



MarketQuest

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the MarketQuest cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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This is Volume 1 of 2 of the *MarketQuest — Meet the Cast* series; each volume is a complete standalone book you can read on its own.

For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

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Introduction

The MarketQuest cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it.
Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive —
a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing.
Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.
Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever)
where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Stock

*SUPPLY — *producer decisions; what gets brought to market; scarcity-and-abundance matter.**



The wheelbarrow squeaked. Stock heard it a mile off, the way you hear your own name. She braced her small russet paws on the handles and pushed, and thirty baskets of tomatoes rolled with her down the hill toward the market square, red and heavy and smelling like warm summer. Her green apron pockets bulged. In one of them rode the ledger — a fat, dog-eared book she had written in every single week since she was old enough to hold a pencil.

At the bottom of the hill she stopped, wiped her forehead, and did the thing she always did. She counted. She had grown thirty baskets. She had *chosen* thirty. She could have grown twenty, or fifty, or none at all and slept in. Every basket in that wheelbarrow was a decision she had made weeks ago, with dirt under her claws, betting on sun and rain she couldn't see coming.

"Morning, Stock," called the bean farmer next door, unloading his own crop.

"Morning," said Stock. "How many did you bring?"

"Forty. Good week for beans." He grinned. "You?"

"Thirty." She patted a basket. "The wilt took two rows." She said it plainly, no shame in it, and rolled her squeaky wheelbarrow into her stall.



Stock had learned to count that way in the river-valley village, in her grandmother's garden, long before she ever saw a market square.

Her family were garden-keepers, all of them, back and back through the years. They grew apples in rows and tomatoes on stakes, and every summer some things came up gold and some things came up nothing. Stock could still remember the summer the frost came late and killed half the seedlings. She had been very small. She had cried into her grandmother's apron, sure they had done something wrong.

Her grandmother had knelt down in the frost-bitten dirt and held Stock's chin. "What we bring depends on many things, little fox," she said. "It depends on the season. It depends on the soil. It depends on whether your old bones can dig this year. Bringing less is not a shame. It is just how it is." She kissed the top of Stock's head. "We do our best inside what we're given. And then we let it be enough."

Stock had held onto that the way you hold onto a warm stone in your pocket all winter.



When Stock turned twelve she walked to MarketQuest, wheelbarrow and ledger and all, because the village said a fox who understood *why* things came to market ought to teach it.

An old badger named Stake met her at the gate. He looked at her tomatoes. He looked at her ledger. Then he asked her one question, the way mentors do.

"When less shows up at market," Stake said, "whose fault is it?"

Stock thought of her grandmother in the frost. She looked down at her own small, strong hands, still stained green from the vines. "Nobody's," she said. "The producer decides what to bring — but she decides inside a season, and a body, and a run of luck she didn't pick. Less isn't a failure. It's a Tuesday after a bad week."

Stake's whiskers lifted in something like a smile. "Then you'd better teach it that way," he said, and let her through.



Her workshop smelled like tomato leaves and old paper. A young rabbit and a mole and a spiky little hedgehog crowded onto the benches, and Stock heaved her ledger open on the table with a *thump*.

"Come look," she said, and they did.

She pointed a claw at a row of numbers. "Last week — thirty baskets. Sold twenty-seven." She flipped the page. "This week." Her claw moved down. "Twenty-five. Two rows caught a wilt. See the leaves I drew? They went yellow." She tapped a small sad sketch of a curling leaf. "Next week, if I'm honest, maybe twenty."

The hedgehog frowned. "So you did worse."

"Did I?" Stock tilted her head. "I planted the same. I watered the same. I got up at the same dark hour. A sickness came for my tomatoes that I couldn't see and couldn't stop." She let that sit. "Is a farmer bad because a wilt came?"

The hedgehog looked at the yellow leaf a long moment. "...No," he said, quieter.

"No," Stock agreed. She slid her claw over to another column. "Now watch this. Fewer tomatoes — so my asking-price went up a little. Not because I turned greedy overnight. Because when a thing gets scarce, it costs a touch more to let it go. That's the whole trick of a market: how much shows up, meeting how many hands reach for it." She smiled at them. "You'll meet Crave next. She's all about the reaching hands. I'm the showing-up."



She closed the ledger gently. The three students were quiet, and the hedgehog had leaned back against the bench like something tight in him had eased.

Stock felt it in her own chest too — that warm, settled thing. She thought of her grandmother's garden, the good seasons and the frost-bitten ones, all those years of trying. There had been no shame in any of it. Only care, done as well as care could be done inside the weather you were handed.

"What gets brought to market is a choice," she said softly, mostly to herself now. "Made with care. Made inside limits." She breathed out, all the way down to her toes, the way you can only breathe when you know your best is allowed to be enough. She hoped the kids felt it too. It felt, she thought, like being trusted. Like being let off a hook you never should have been on.

Crave

*DEMAND — *consumer preferences; needs vs wants; price-sensitivity.**



The vest gave Crave away before he even said a word.

He was a raccoon — a tween, warm grey, with a creamy mask across his eyes and a habit of pressing his little price-tag checker just to hear it *beep*. But the vest was the thing everyone stared at. It was cut like a chunky cartoon shopping basket, and sewn onto the front were two fat pockets. One said **NEEDS**. The other said **WANTS**. Crave patted them the way some people pat a dog.

He was in the square one morning when a small mouse rushed past clutching a shiny fruit-shaped eraser to her chest, eyes huge, breathing fast.

"Whoa," said Crave gently, stepping into her path. "Big feeling. What've you got there?"

"I *need* it," the mouse gasped. "I need it, I need it —"

Crave crouched down to her level. "Can I ask you one thing? Not to take it away. Just to look." He tapped the **NEEDS** pocket, then the **WANTS** pocket. "If you skip lunch today, do you get hungry?"

"...Yes."

"If you skip the eraser today?"

The mouse's ears drooped, then slowly relaxed. A small laugh escaped her. "...Nothing happens." She looked at the eraser, and then she looked at it *differently*. "It's a want."

"It's a want," Crave agreed, warm as toast. "And wanting it is totally allowed. I just like knowing which conversation I'm in."



Crave learned to sort feelings like that in the foraging village, from a family of raccoons everyone called the gatherer-discerners.

They were famous for it. When the wild berries came in and the whole village went a little wild too, Crave's aunts and uncles would move calmly through the piles, sorting. *This we keep for the cold months. This is just for tonight's fun. Both are good — but treat them differently.* Nobody in that family was ever ashamed of wanting the sweet thing. They just knew, in their bones, that the sweet thing and the keep-you-alive thing were not the same, and pretending they were only got you in trouble.

"A clear head knows the difference," his grandmother used to say, dropping a fat blackberry into Crave's paw with a wink. "That doesn't make you not want the blackberry."



When Crave turned twelve he walked to MarketQuest, because the village said a raccoon who could keep his head in a berry-pile ought to teach the buyer's side of the market.

Stake the badger met him at the gate and asked the question mentors ask.

"When a shop puts a price on bread, and the same shop puts a price on a glittery toy," Stake said, "are those the same kind of price?"

Crave thought about the mouse and her eraser. He thought about lunch you get hungry without. "No," he said. "Both are people wanting things — that's all demand, the reaching-for. But charging too much for bread can *hurt* somebody. Charging a lot for a glittery toy just means they save up or skip it. Same feeling, wanting. Very different stakes."

Stake nodded once. "Then teach them to tell which is which," he said, and stepped aside.



Crave's workshop smelled of old paper and fresh berries, with dust motes floating in a beam of sun. A badger named Pip chewed anxiously on his pencil, and a squirrel named Squeak bounced on her toes.

"Watch closely," Crave said, and he opened the NEEDS pocket.

Out came a plain warm loaf. A small bottle of water. A bar of white soap. A folded grey blanket, soft and worn. Sturdy brown shoes that looked like they'd walked a hundred miles. He laid them in a row.

"These," said Crave, "keep you alive and safe. If the price on these climbs too high, somebody doesn't eat, doesn't stay warm, doesn't stay clean. So we watch the price of these like hawks." He tucked them back. Pip stopped chewing his pencil.

Then Crave opened the WANTS pocket, and Squeak gasped. Out came a soap stamped with a tiny flower that smelled like a whole garden. Neon-green shoes with purple laces. A blanket dripping with glitter and jingling bells. A bag of frosted pet treats shaped like little cakes.

"These," said Crave, grinning, "make life *fun*. And a fun thing is allowed to cost more, because if you skip it, nobody gets hurt — you just don't get the sparkly blanket." He held up the jingling blanket and gave it a shake. It sang.

Squeak leaned in. "But how do you *tell*? In your head?"

"Best question all day." Crave tapped his forehead. "Ask what happens if you skip it. If you get hungry, cold, or sick — need. If you just feel a little sad you missed out — want. Both are real! You're allowed both." He lowered his voice like he was letting them in on a secret. "But folks selling things sometimes try to make a want *feel* like a need, so you'll pay anything. Sorting the two is how you keep your own head."



Pip put his pencil down. He looked calmer than he had all morning, like something tight in his chest had come loose.

"One more thing," Crave said softly, "and it's the one that matters most. Don't ever be embarrassed for wanting. Wanting is just part of being alive." He looked from Pip to Squeak. "And never sneer at what somebody else buys. A fancy toy's a want for one kid and a whole dream for another, depending on the money in their pocket. You don't know their budget. So you don't judge. You just... notice, and stay kind."

Squeak had gone quiet, thinking. Crave felt it settle over the room, and he felt it in himself too — that warm, unknotted feeling you get when a muddled thing finally comes clear. It felt good, he thought. Not scary. Just honest, and a little bit peaceful, like setting down something you'd been gripping too hard.

Even

PRICE EQUILIBRIUM — where supply meets demand, the conversation point between producer and consumer.



In the middle of the market square, a small striped badger named Even set a two-pan scale on an upturned crate and let a crowd argue over apples.

"Six coins a basket!" said the apple seller, arms crossed.

"Two!" said a mole with a shopping bag. "Six is robbery."

Even said nothing. She just dropped a little iron weight marked *sell* onto one pan. It clunked down. Then she dropped a weight marked *buy* onto the other pan. That side barely moved.

"Look," Even said quietly, tapping the tilted scale. "Right now you're both shouting a number that only makes *you* happy. The scale doesn't care what you shout. It cares where you actually meet."

She slid the seller's weight down a notch. She slid the mole's weight up a notch. The two pans crept toward level. She kept nudging — a little off one side, a little onto the other — until the pans hung perfectly even and stopped swinging.

"Four," she said. "At four, the seller sells every basket he's got. At four, the mole and everybody behind her can actually buy. Nobody's thrilled. Nobody's robbed." She smiled. "That's the price where you both stop shouting. It's not a rule. It's the answer you talked your way into."

The mole paid four. The seller took four. Both of them looked faintly surprised that it had worked. Even packed up her scale and moved on before either could change their mind.



Even had learned about that even, settled feeling when she was small, and it had scared her at first.

Her family were the village balance-keepers — badgers who checked that market scales were honest. One morning two neighbors nearly came to blows over the price of firewood, and little Even hid behind her grandmother's leg, certain someone was about to lose.

Her grandmother didn't take a side. She just set her scale down between the two arguing neighbors and waited. And slowly — a coin off here, a bundle on there — the shouting turned into muttering, and the muttering turned into a handshake.

"See how your shoulders were up around your ears?" her grandmother said afterward, resting a paw on Even's back. "You thought a fight had only one ending — somebody wins, somebody loses."

Even nodded. That was exactly what she'd thought.

"But that's not how a fair trade ends. When it's honest, it ends *even*. Both sides give a little. Both sides get enough. Nobody walks away robbed." Her grandmother looked down at her, warm. "That handshake feeling — that loose, settled feeling in your chest when it's finally fair? That's the whole job. You'll spend your life helping people find it."

Even remembered the loose feeling more than the words. The fight hadn't ended in a winner. It had ended *even*. And somehow that was the safest feeling she knew.



She walked to MarketQuest when she was thirteen, because a place that studied markets ought to understand the kind of price that nobody sets — the kind that two sides talk their way into.

Stake, her mentor, met her at the gate. He didn't ask her to prove she was clever. He asked one question. "Who decides the price of apples?"

Even thought for a moment, staring at the worn wooden floor. Then she reached into her bag and set her little two-pan scale on the gatepost.

"Nobody decides it," she said. "Not really." She put a weight on each pan and let them tilt. "The seller wants more. The buyer wants to pay less. They push back and forth — a little off, a little on — until the pans stop moving. Wherever they land, *that's* the price. It shifts the second anything changes. It's not a number someone picks. It's a conversation that settles."

Stake looked at the balanced scale for a long moment. "You belong here," he said.



Even's workshop was full of things that were quietly finding their level.

A boy came in one afternoon, frustrated, holding a basket of shiny red apples. "I priced them at eight coins," he said, "and nobody bought a single one. They're just *sitting* here. Feels like I did something wrong."

Even knew that stuck feeling. "Set them on the supply pan," she said. He piled them on. The pan sank low. "See how heavy that side is? Lots of apples, way up here at eight coins. How many buyers came?"

"None."

"That's called a *surplus* — more offered than anyone wants. The scale's telling you something." She slid the supply weight down a step. "Try lowering the price."

"But then I make less per apple!"

"Do you make anything on an apple that just sits and rots?"

He paused. "...No."

"Right." She kept easing the weight down until, gently, the pans drew level. "There. Watch what happens when the price is fair." She waved toward the door, and as if on cue a small line of villagers wandered up — a mole, two rabbits, a tired-looking hedgehog — and one by one they bought until the basket was empty.

The boy stared at the bare basket. "They all bought."

"They all bought," Even agreed. "That's the market *clearing*. Everything offered gets sold. Everyone who wants one gets one. Nobody's robbed, nobody's stuck." She tilted her head. "The price wasn't wrong because *you* were wrong. It was just still shouting. You let it have its conversation, and it settled."

Then she pulled a single apple off the pan. "Now — big storm ruins half the orchards tomorrow. Fewer apples. What happens to your fair price?"

The boy watched the supply pan rise light. He thought about it. "...It goes up? There's less to go around, so people who really want one will pay more."

"There it is," Even said softly. "It moved. It always moves. That's not the price breaking. That's the price *listening*."



Later, when the workshop was empty, the boy came back with one more question. He was quieter now.

"When both sides want different things," he said, "how do you know it'll ever land somewhere fair? What if one side just keeps winning?"

Even thought about the firewood fight, and her grandmother's paw on her back, and the handshake that ended even instead of ending in a winner.

"You feel it," she said. "That's the honest answer. When a trade is really fair, there's this loose, settled feeling — like both people just set down something heavy at the same time. Nobody's shoulders are up around their ears anymore." She glanced at her scale, hanging level in the last of the afternoon light. "If one side always leaves feeling robbed, the scale's still tilted, and I keep nudging. But when it goes even — when the seller and the buyer both nod and mean it — you can feel the whole square breathe out."

The boy nodded slowly, and Even watched the frustration lift off his shoulders — the same loose, unclenched way hers had, years ago, behind her grandmother's leg.

She didn't say the rest out loud, but she thought it, warm and certain: *fair isn't when somebody wins. Fair is when everybody's shoulders come down at once.*

Hand

*MARKET ROLES — *producer + consumer + distributor. visible labor. all three roles matter; none is invisible.**



The apple basket wobbled, and Hand caught it.

She was a small porcupine — a tween, warm brown, with soft rounded quills instead of sharp ones — and right now she was walking a neighbor's baskets of apples across the market square because the neighbor's back had given out that morning. Hand balanced them the way her family always had, snug against her rounded quills, and set them down gently at the fruit stall.

"Bless you, Hand," the neighbor said. "I'd never have got them here."

Hand smiled and touched the middle pocket of her chunky three-pocket vest — the one labeled **DISTRIBUTOR** — where a smooth blue stone lived. She fished it out and held it up to the light, just for a second, like a little private ceremony.

A squirrel watching from the stall frowned. "You didn't *make* the apples, though."

"Nope," said Hand cheerfully. "The neighbor grew them — she's the producer. Somebody's about to buy them — that's the consumer. But if nobody moves them from her tree to this stall..." She spread her paws. "...then the apples just sit under the tree and rot, and everybody stays hungry. Moving them is a real job. It's just a job that hides." She dropped the blue stone back in its pocket. "I like to *say* the hidden ones out loud."



Hand learned to say them out loud in the village trade-post, which was loud and dusty and smelled of fresh bread all day long.

Her family were carriers, all of them, back and back through the years — porcupines with a special trick for balancing heavy loads against their quills. They hauled goods between the farms and the market so the farmers could farm and the shopkeepers could keep shop. It was tiring work, and it was work most people forgot the second it was done.

Hand remembered her grandfather setting down a huge sack of grain, sweat on his brow, and a customer sweeping past without so much as a glance.

"Doesn't it bother you," young Hand had asked, "that nobody notices?"

Her grandfather sat down heavily and pulled her close. "The carrier is as needed as the farmer or the cook," he said. "Without the carrier, the whole conversation breaks — the food never reaches the table. Being unseen doesn't make the work small." He tapped her nose. "So if the world won't say our names, we say everyone's. Starting with the ones the world skips."

Hand carried that lesson forward like the most precious package of all.



When Hand turned twelve she walked to MarketQuest, because the village said a porcupine who noticed the unnoticed ought to teach how a market really runs.

Stake the badger met her at the gate.

"A package appears at somebody's door," Stake said. "How many people made that happen?"

Hand counted on her paws, out loud. "Someone made the thing. Someone will use it. And in between — a driver, a warehouse packer, a sorter, a courier climbing the steps." She looked up. "Most folks only see the maker and the user. The whole middle is invisible to them. But the middle is *most* of it." She lowered her paws. "Naming the middle is how you honor it."

Stake's eyes crinkled. "Then teach them to name it," he said, and let her through.



Her workshop had a big colorful drawing of the market pinned to the wall. A badger named Pip and a mole and a wide-eyed dormouse crowded close as Hand tapped her three-pocket vest.

"Watch," she said. "This morning I was three different people."

She reached into the **PRODUCER** pocket and pulled out a green stone. "First I baked a loaf of bread. I *made* something. Producer." She set it down. Then the **DISTRIBUTOR** pocket and the blue stone. "Then I carried my neighbor's apples to the stall. I *moved* something. Distributor." Down it went. Finally the **CONSUMER** pocket and a red stone. "Then I bought tomatoes and made sauce. I *used* something. Consumer." She held the red stone high. "Same porcupine. Three jobs. All morning. All worth saying."

The dormouse pointed shyly at the drawing. "Which ones on the wall are the hidden jobs?"

"Oh, good eye — come find them with me." Hand traced the picture. "See the farmers, the bakers, the toy-crafters? Everybody sees *them* — producers. See the families buying dinner, the school stocking up on fruit? Everybody sees *them* too — consumers." Her claw moved to the edges of the scene. "Now here. The truck-driver bringing crates in. The packer filling bags. The cashier scanning. The stocker filling shelves. The dishwasher out back of the food stall." She looked at the students. "Nobody puts *those* on a poster. But pull them out and the whole market falls down."

Pip's brow furrowed. "My mom's a bus driver," he said quietly. "People kind of look right through her."

Hand crouched to his level. "Then next time, you look *right at her*," she said gently. "And you say, out loud, 'my mom drives the bus.' Watch what it does to her face."



Pip was very still. He was picturing a courier who'd once brought him a book, a stranger he'd never thanked, and something warm and grateful stirred in his chest — a feeling like finally saying thank you to someone he'd never met.

Hand saw that soft glow spread across the whole bench, and her own heart felt full.

"When a package comes," she said softly, "picture the courier, and name them. When a meal's set down, picture the cook and the server and the dishwasher, and name them. When food just *appears* in your kitchen, picture the driver, the packer, the stocker, the cashier — and name them all." She tapped her vest one last time. "Seeing the work gives people back their dignity. It says: I know you were there. I know you carried this."

The room was quiet. Naming the work, Hand thought, didn't only keep the market running. It made you feel less alone inside it — because everybody was carrying *something*, and everybody deserved to be seen doing it. She breathed in the bread-and-dust smell of a place full of hands, and felt, more than anything, glad.

Tide

MARKET EVENTS — shocks + policy + trade flows read as patterns. external events ripple through markets in predictable ways.



In the harbor-village of MarketQuest, a small octopus-tween named Tide sat on a barrel with eight arms full of charts and watched a single tomato roll off a cart.

Nobody else noticed. But Tide did. She traced the cart back to the ship, and the ship back to the storm clouds bunching over the far islands, and she reached for the little board she always carried — a smooth panel where she could draw with a fingertip and the lines would ripple outward on their own.

A market-runner skidded up beside her. "Why are you just *sitting* there? The whole harbor's about to get busy!"

"I know," Tide said. "That's why I'm sitting. Watch."

She drew a dot on the board. "A storm hit the island farms last night. That's the splash." Then she touched the water beside it, and rings spread out. "First the farmers know. Then, in a few days, the sellers know, because fewer crates come in. Then the price creeps up. Then folks at the market feel the pinch." Each ring lit up a stall in the harbor below, one after another, like a slow, quiet drumbeat.

The runner stared. "You can see it before it happens?"

"Not magic," Tide said. She wrapped an arm around the little board. "The splash is a surprise. But the ripples aren't. The ripples follow patterns. Once you know the shape of the water, you're never really caught off guard again." Below them, right on cue, a seller shouted that the tomatoes were sold out — and Tide just nodded, like the harbor was reading from a page only she could see.



Tide learned to watch the water when she was very small, and it did not start out feeling clever. It started out feeling frightening.

Her family were harbor-watchers, the octopuses who kept an eye on the tides and the traffic. One winter a trade-ship failed to come, and the whole village went tight and worried — flour ran short, then bread, then tempers. Tide was little enough that she didn't understand *why*. She only felt the fear moving through the grown-ups, spreading from house to house like cold water, and it made her chest go small. It felt like the whole world had simply broken with no warning.

Her grandmother found her curled behind the nets. She didn't say *don't worry*. She said, "You feel it moving through everyone, don't you? Like it came from nowhere."

Tide nodded.

"It didn't come from nowhere, little one." Her grandmother drew a slow circle in the sand. "One ship didn't come. That's the middle. Everything else spreads out from there, in order — every single time. The fear feels wild because you can't see the shape. But there *is* a shape." She widened the circle with her fingertip, ring by ring. "When you can see the rings, the scary thing turns into a thing you understand. And a thing you understand can't swallow you whole."

That winter the ships came back, and the shortage eased, exactly the way her grandmother's rings had said it would. Tide never forgot the moment the fear had turned into a pattern in the sand — how something that had felt like the end of the world became, instead, just weather she could read.



She walked to MarketQuest at twelve, board tucked under one arm, because a place that studied buying and selling ought to understand the ripples too.

Stake, the old mentor, met her at the gate. He didn't ask her to prove she was quick. He asked one question. "What is a market event?"

Tide didn't answer with a speech. She set her board on the wall and pressed one dot into it. "A ship doesn't come," she said quietly, and touched the water. The rings spread — sellers, then prices, then the people at home — and Stake watched each ring travel outward in its patient order.

"It looks like chaos when it happens," Tide said. "But it isn't. It ripples the same way whether it's a storm or a closed road or a brand-new rule from the harbor council. Different splash. Same rings."

Stake looked at the little board for a long moment. "You belong here," he said.



Tide's workshop was full of children who were sure the world was about to fall apart.

One afternoon a girl came in clutching a newspaper, wide-eyed. "There's a *tax* on the toys from across the sea now," she said. "Everyone says the shops are ruined. Is everything ruined?"

Tide remembered being small behind the nets. She knew that feeling.

"Come draw with me," she said, and slid the board over. "Put the splash in the middle. What changed?"

"The toys cost more to bring in."

"Good. Now — who feels it first?" Tide touched the center.

The girl thought. "The... shops that buy them?" A ring spread.

"And then?"

"The prices go up a little?" Another ring.

"And after that?" Tide tilted her head. "What might a toymaker *here* in the village do, if the ones from across the sea got pricier?"

The girl's eyes went round. "Make more toys here! Because now people would want them!" A whole new ring bloomed outward, bright.

"There it is." Tide smiled. "You just read the pattern. It felt like *ruined* when it was one scary word. But it's rings, spreading in order, settling into something new. Some folks get pinched along the way — real people, and that matters, and we don't pretend it doesn't." She pressed the board gently. "But the market isn't glass. It bends. It settles. Most ripples calm."

The girl set the newspaper down like it had gotten lighter.



Later, when the workshop was empty, the girl came back with one more question. She was quieter now.

"When something bad happens," she said, "and everyone's panicking... how do you stay so calm?"

Tide thought about the nets, and the cold winter, and her grandmother's finger drawing rings in the sand.

"I'm not calm because I stopped caring," she said. "I'm calm because I stopped being surprised. When you can see the rings, a shock stops feeling like the ground dropping away. It just feels like water — moving the way water moves." She looked out at the harbor, where the last of the day's boats were coming in. "The fear used to sit right here." She touched the top of her round little head, then let the arm drift down. "Now, when the splash comes, there's this settled, steady feeling instead — like watching rain start and already knowing the shape of the puddle it'll make."

The girl nodded slowly, and Tide watched the tightness leave her shoulders — the same tightness that had once curled a small octopus up behind the nets, now smoothing out into something that felt, more than anything, like being held safe.

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Spark & Anvil is a 501(c)(3) public charity. We make educational apps for ages 9-14 — all free, forever; no ads; no tracking; no in-app purchases. MarketQuest is one of 140+ apps in the portfolio.

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- **CuriosityQuest** — Texas geography exploration through Linger, Notice, and the Lantern in the Dark
- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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