Robbie Butler was a fifth grader at Rosa Parks Elementary School. Ever since he was little, Robbie had always had a lot of friends. Parents and children couldn’t help but like him because he was funny and smart. At school, he worked hard and turned in his homework on time. Robbie had one problem, though. He often said things he regretted later. Sometimes he teased his friends, not realizing until later that he had hurt their feelings. Robbie had so much energy that sometimes he couldn’t wait until it was his turn to speak before saying something. This meant that he was often cutting other people off in mid-sentence when they were talking.

Today, Robbie was up early. He had a karate lesson after school, and he had to pack his gi, a pair of white pants, a white jacket, and his belt. Karate was Robbie’s favorite sport. He and Kyle, his best friend, went to the same dojo. Both boys were yellow belts, but Robbie hoped to be a green belt soon. He was working toward the highest honor, a black belt.

“Robbie, you’re up!” said Robbie’s mom from his bedroom door. “What’s going on?”

“I’m just making sure I have everything I need for today,” Robbie replied. “I was just reviewing some math problems. I want to do well on the test.”
“If you’ve studied, you’ll do fine. What about this afternoon? What time should I pick you up at the dojo?”

“Six o’clock is good,” Robbie answered. “Sensei said he’s going to teach us a new move today. I’m going to the library to borrow a book that has different moves in it. Maybe it’ll help me learn it fast.”

“Well, just be careful,” Robbie’s mother reminded him as she turned to leave the room. “You could get hurt.”

“I won’t ever get hurt, Mom. Nobody in the class can touch me.”

“Oh, Robbie,” his mother sighed. “Breakfast is in ten minutes. Finish what you’re doing. I’ll drop you at school on my way to work.”
Robbie finished putting his books in his book bag and his karate uniform in his duffle bag, grabbed his jacket, and closed his bedroom door.

At school, Kyle was the first person Robbie saw.
“Hey, Kyle,” Robbie said. “Ready for the new move?”
“I guess so,” said Kyle. “I’ve been looking at the diagrams Sensei gave us. They look pretty complicated.”
“No sweat,” said Robbie. “I’m sure it won’t take us more than five minutes to figure it out. You’ll see. Don’t worry about it!”
“Hmmm, I don’t know,” Kyle said a little hesitantly.

In the classroom, Robbie and Kyle took their seats. The day went by as usual. They read the last part of a story in their literature books. Mr. Morris handed out the math test. As Robbie had predicted, he knew all the answers.

In Language Arts, they wrote rough drafts of stories. Robbie was writing about his karate class. He was up to the part where Sensei would choose him to compete in a meet.

At lunch, Robbie and Kyle were sitting with their friends. The identical twins, Terry and Jerry, sat across from one another. Miles, Quentin, and Jamey were in their usual places at the table. Quentin, Miles, and Jamey were in a regular math class. Robbie, Kyle, and the twins were taking advanced math. All the classes had their math tests that morning.
“So, how did you do on the math test?” Robbie asked no one in particular.

“Who cares?” said Quentin. “I’m just glad it’s over.”

“Yeah, anybody can add 2 and 2.” laughed Robbie. Miles rolled his eyes and Jamey frowned.

“That’s not very nice,” said Terry.

Miles began talking about going to his first pro basketball game, and then the bell rang.

“Here, I’ll do that.” Robbie took the empty lunch bags and threw them in the trash. “Sorry I said that,” he mumbled to Quentin as they all walked back to their classrooms.
Back in the classroom, it was time for Social Studies. Mr. Morris pulled down the map of the United States.

“Class, what is the most important river in the country?” he asked. Hands shot up.

“Elena,” Mr. Morris said.

“The Mississippi,” said Robbie, just as Elena was about to answer.

“Do we have two Elenas in the class? I thought your name was Robbie Butler,” Mr. Morris said, looking at Robbie. “Perhaps I’ll call you ‘Elena’ from now on.”

“Sorry,” said Robbie. “I got carried away.”

Mr. Morris chuckled. “Now, the real Elena, please name an important river other than the Mississippi.”

“Correct, the Missouri River is also important,” said Mr. Morris. “Now, let’s move west. What is an important river in the western United States? Anyone?” he asked.

As Mr. Morris went on with the lesson, Robbie tried to catch his friends’ eyes. No one would look at him. Robbie groaned to himself.

“At it again, I see.” murmured Kyle.

“I’ve got to stop opening my big mouth,” Robbie whispered back. “My mother is always telling me to think before I speak, but before I can stop myself, stuff just kind of comes out. I’m going to try not to do that, I really am,” he muttered.

When the bell finally rang, Robbie waited for Kyle so they could walk to their karate lesson together. Their karate school was a genuine dojo, the most well known in the area. Their sensei was one of the few teachers who had actually studied karate in Japan.

“Sensei says there’s going to be a big martial arts fair at the local community center next month,” said Kyle excitedly. “They’re going to have all sorts of self-defense demonstrations. Some of us might get to do them. Isn’t that cool? I hope Sensei picks us.”
“I doubt it! He’ll probably let Jamal and Aidan go to it because they’re better,” Robbie answered. “We’re not ready—at least you’re not.”

“Thanks a lot. I’ve been practicing,” Kyle insisted. “I just get my hands and feet mixed up sometimes. It sure isn’t as easy as it looks in the movies. We’ll have a lot of time between now and then to practice. Who knows, maybe Sensei will like what he sees.”

“Let’s hope so,” said a smiling Robbie.

After each boy had put on his gi, they walked into the dojo, a long, sparse room with white walls and a highly polished wooden floor.
Sensei entered the room. The students greeted him with a bow.

Sensei was a very dignified man. Everyone behaved around him. He made you want to behave. Sensei began by giving the “line up” command. He then gave the command mokuso. This means “clear your mind.” All of the students closed their eyes and began to meditate.

Five minutes later, Sensei commanded yame, or stop, by which he meant that the meditation period was over. Now they were ready for class to begin.

“Ready stance,” Sensei boomed.

Everyone stood with their feet shoulder width apart. Their hands were in fists in front of their hips, and everyone stared straight ahead. After Sensei gave the command to relax, the lesson began.

Sensei divided the students into pairs. Robbie and Kyle were partners. First they would review the basic stances, blocks, arm positions, and kick motions. As he walked around the room, Sensei straightened an arm or elbow. When he found fault, he corrected it. He always gave encouragement.
Sensei showed Robbie and Kyle two new moves. First, Kyle was Sensei’s sparring partner while Robbie looked on. Kyle caught on quickly. When Sensei praised him, Kyle beamed with pleasure.

Robbie was so surprised he almost fainted. “This must be your lucky day,” he said. He was sorry as soon as the words left his lips. He knew he had hurt Kyle’s feelings.

“No talking,” Sensei said, disapprovingly.

“Sorry, Sensei, it won’t happen again,” said Robbie.

Kyle shook his head, looked away, and began to practice the new move on his own.

Sensei began teaching the move to Robbie. They went over and over it.

Robbie couldn’t believe his ears. How could Kyle be better? Kyle hadn’t wanted to take karate. He had asked Robbie if he could borrow a gi from him because he didn’t want to buy a set in case he didn’t like it. On the first day, Robbie practically had to drag him in the dojo. Now Kyle was better? He couldn’t believe it!

Kyle and Robbie practiced hard, and before they knew it, class was over. Everyone recited the Dojo Kun, thanked Sensei, and left. As Robbie was about to walk through the doorway, Sensei whispered quietly to him, “A true karate master is humble and always thinks before he speaks.”

Robbie’s mom was waiting to drive them home. On the way home, Kyle kept up a lively conversation about the new move they had learned. He even told Robbie’s mom about the upcoming martial arts fair and how he hoped Sensei would pick them to demonstrate a move.

“Well,” said Robbie’s mom as soon as they dropped Kyle at his house. “Are you and Kyle going to be the two to compete from your group? That would be quite an honor, wouldn’t it?”
“Yeah, I guess so,” answered Robbie. “I kind of hurt Kyle’s feelings today.”

“What did you say this time? Someday you’re going to learn that words hurt just as much as those karate chops and kicks of yours,” said Robbie’s mom.

“I know. Sometimes I think I have no control over what comes out of my mouth,” admitted Robbie.

“Well, if you need proof, just ask your friends. Each one of them could tell you something you’ve said that you shouldn’t have,” said Robbie’s mom. “Let’s go home. You can think of a way to apologize to Kyle.”

Robbie went to his room to do his homework. As he looked up information in a reference book, he thought about tomorrow’s spelling bee.

The next day, Robbie met Kyle at the bus stop. They didn’t have much to say. At school, they walked into their classroom together.

“Spelling bee time,” announced Mr. Morris.

A series of moans went up. For some reason, the girls liked spelling bees and the boys didn’t, even though quite a few boys were great spellers. Kyle was the best of all.

“We’re going to have four teams,” Mr. Morris explained. “Robbie, Tiffany, Wylie, and Marsha will pick five students each.”
“Mr. Morris,” Robbie called out. “I think you made a mistake. If you’re choosing the best spellers, Kyle should be up here instead of me. He helps me with my spelling homework all the time.”

“Robbie, that’s a really nice thing to say,” said Mr. Morris. “I’ll keep that in mind for the next time.”

The spelling bee continued. When it was Robbie’s turn, Mr. Morris said, “Your word, Robbie, is ‘slimy.’ Please use the word in a sentence and then spell it.”

Robbie hesitated. He knew that “slimy” really meant covered with mud. But he said, “A slimy person is someone who doesn’t think before he speaks. Slimy, s-l-i-m-y.”

The class laughed.
Glossary

**Dojo**  Gym where karate is practiced

**Dojo kun**  The rules of the dojo, recited at the end of every karate practice

**Gi**  White robe and pants worn during karate

**Karate**  One of the martial arts, stressing self-defense, meditation, discipline, and respect for one’s opponent

**Sensei**  Karate instructor
Responding

**TARGET SKILL** Conclusions and Generalizations

What conclusion can you draw about Robbie? What other details support this conclusion? Copy and complete the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Conclusion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text detail</td>
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**Text detail** In class, Robbie answers questions before he is called on by the teacher.

Write About It

**Text to Text** Have you read about another pair of good friends in a different book? Write two paragraphs in which you describe the two friends and what makes their friendship special.
**TARGET VOCABULARY**

- apologize
- borrow
- fainted
- fault
- genuine
- insisted
- local
- proof
- reference
- slimy

**EXPAND YOUR VOCABULARY**

- black belt
- martial arts
- meditate
- sparring
- stance

**TARGET SKILL**

**Conclusions and Generalizations** Figure out unstated or broad ideas.

**TARGET STRATEGY**

**Question** Ask questions before you read, as you read, and after you read.

**GENRE** **Realistic Fiction** is a present-day story that could take place in real life.