



Chaim and the Noisy Lunchroom

Ages 6-9
A story and 9 activities



Chaim and the Noisy Lunchroom

The school lunchroom at noon sounds like a hundred pots banging at once. Chairs scrape. Trays clatter. Forks clink. Two hundred children talk, laugh, and shout across the long tables. Somebody drops a metal lunchbox, and it rings like a gong.

Chaim stands at the door holding his brown paper bag. His ears are tingling. His chest feels tight. All he wants to do is turn around and run.

It is only the second week of third grade, and every day the lunchroom feels louder than the day before.

He finds a seat at the end of a table. His friend Yitzy sits down beside him. "Hey, Chaim! Want to trade your pretzels for my crackers?"

"Mm-hm," says Chaim. But he can hardly hear Yitzy over the noise. He opens his sandwich, but he doesn't feel hungry. His head hurts in a funny way, like a drum is playing inside it.

Someone behind him laughs very loudly. Chaim jumps. His hand knocks over his water cup, and water splashes across the table.

"Oops!" says Yitzy.

"Sorry, sorry," Chaim mutters. His face grows hot. He jumps up and runs out of the lunchroom into the hallway.

In the quiet hallway, he leans against the cool wall. His heart is racing. He breathes fast, like he has been running.

The door opens, and out comes Mr. Katz, the teacher who helps with lunch duty. He walks over slowly and stands a few feet away.

"That room can be very loud," says Mr. Katz. "Lots of children find it hard."

Chaim looks at him. "You do?"

"I used to," says Mr. Katz. "My ears are very sensitive. I still notice every little sound."

Chaim lets out a long, shaky breath. "I feel like my head is going to burst."

"That makes sense. Your body is telling you it has too much noise, too fast. That isn't anything to be ashamed of. It's just information."

Chaim thinks about that. Information. It sounds much better than "something is wrong with me."

"What helps you?" he asks.

Mr. Katz smiles. "Let's make a tool kit together. First, what helps your body feel calm?"

Chaim thinks. At home, when his house gets noisy, he likes to sit in the corner with his stuffed lion and listen to the tick of the clock.

"Quiet," he says. "And something soft to hold."

"Good. Those are two tools. What else? Maybe pressing your hands together, or counting breaths, or sitting where there are fewer people?"

They make a plan. Chaim can ask for a seat near the end of the table, by the wall, where there are fewer people. He can keep a small soft cloth in his

pocket to hold when it gets loud. And if it gets to be too much, he can say to his teacher, "I need a quiet minute," and walk to the hallway.

"Is that allowed?" asks Chaim.

"Absolutely," says Mr. Katz. "Taking care of your body is part of learning."

The next day, Chaim sits at the end of the table by the wall. He squeezes the soft cloth in his pocket. When the noise builds up, he presses his hands together and counts four slow breaths.

The room is still loud. But the drum in his head is smaller.

"Want to trade pretzels for crackers?" Yitzy asks again.

"Yes," says Chaim, and he smiles. This time he hears every word.

On Thursday, the noise grows too big again, right in the middle of lunch. Chaim notices his chest getting tight. He raises his hand. "Mr. Katz, I need a quiet minute, please."

Mr. Katz nods. Chaim walks out to the hallway, breathes in and out five times, and goes back inside. It takes only two minutes.

When he sits down, Yitzy whispers, "Are you okay?"

"I am," says Chaim. "My ears needed a break."

"Cool," says Yitzy. "I get that when the fire drill happens."

Chaim grins. He didn't know that about Yitzy. He passes over the pretzels, and Yitzy passes back the crackers, and the lunchroom roars on around them.



Activity 1 of 9

Remember the story

1. What is too loud for Chaim?

2. Who helps Chaim in the hallway?

3. What soft thing does Chaim keep in his pocket?

4. What can Chaim say when it is too loud?



Activity 2 of 9

Fact or guess? (circle one)

1. Chaim knocks over his water cup. Fact / Guess
2. Chaim sits near the wall the next day. Fact / Guess
3. Yitzy is angry about the spilled water. Fact / Guess
4. Mr. Katz says sensitive ears are nothing to be ashamed of. Fact / Guess



Activity 3 of 9

Think and write

1. What sounds, lights, or crowds feel like too much for you?

2. Why does the word 'information' help Chaim feel better?

3. What would you put in your own calm tool kit?



Activity 4 of 9

Word search (find all 6)

Words: LUNCHROOM, NOISY, QUIET, CLOTH, TOOLKIT, HALLWAY

R	M	J	E	W	P	B	F	N	U	M
D	O	H	C	U	W	O	O	M	C	R
L	N	P	T	J	Y	N	C	G	W	I
U	O	P	I	N	F	A	A	S	D	I
N	T	L	K	G	O	I	R	O	K	R
C	I	N	L	N	U	I	P	I	U	Q
H	P	W	O	P	C	P	S	E	M	U
R	P	J	O	V	O	L	K	Y	L	I
O	W	F	T	U	M	Y	O	U	I	E
O	H	A	L	L	W	A	Y	T	K	T
M	V	M	P	F	J	S	A	U	H	O



Activity 5 of 9

Scrambled words (from the story)

1. UQETI = _____

2. PTEELZRS = _____

3. YLLAHAW = _____

4. COLHT = _____

5. EOINS = _____



Activity 6 of 9

Say it out loud

Practice each line in a calm, steady voice:

"I need a quiet minute, please."

"My ears need a break."

"Can I sit near the wall?"



Activity 7 of 9

My chart

My Calm Tool Kit

#	Too much of this	My body said	My tool
Loud			
Bright			
Crowded			



Activity 8 of 9

Draw it

Draw Chaim's calm tool kit: the soft cloth and the quiet corner.

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners and a thin teal border, intended for drawing Chaim's calm tool kit.



Activity 9 of 9

Answers

Remember the story:

1. The school lunchroom
2. Mr. Katz
3. A small soft cloth
4. "I need a quiet minute."

Fact or guess: 1 Fact; 2 Fact; 3 Guess; 4 Fact

Scrambled words: QUIET, PRETZELS, HALLWAY, CLOTH, NOISE

Think and write: answers will vary; talk them over together.