



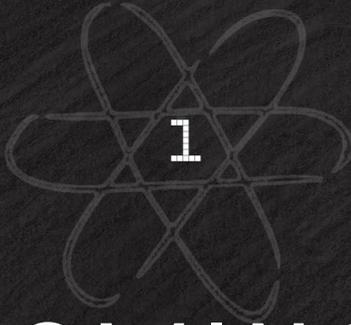
THE STORY OF
Mae
Jemison

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THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY



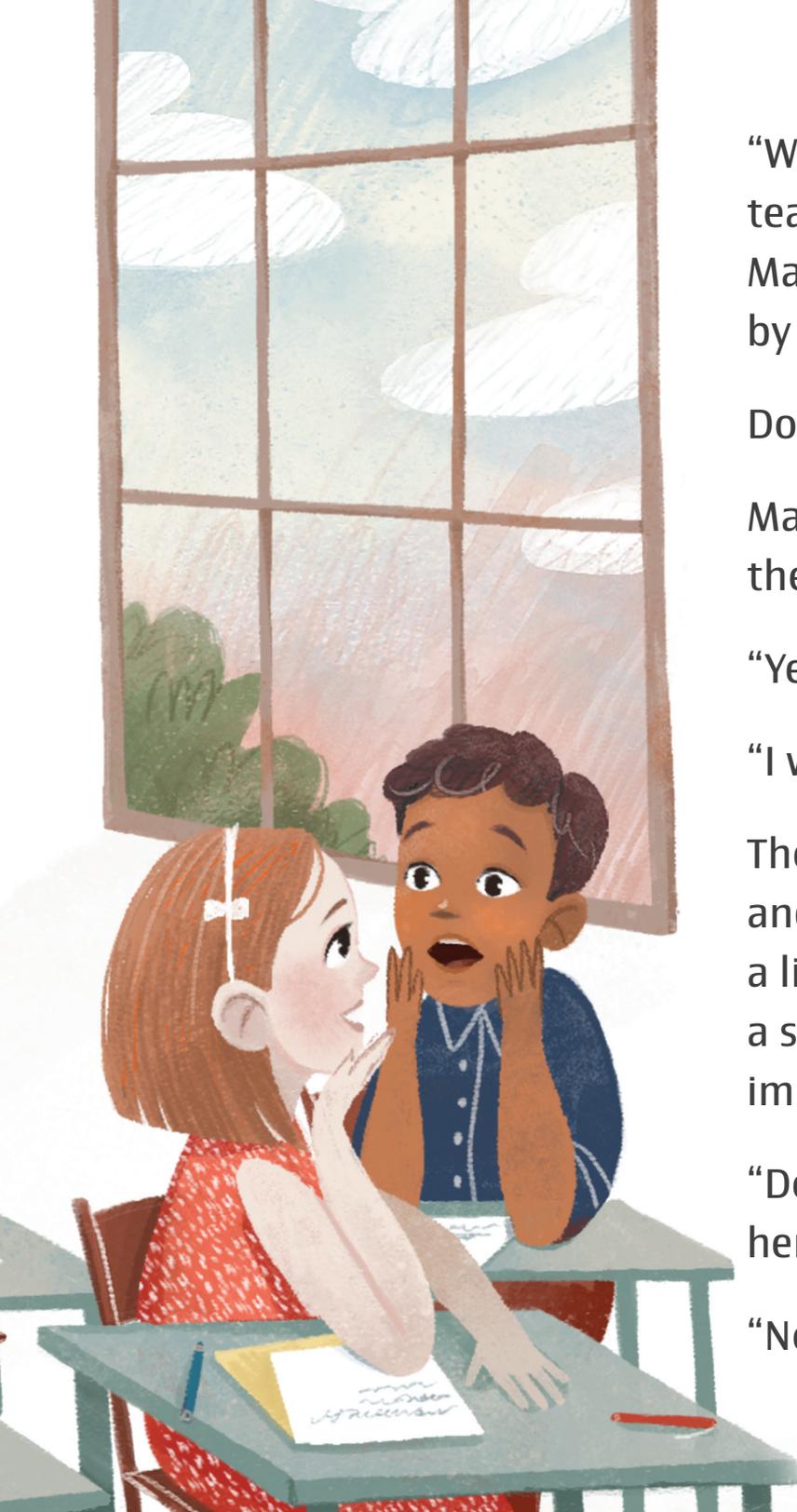
GROWING UP

“My parents were the best scientists I knew, because they were always asking questions.”



Mae loved school. She bounced at her desk happily, surrounded by crayons, books, and other wiggly children, waiting for the teacher to call on her.





“What do you want to be when you grow up?” her teacher asked the classroom of five- and six-year-olds. Mae listened closely as the other kids answered one by one.

Doctor. Teacher. Police officer. Mailman.

Mae waved her arm in the air frantically until finally, the teacher pointed at her.

“Yes, Mae, what do you want to be when you grow up?”

“I want to be a scientist!” Mae said proudly.

The teacher looked confused. It was 1961 in America, and at that time, most people did not believe that a little African American girl could grow up to be a scientist. In fact, most people would say it was impossible.

“Don’t you mean a nurse?” her teacher asked, shaking her head.

“No,” Mae said firmly, “I mean a scientist.”

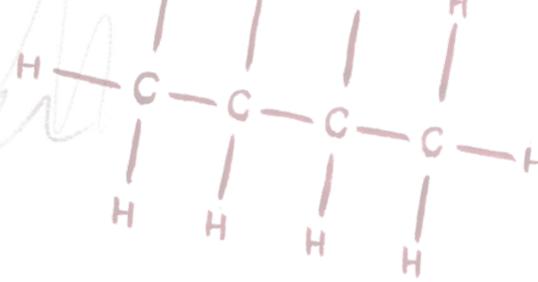
Mae Jemison was born on October 17, 1956, in Alabama, and by the time she turned four, her family had moved to Chicago. She was a lively and precocious child. Once, while waiting in the car for her mom at the grocery store, three-year-old Mae jumped into the driver's seat and somehow managed to put the car into gear and hit the gas. However, she couldn't see over the steering wheel, so she hit three other vehicles before finally coming to a stop.





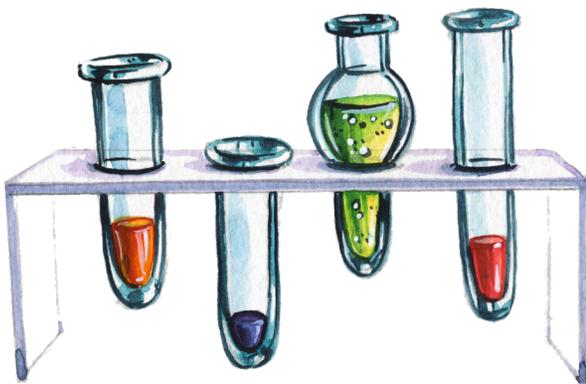
From the beginning Mae was bright and curious. Her mind was always racing along, coming up with questions to answer and adventures to conquer. If she passed a pond while walking to school, her imagination transformed it into a beautiful place, complete with lily pads, frogs, and exotic flowers. When sent on an errand to the basement, she found herself descending into a dark and mysterious cave, fraught with perils and cobwebs.



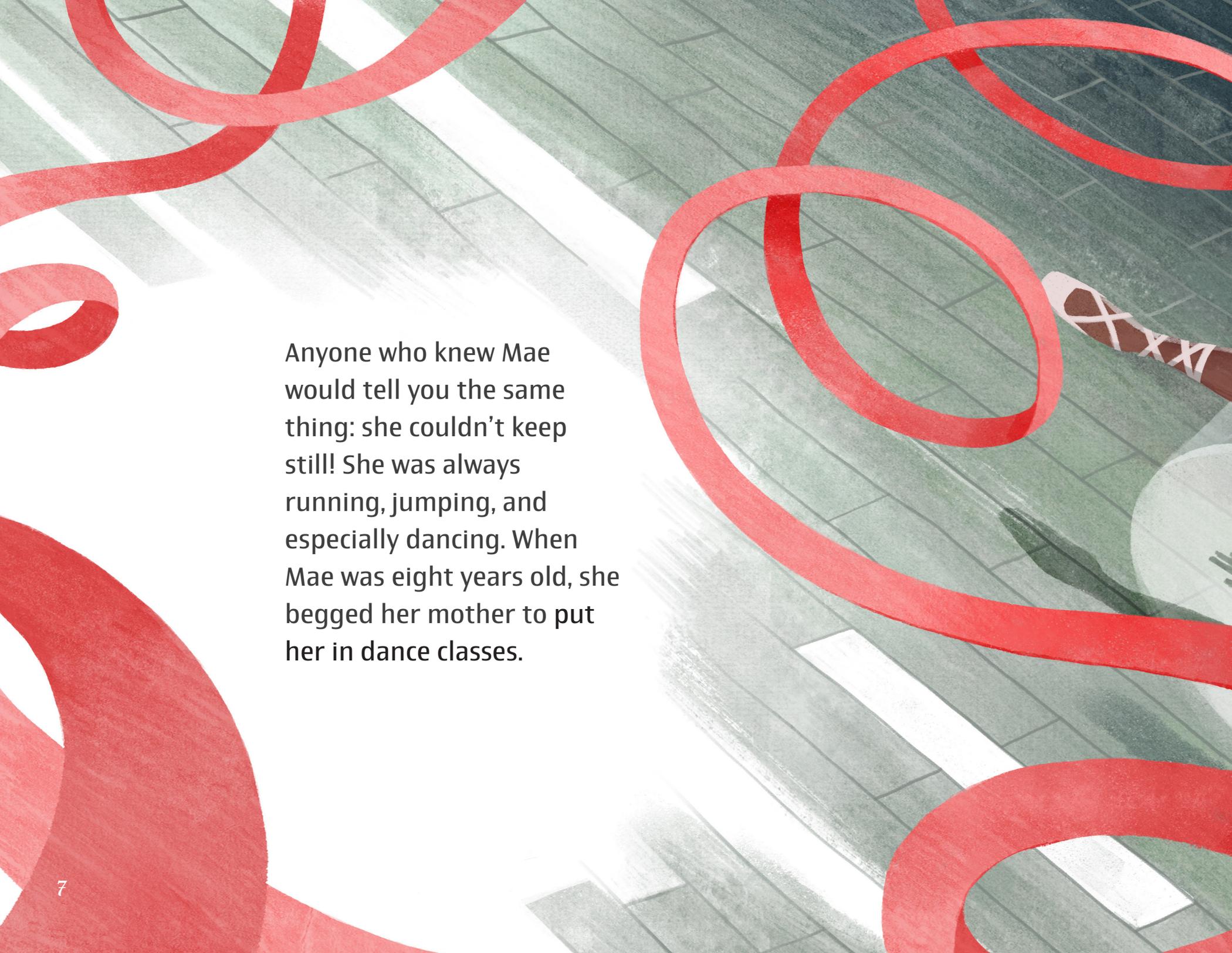


One time, a small cut on her thumb became infected. Instead of being upset, Mae was fascinated by the process. Why did the cut become red and swollen? Why did her body produce pus when infected? Her parents encouraged her to find the answers for herself, and scientific study became a part of Mae's life from a young age.

As Mae grew up, she learned important life lessons from the best role models possible—her family. The Jemisons were a tight-knit family. Helping her older siblings work on science projects and homework taught Mae the importance of education. Watching her mother go back to school to get a master's degree while raising a family taught her lessons in perseverance. Seeing her father step up to manage their home while her mother was away at school instilled in Mae a belief that men and women were equal. All of these life lessons formed the foundation of Mae's character and helped her become the kind of woman who would go on to make history.



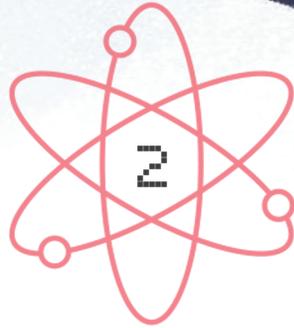


An illustration of a dance studio floor with a green and white checkered pattern. A thick, vibrant red ribbon swirls and loops across the floor, starting from the top left and ending at the bottom right. In the upper right, a person's foot wearing a white lace-up dance shoe is visible, stepping on the floor. The overall style is artistic and dynamic, suggesting movement and energy.

Anyone who knew Mae would tell you the same thing: she couldn't keep still! She was always running, jumping, and especially dancing. When Mae was eight years old, she begged her mother to put her in dance classes.



Mae's mother enrolled her in a local ballet studio. Her time studying dance started a lifelong passion. Mae seriously considered becoming a professional dancer. Dancing taught Mae grace, strengthened her body, and gave her an appreciation for hard work. Mae loved to dance, but she would soon discover something she loved even more.



SPACE

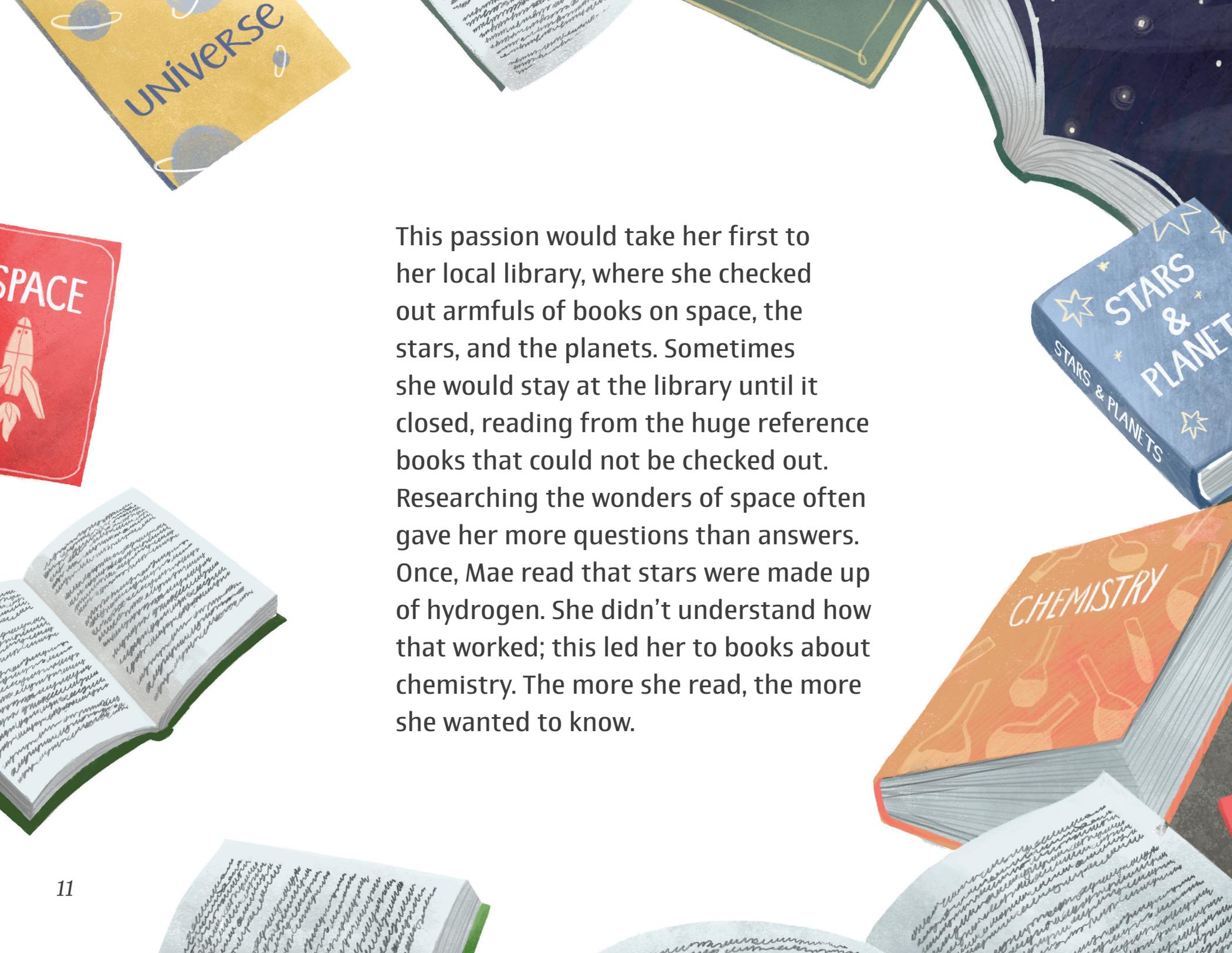
“The arts and sciences are avatars
of human creativity.”

When Mae was in sixth grade, her class participated in a program to allow inner-city children to go camping.



To prepare for the trip, the students memorized the local constellations. Away from the bright lights of the city, surrounded by darkness and silence, the skies revealed their wonders to Mae. She contemplated

the stars and planets shining above her, each one in its appointed place in the black expanse of sky. She felt a sense of belonging. A new passion was born.



This passion would take her first to her local library, where she checked out armfuls of books on space, the stars, and the planets. Sometimes she would stay at the library until it closed, reading from the huge reference books that could not be checked out. Researching the wonders of space often gave her more questions than answers. Once, Mae read that stars were made up of hydrogen. She didn't understand how that worked; this led her to books about chemistry. The more she read, the more she wanted to know.



As she walked home, Mae would look up at the night sky. She liked the cold nights best because the stars were brighter. Spinning around with her eyes on the sky, she imagined herself up in space, dancing through the stars on a spaceship. Mae knew that someday, somehow, she would go to space.