The Girl and the Little Whale
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Maya sat cross-legged on the classroom rug, her red sneakers tucked under her. Ms. Lee clicked a picture onto the screen: a huge blue whale with a gentle eye. 'This whale swims thousands of miles every year,' Ms. Lee said. Maya's dark brown eyes grew wide. 'Thousands?' she whispered. Her curly black hair bounced as she leaned forward.

Ms. Lee pointed to a map on the screen. 'The whale travels from cold waters to warm ones,' she explained. 'It follows the ocean like a road.' Maya imagined the little whale swimming all that way. She thought of the ocean connecting faraway places. Her round cheeks glowed. 'I want to make a map like that!' she said. Ms. Lee smiled warmly, her glasses catching the light.

After school, Maya unrolled a giant sheet of paper across the classroom floor. 'This will be my ocean,' she declared. She drew wavy lines for the sea and a bright blue sky above. Her yellow t-shirt with the small whale print seemed to cheer her on. 'I'll need a whale,' she said, and drew a small blue-grey calf with a white belly.

As Maya colored the cold waters dark blue, she felt a gentle nudge. The little whale from her drawing seemed to wiggle. 'Follow me,' it said in a soft, bubbly voice. Maya gasped, but the whale's small dark eye was kind. 'You can show me the way,' she said. She picked up her blue crayon and began to trace a long, curving path.

The little whale led Maya's crayon across the paper. 'First, we swim past icy mountains,' it said. Maya drew white peaks rising from the sea. She added tiny dots for snow. 'Brrr!' she giggled. The whale's gentle fluke flicked as it swam ahead. Maya's overalls had paint smudges now, but she didn't mind. The ocean on the floor was growing bigger and bigger.

Next, the whale guided her through a wide, warm sea. Maya colored it turquoise and added little fish with bright tails. 'This is where I sing,' the whale said. Maya drew musical notes in the water. She thought about how the ocean connects distant homes. 'Do other whales sing here too?' she asked. 'Yes,' said the whale, 'and they all hear each other.'

Maya's friend Ben stopped by. 'What are you making?' he asked. 'A whale migration map,' Maya said. 'The little whale is my guide.' Ben picked up a green crayon and drew seaweed along the edge. 'I'll help,' he said. The whale swam in happy circles. Maya smiled her bright smile. 'Teamwork makes the map better,' she said.

The whale showed Maya a deep, dark part of the ocean. 'This is where I rest,' it said. Maya colored it navy and added twinkling stars above the water. 'It's not scary,' she said. 'It's peaceful.' The whale nodded. 'The ocean has many homes,' it said. Maya drew a tiny cave for the whale to sleep in. Her curly hair fell over her eyes as she worked.

Ms. Lee came to see the map. 'You've drawn the whole journey!' she said. Maya pointed to the path. 'The whale goes from cold to warm and back again,' she explained. 'And the ocean connects it all.' Ms. Lee nodded. 'Like a big blue road,' she said. Maya beamed. She felt proud of her work, and the little whale seemed to smile too.

Maya added more places to the map: a rocky shore, a sandy beach, and a green island. 'My cousin lives near the warm sea,' she said. 'Now I can show her where the whale swims.' The little whale swam past the island. 'The ocean joins us all,' it said. Maya thought about how water touches every shore. She colored a tiny heart near her cousin's home.

That night, Maya dreamed she was swimming beside the little whale. The water was cool and sparkly, and the whale's fluke waved gently. 'Don't be afraid,' it said. 'The ocean is full of friends.' Maya saw other whales in the distance, singing. She felt small and safe. When she woke up, she knew exactly what to add to her map: a school of whales swimming together.

The next morning, Maya rushed to the classroom. She drew a big blue whale next to the little calf. 'This is the mother,' she said. The little whale in her drawing seemed to nuzzle close. Maya added tiny hearts around them. 'Families travel together,' she said. She colored the path with brighter blues. The whole ocean seemed to dance.

Ms. Lee hung the map on the classroom wall. The whole class gathered around. 'Look how far the whale goes!' said Ben. Maya pointed to the cold waters and the warm ones. 'The ocean connects distant habitats,' she said. 'It's like one big neighborhood.' Her classmates nodded. The little whale on the map seemed to wave its fin. Maya felt warm inside.

Maya stood by the map and told the story of the little whale. 'It starts here, in the cold,' she said. 'Then it swims all the way to the warm sea.' Her voice was clear and happy. 'And it meets other whales and sings.' The class clapped. Ms. Lee smiled proudly. 'You've taught us something important,' she said. Maya's round cheeks turned pink.

The map stayed on the wall for the whole year. Children from other classes came to see it. Maya showed them the path and told them about the little whale. 'Every ocean is connected,' she said. 'So all whales are neighbors, no matter how far apart they live.' The little whale drawing seemed to smile its gentle smile. Maya knew it was true.

Maya sat on the rug and looked at her map. The ocean connected icy mountains, warm seas, and her cousin's island. The little whale had guided her all the way. She thought about the real whales swimming out there, following the same path. 'The ocean joins faraway homes together,' she whispered. And she smiled her bright, curious smile, ready for the next adventure.