

Picture Perfect Penelope

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“Mom, I can’t find my other shoe! I specifically set them aside last night, they match my outfit so this is really important”, said Penelope, panicked and in a rush.

Penelope was somewhat of a perfectionist. She liked what she liked, and she only liked that. She would spend so much time making sure that everything was just right, her shoes matched her socks, matched her backpack, matched her scrunchie. Her printing had to be perfectly spaced on every piece of homework. Sometimes, it was a good thing that she was so particular, but other times, it held her back. She was often afraid to try new things because she didn’t want to fail, more importantly, she didn’t want to fail in front of other people.

Today was the first day of third grade and she promised herself that this year would be different. This year she would finally share her passion for art with her classmates. Ever since kindergarten, Penelope knew she wanted to be an artist. She would draw in her sketchbook for hours on end, but she never showed anyone, not even her own mom. She was worried that her artwork wasn’t good enough, and that people would laugh at her.

Once Penelope got to her class, she was surprised to meet her new teacher Mr. Finnigan. Mr. Finnigan was, well, quirky, he marched to the beat of his own drum if you know what I mean. He was an artist too, and a real good one at that.

Their first assignment in the classroom was a “self portrait”. Each student had to draw a picture of themselves and present it to the class the next day. This made Penelope excited at first, and then it made her scared, very scared. Whenever Penelope was feeling anxious or nervous, tapping her fingers would help calm her down. After 5 minutes of tapping, she felt much better. As a matter of fact, she decided to get a head start on the project. Pulling her sketchbook out of her backpack, Penelope got straight to work. It didn’t even take 5 minutes before she was in her zone, sketching away.

“Hey, cool monster”, said Eduardo pointing at Penelope’s self portrait. She looked up at him, and didn’t know what to say. This wasn’t a monster, SHE WASN’T DRAWING A PICTURE OF A MONSTER! She was drawing a picture of herself. She was so embarrassed, trying her best to play it cool.

“Thanks”, she replied before putting her head down and fighting back tears.

“Please don’t cry, please don’t cry, please don’t cry”, she repeated to herself in her head. And guess what she didn’t cry! Afterschool Penelope went straight home, and then... lost it. The tears started as soon as she stepped out of the elevator.

Penelope's mom overheard her crying in her bedroom, so she gently knocked on the door and sat down beside her. She asked what was wrong, and Penelope explained the entire story - she told her mom that she was nervous about showing her art to her class and about Eduardo thinking that her self portrait was of a monster.

Her mom patted her on the back and told her that it's ok to be sad, but giving up on something she loves should never be an option, then she left the room. Penelope thought about it, Eduardo didn't mean to hurt her feelings, and tomorrow was the big day. She could either spend the evening crying and feeling upset OR she could spend this time watching some drawing video tutorials and working on her project.

She walked to the bathroom, washed her face, ate a snack and got right to work. She started by making a rough draft, this was so that she could make mistakes freely, and not worry about them. She went through 11 pieces of paper, before starting on her "good copy". Even on her good copy, she drew first in pencil, and then painted on top. By 9pm, she had just about wrapped it up, she took a step back and was so proud of what she had done. Usually she would give up on things that frustrated her, but it felt good to practice and keep getting better.

That night, Penelope slept so well. When she woke up in the morning, she took a big stretch and smiled. She couldn't wait to get to school to present her artwork.

QUESTIONS:

1. When Penelope is feeling nervous or anxious, she likes to tap her fingers to calm herself down. What helps you keep calm?
2. How do you build up the courage to do things that you're afraid of?
3. What advice would you give Penelope about being afraid to share her artwork?