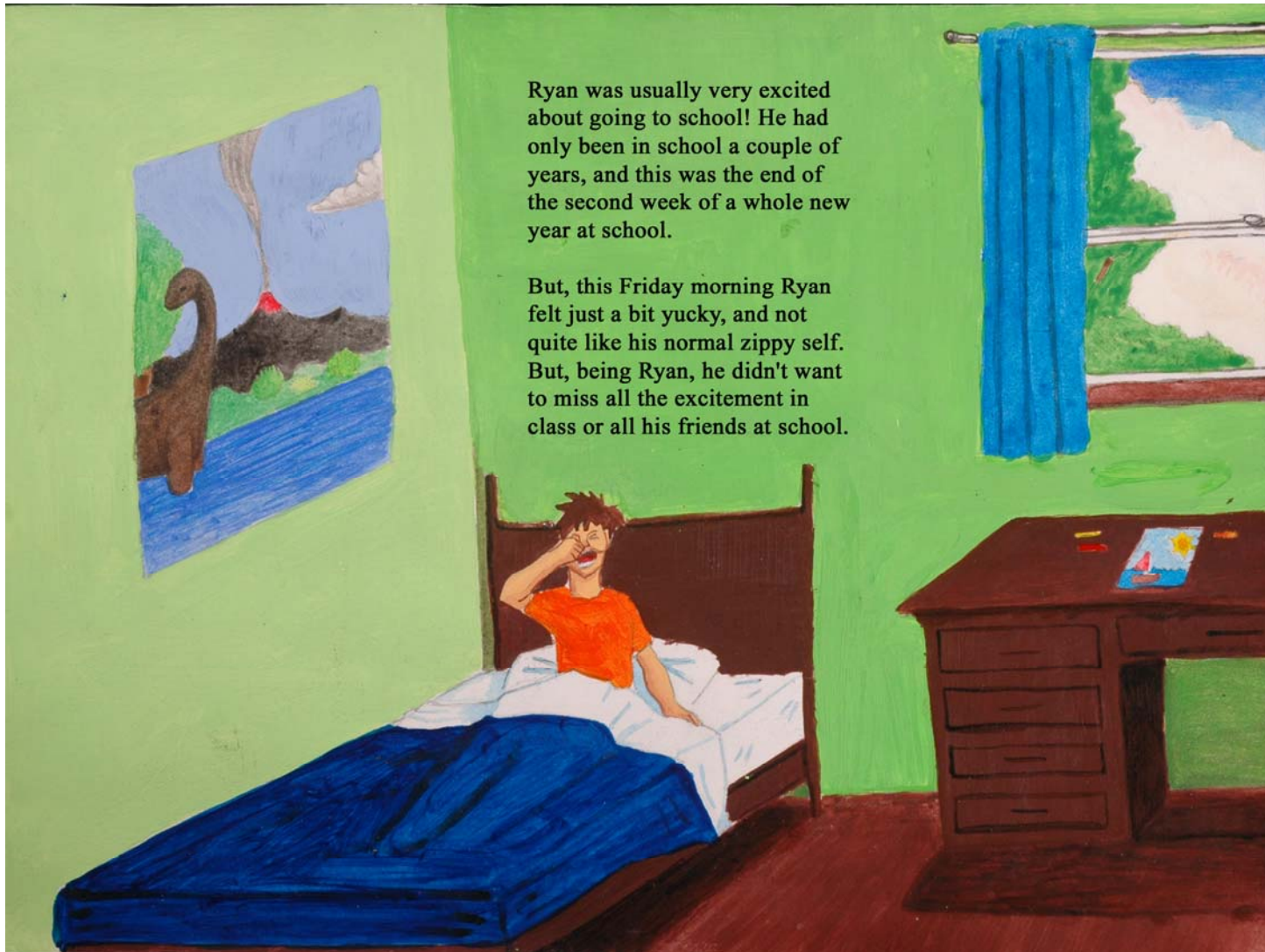


Excerpts from "Ryan's Secret Balloon Ride: A Child's Story" by Craig M. Szwed.

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Ryan was usually very excited about going to school! He had only been in school a couple of years, and this was the end of the second week of a whole new year at school.

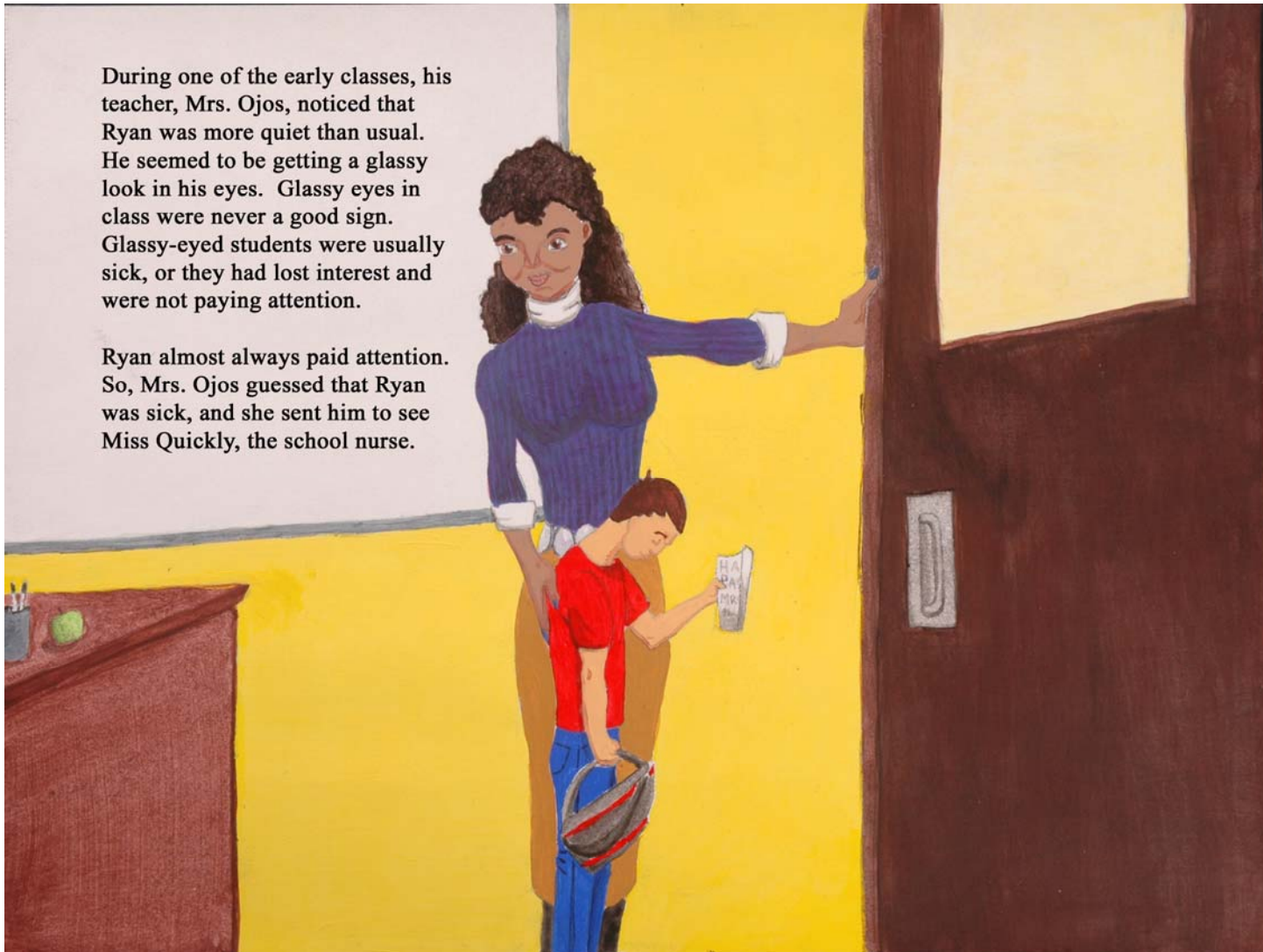
But, this Friday morning Ryan felt just a bit yucky, and not quite like his normal zippy self. But, being Ryan, he didn't want to miss all the excitement in class or all his friends at school.

Excerpts from "Ryan's Secret Balloon Ride: A Child's Story" by Craig M. Szwed.

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During one of the early classes, his teacher, Mrs. Ojos, noticed that Ryan was more quiet than usual. He seemed to be getting a glassy look in his eyes. Glassy eyes in class were never a good sign. Glassy-eyed students were usually sick, or they had lost interest and were not paying attention.

Ryan almost always paid attention. So, Mrs. Ojos guessed that Ryan was sick, and she sent him to see Miss Quickly, the school nurse.



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Ryan was fevered and hot one minute, and chilled the next. Grampa kept an eye on him, and was reminded of a hot air balloon ride. That had been Grammy's birthday gift to Grampa one year. There were a lot of similarities between Ryan's fever and the balloon ride, so Grampa asked Ryan if he wanted to hear a story, while they waited for Daddy.

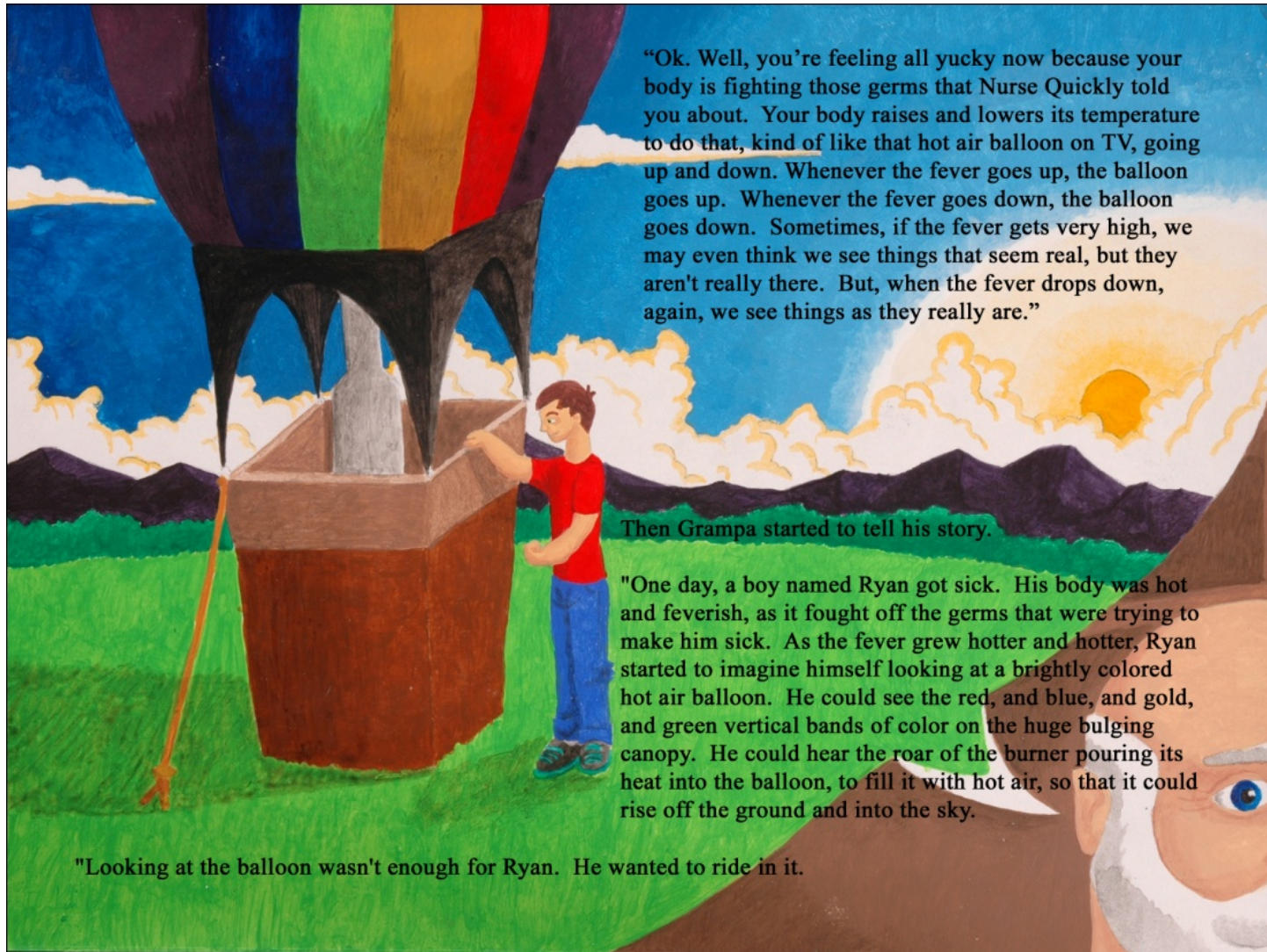
"Yes." said Ryan quietly, as he burrowed deeper into the blanket.

"Do you remember when we saw those colorful hot air balloons on TV, and the balloon pilot kept turning the heater on and off to make it go up and down?"

Ryan barely nodded, as he lay there with his eyes half shut.

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"Ok. Well, you're feeling all yucky now because your body is fighting those germs that Nurse Quickly told you about. Your body raises and lowers its temperature to do that, kind of like that hot air balloon on TV, going up and down. Whenever the fever goes up, the balloon goes up. Whenever the fever goes down, the balloon goes down. Sometimes, if the fever gets very high, we may even think we see things that seem real, but they aren't really there. But, when the fever drops down, again, we see things as they really are."

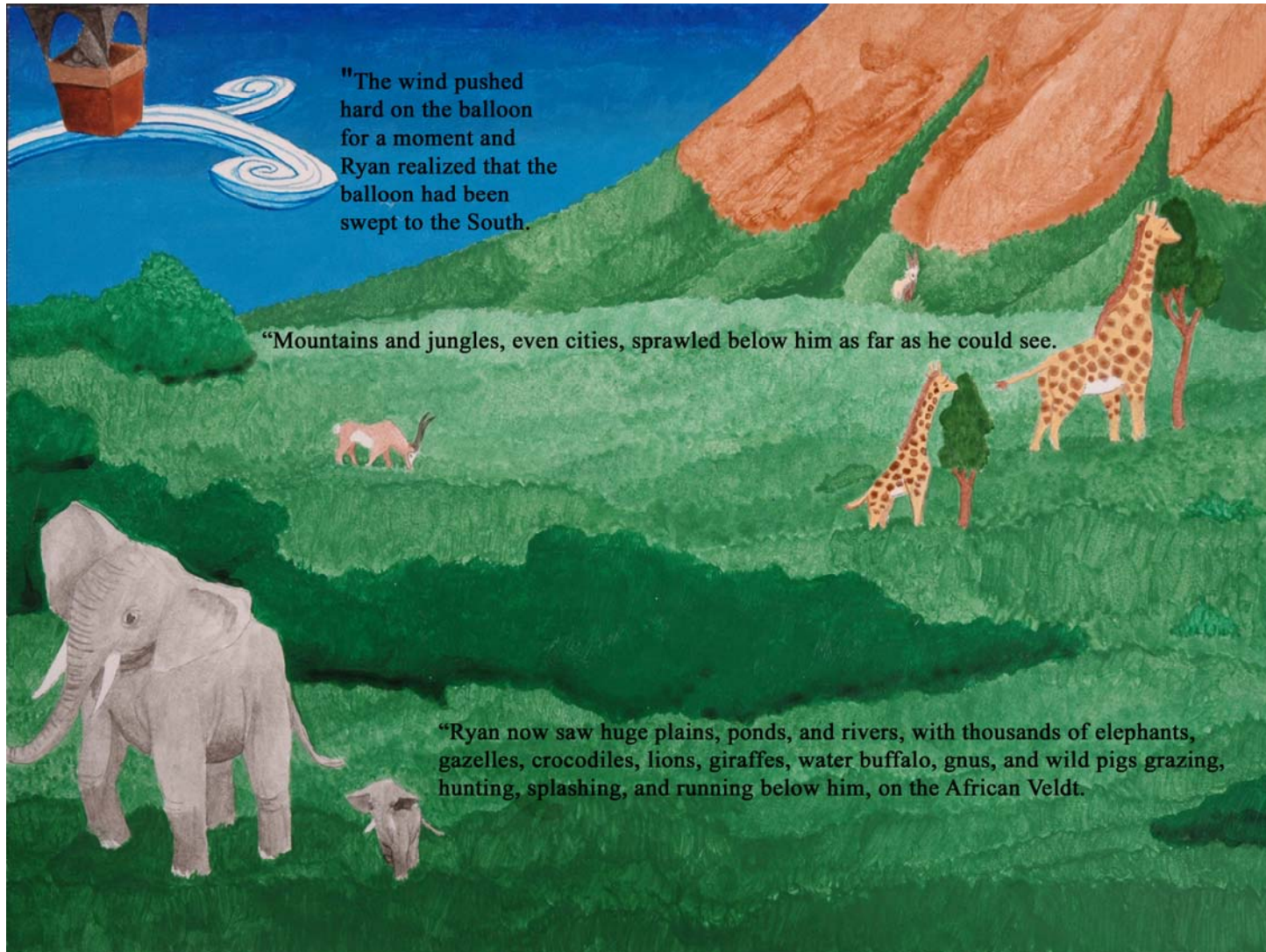
Then Grampa started to tell his story.

"One day, a boy named Ryan got sick. His body was hot and feverish, as it fought off the germs that were trying to make him sick. As the fever grew hotter and hotter, Ryan started to imagine himself looking at a brightly colored hot air balloon. He could see the red, and blue, and gold, and green vertical bands of color on the huge bulging canopy. He could hear the roar of the burner pouring its heat into the balloon, to fill it with hot air, so that it could rise off the ground and into the sky.

"Looking at the balloon wasn't enough for Ryan. He wanted to ride in it.

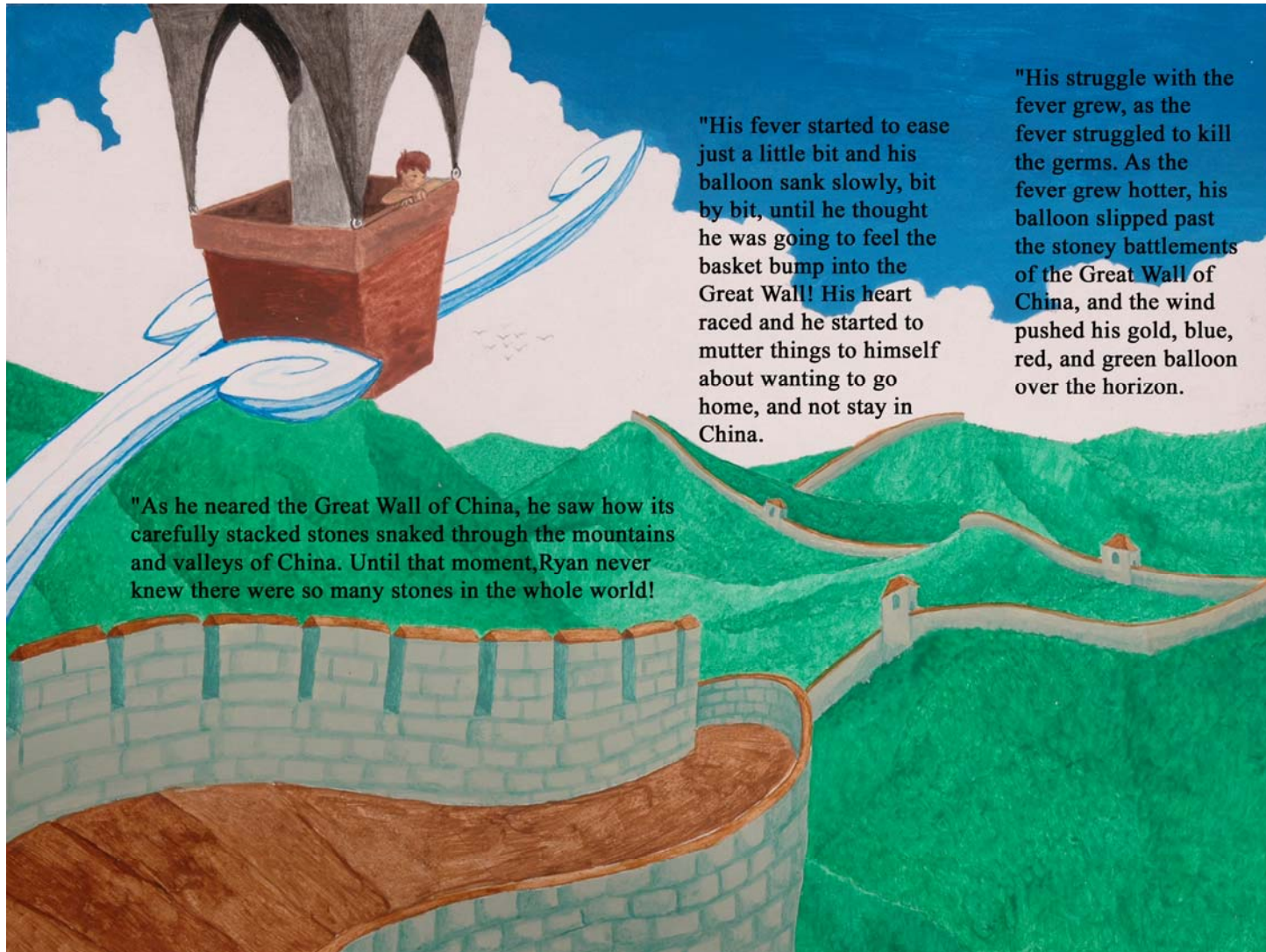
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"As he neared the Great Wall of China, he saw how its carefully stacked stones snaked through the mountains and valleys of China. Until that moment, Ryan never knew there were so many stones in the whole world!

"His fever started to ease just a little bit and his balloon sank slowly, bit by bit, until he thought he was going to feel the basket bump into the Great Wall! His heart raced and he started to mutter things to himself about wanting to go home, and not stay in China.

"His struggle with the fever grew, as the fever struggled to kill the germs. As the fever grew hotter, his balloon slipped past the stoney battlements of the Great Wall of China, and the wind pushed his gold, blue, red, and green balloon over the horizon.