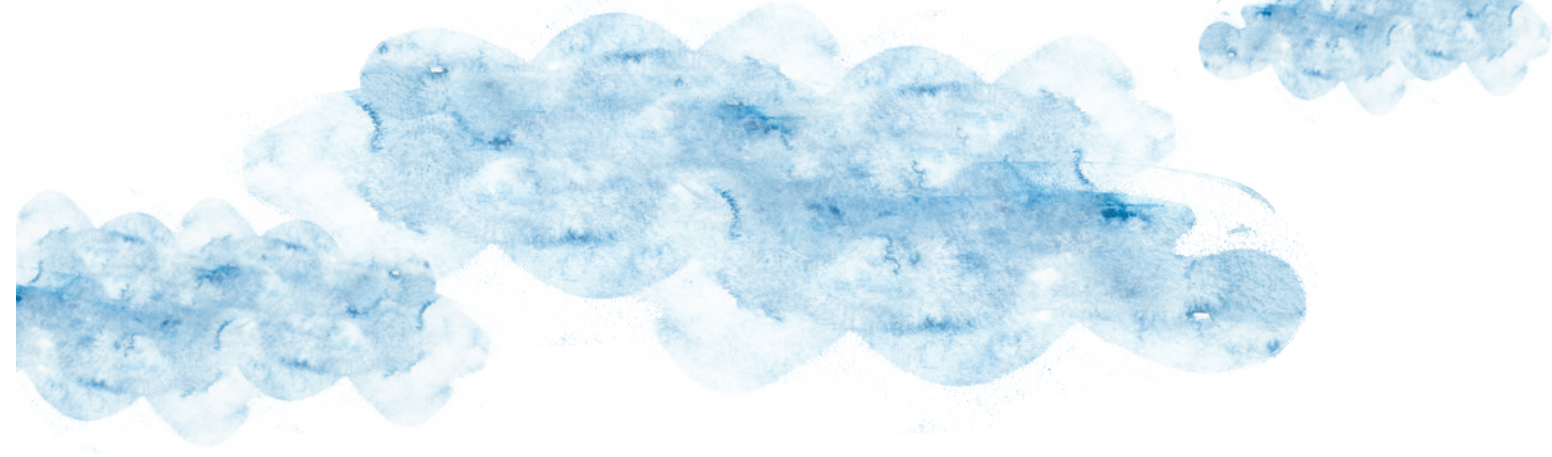




# HELLO, BEECH TREE!

**Rasha Hamid**  
illustrated by **Sofia Moore**



For the Beech Class  
-RH

To my daughter,  
Mila May, a reader and an artist.  
-SM

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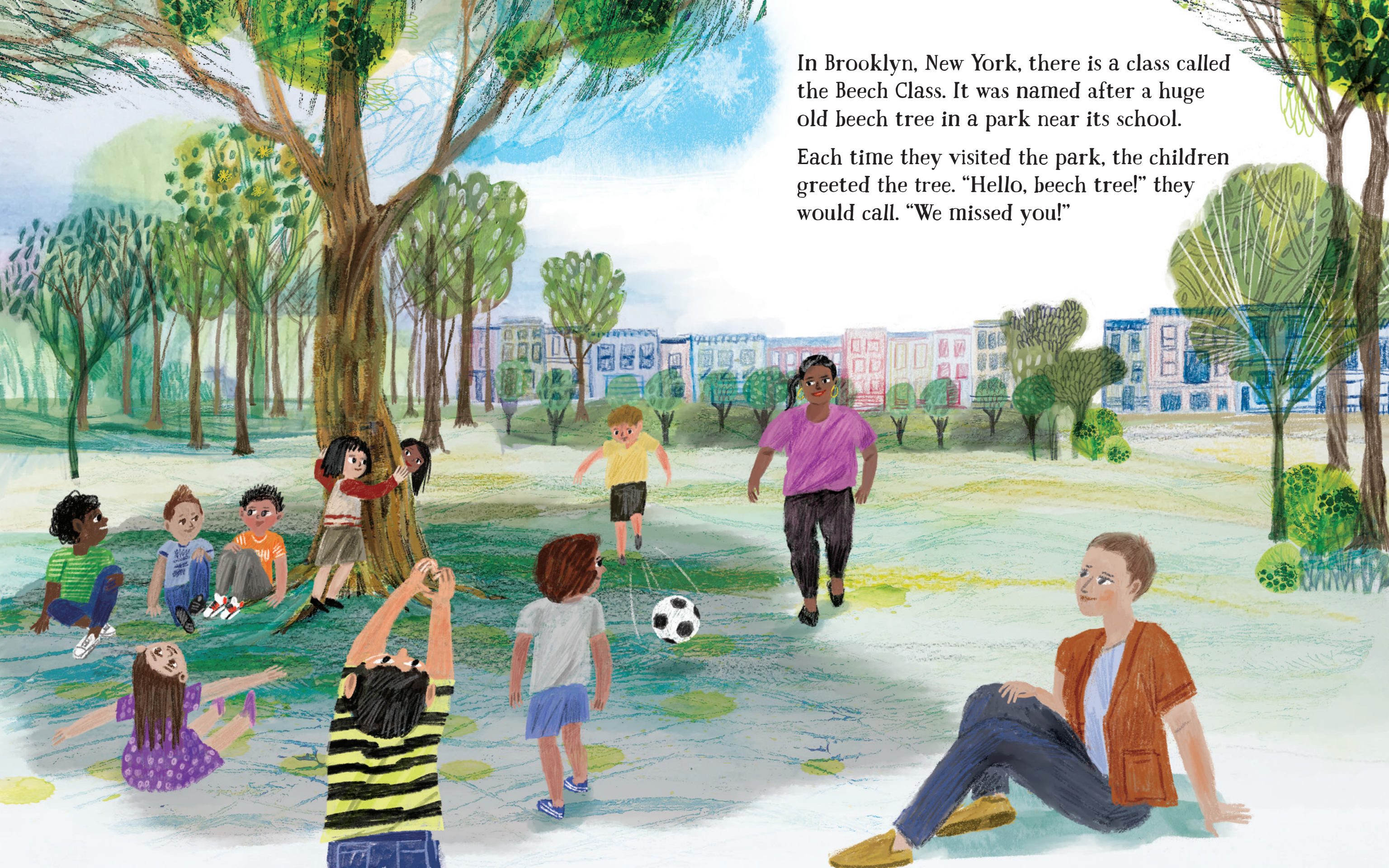
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In Brooklyn, New York, there is a class called the Beech Class. It was named after a huge old beech tree in a park near its school.

Each time they visited the park, the children greeted the tree. "Hello, beech tree!" they would call. "We missed you!"



Sometimes they told the tree, “Your leaves are beautiful!” or “Your leaves are almost gone!” depending on the season.

## A Note from Rasha

Dear Reader,

Have you ever noticed how sunlight and blue sky peek through a canopy of trees in the summer? In autumn, rustling leaves turn gold and red and purple. In spring, every imaginable shade of green begins to burst forth. In winter, bare branches form geometric patterns against the sky.

In the United States, eight out of ten people live in a city. Many urban communities don't have enough parks and green spaces. Sometimes parks are unsafe or dirty, hard to get to, or too small for all the people who need a green place to enjoy. Community members in these neighborhoods experience hotter temperatures and dirtier air. Spending time with trees makes us healthier and happier. *Everyone* deserves to live in a clean, safe place, close to green space where they can exercise, play, and relax. This is part of an idea called **environmental justice**.

Around the world and throughout history, people and communities have taken action for environmental justice. For example, in the 1970s Wangari Maathai showed people in her home country of Kenya how to collect indigenous tree seeds, grow seedlings, plant them, and care for the trees they grew into. Dr. Maathai knew that green spaces like parks and forests improve our health, clean the air, and keep cities cooler. Her research, problem-solving, passion, and courage helped re-green Kenya.

If you notice places in your community where there aren't enough trees or where people don't have easy access to green spaces, you can take action to make a change, just like Wangari Maathai and the Beech Class.

Most importantly, get out there (with your grown-ups) and enjoy our beautiful city parks, state parks, and national parks. And wherever you go, try to always leave our **commons** (the places that belong to all of us) better than you found them!

Love,  
Rasha



## Questions to Think About

- Do you have a favorite tree? What do you love about it? (If you don't have one, go find one!)
- How do trees help people?
- How can we help trees?
- What kinds of art do trees and nature inspire you to make?
- What kinds of trees are native to your community? If you aren't sure, who could you ask?
- Do you think your community has enough green space?
- What can you do to care for the commons—the places and resources we all share?



## How to Take Action

Do you have any environmental concerns about your community? If you notice something that could be better, you can help. Here's how:

- Start by identifying the problem.
- Gather information. Find out as much as possible about why the problem exists. Talk to experts in your community. Read books. Search online. Take a closer look. Don't forget to take notes!
- Review the information you gathered, and create a list of possible solutions.
- Choose a solution that does the most to solve the problem and seems possible.
- Make a step-by-step plan to put the solution into action. And you don't have to do this alone! Ask people to help you.
- Get started!
- Reflect on your plan. How did it go? What ideas did it give you for future environmental justice projects?

