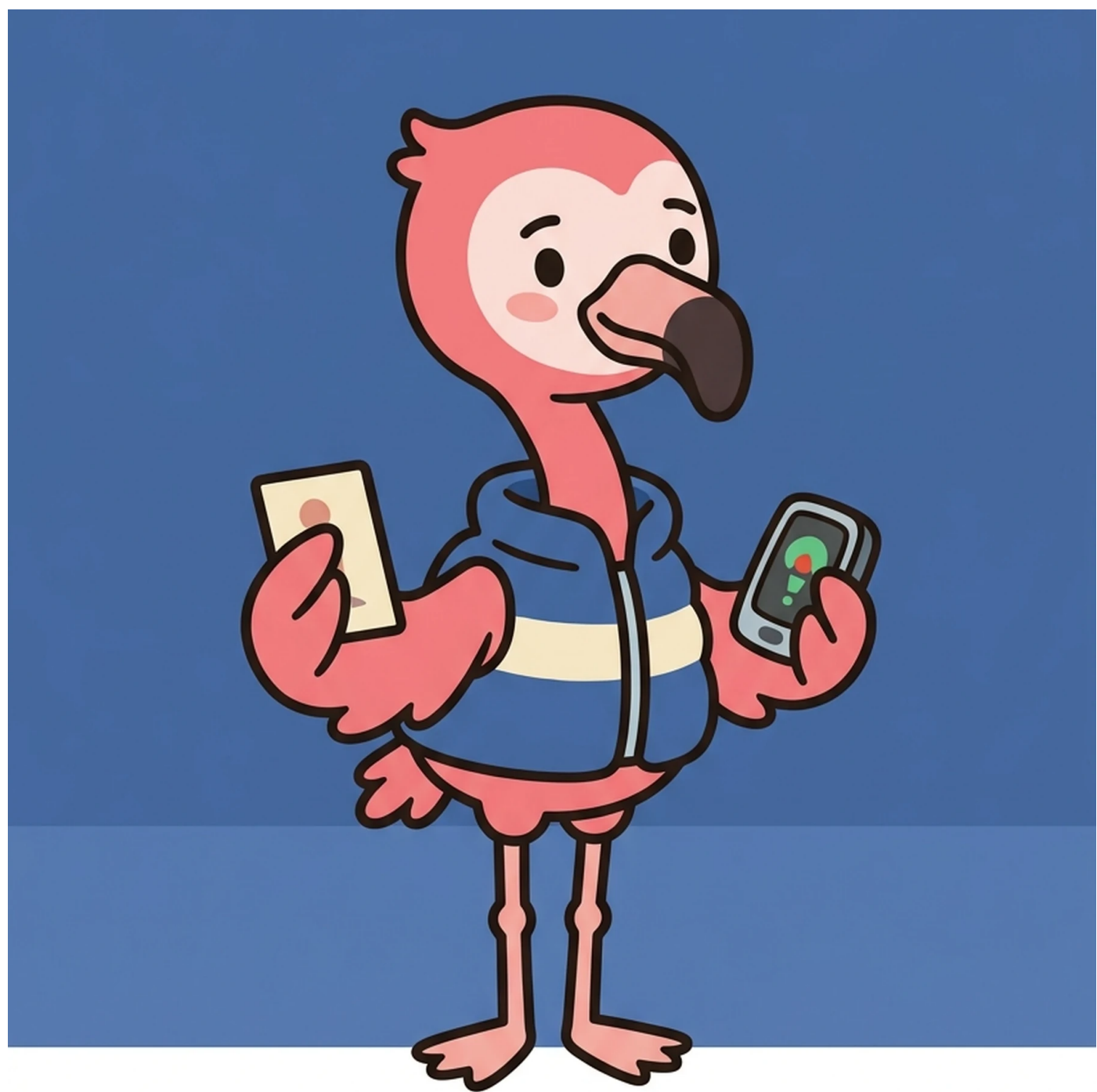




SpeakForge

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the *SpeakForge* 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 2 of 2 of the *SpeakForge — 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 SpeakForge 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*

Easel

*VISUAL AIDS — *show, don't just tell*. A picture, a chart, or a prop at the right moment makes an idea land. The aid serves the words; it never replaces them. One clear image beats a hundred words you can't quite picture.*



At the SpeakForge academy, where every creature was learning to stand up and speak clearly, Easel was a calm, square-shouldered creature who always carried something under one arm — a rolled-up picture, a little chart, a wooden model of something.

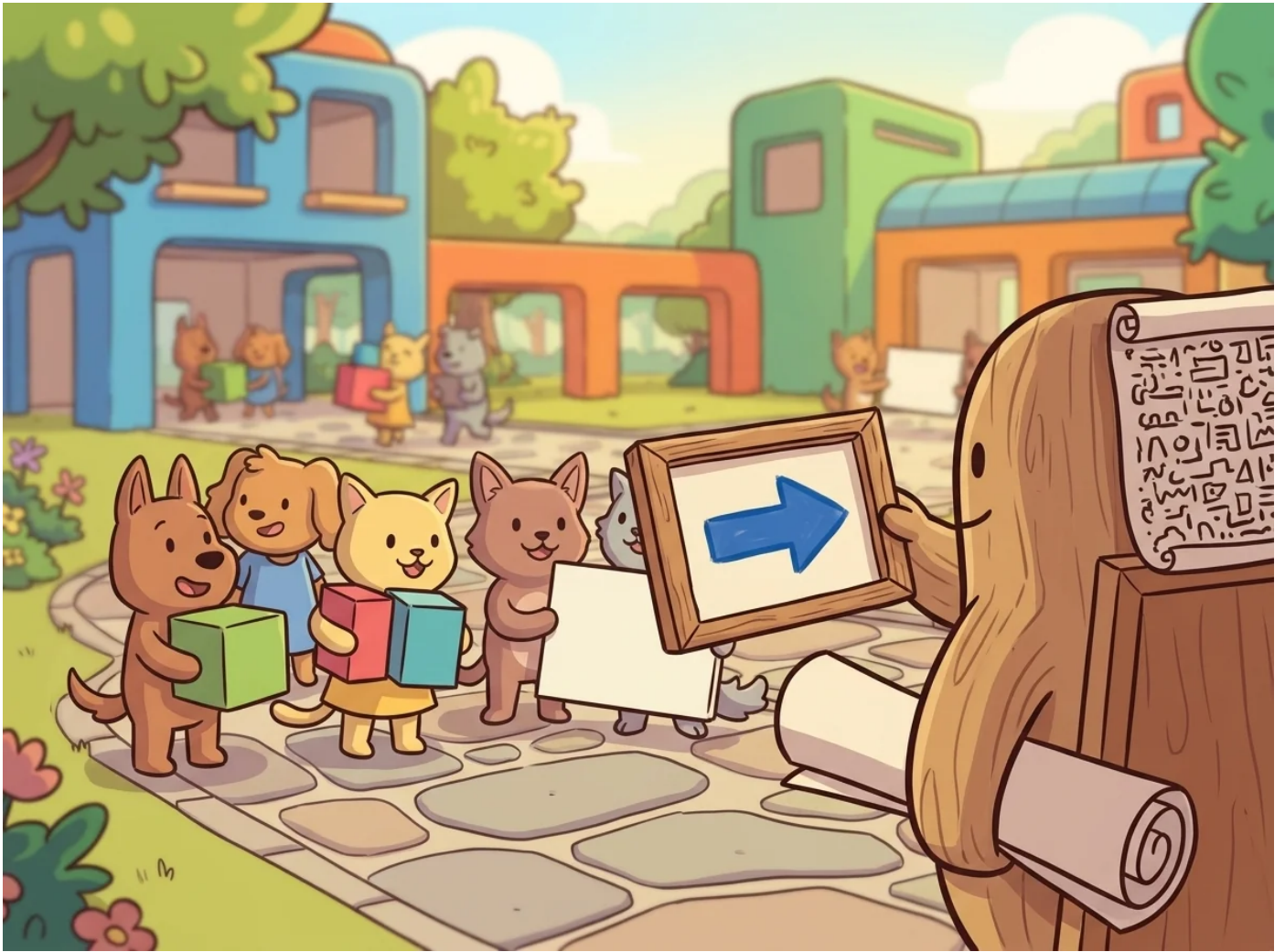
When a speaker hit the exact spot where words alone got tangled, Easel would quietly unroll the right picture and prop it up, and the whole room would go *ohhh* — the idea snapping into focus all at once. She never showed a picture to be flashy. She showed it at the precise moment a listener needed to *see* the thing to understand it.



"You made that whole confusing part easy with one picture!" a young speaker said.

"That's my craft," Easel said, smoothing the picture flat. "I'm Easel. I keep the visual aids — *show, don't just tell.*" She tapped the propped-up image. "An aid serves the words. It never replaces them. When an idea is hard to picture, you give the listener a picture. One clear image can do what a hundred words can't."

Resonance, the academy's warm mentor, watched and asked, "Show them what happens when the aid takes over."



Easel nodded and tried it wrong on purpose. She kept talking but held up a picture so crammed with tiny shapes and crowded little drawings that nobody could tell what to look at. The young speakers squinted, lost.

"Too much," Easel said, rolling it away. "When the aid is busier than the idea, it stops helping and starts hiding." Then she held up a second picture — just one big, simple shape with a single arrow. "*That's* an aid. One idea. One look. Your eye knows exactly where to go."

A young speaker's face lit up. "So a good picture has LESS on it, not more!"



"Less, on purpose," Easel agreed. "The aid points at the one thing that matters and stays out of the way of everything else. You're not decorating. You're *clarifying*."

Resonance asked Easel to teach the whole cast before their big group presentation. "Pitch can make her voice carry," Resonance said, "and Truss can build a tight argument — but some ideas need to be *seen*. Will you show them how?"

Easel was glad to. When she teaches, she gives one rule: "Use an aid only where words leave a gap. Ask yourself — is this thing easier to *see* than to *say*? If yes, show a picture. If no, just talk. And make the picture so simple a stranger could understand it in one glance."



Truss was explaining how the parts of an argument stack up, and the room looked foggy. Easel quietly unrolled a picture of three blocks resting on each other, with one arrow pointing up. No words on it — just blocks and an arrow. "Ohhh," said the room. Suddenly Truss's stacking idea was *obvious*. "You didn't change my words," Truss said, amazed. "You just gave them a window."

After the rehearsal, Easel sat down with her rolled pictures stacked neatly beside her, the way she always kept them.

For a long time, Easel had carried a quiet worry. She wondered if she was even a real *speaker* at all. The others used their voices — Pitch projected, Hark listened, Echo read the room. All Easel did was hold up pictures. Maybe, she'd thought, she was just the helper who carried the props while the real speakers did the talking.

But sitting in the soft academy light, watching a young speaker hold up one clean picture and hear the whole room understand at once, Easel felt the worry loosen and warmth spread through her chest. Her pictures weren't a crutch for people who couldn't talk. They were a *bridge* — built at the exact spot where words run out and seeing begins. Choosing the one right image, keeping it simple, showing it at the perfect moment: that was craft, and it was hers. A steady, glad calm settled over her, and she rolled her next picture closed, content, ready for the next gap that only a picture could cross.

Waypoint

*SIGNPOSTING — *tell them where you're going, then take them there.* Little spoken markers — "First... Next... Finally" — let a listener follow a talk without getting lost. The signpost isn't the idea; it's the path to the idea.*



At the SpeakForge academy, where creatures learned to be understood, Waypoint was a bright-eyed creature who never went anywhere without planting little markers behind her — small spoken flags that said, in effect, *you are here, and here is where we go next.*

When a speaker started to wander and the listeners' eyes glazed over, Waypoint would step in and drop a marker: "First, the problem. Then, the cause. Finally, the fix." And just like that, the lost listeners had a path again. She didn't add new ideas — she laid down the trail *between* the ideas so nobody fell off it.



"You didn't say anything new," a young speaker said, "but suddenly I knew exactly where the talk was going!"

"That's the whole job," Waypoint said, planting an imaginary little flag in the air. "I'm Waypoint. I keep the signposting — *tell them where you're going, then take them there.*" She walked a few steps, marking each one. "First. Next. Finally. The signpost isn't the idea. It's the *path* to the idea. A listener who knows where you're headed never gets lost on the way."

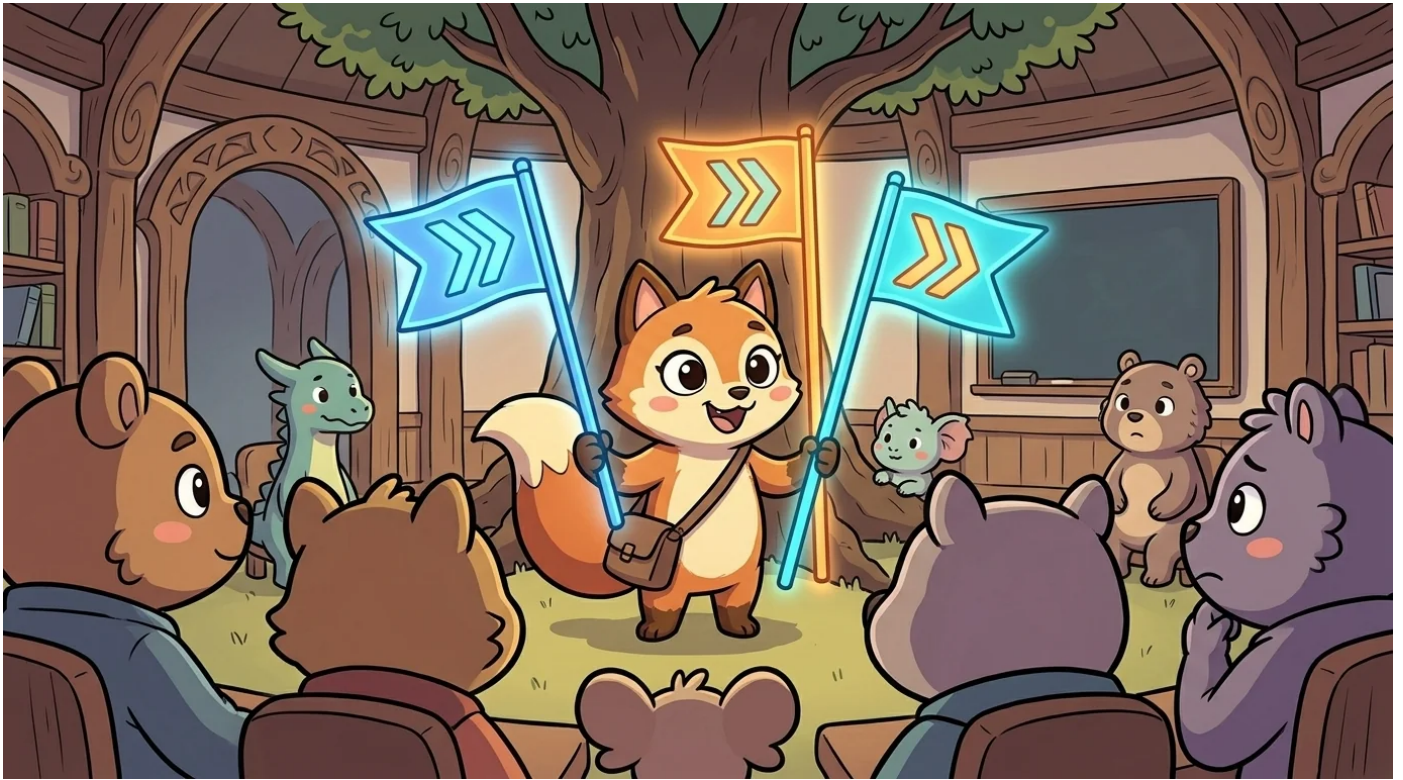
Resonance, the warm academy mentor, said, "Show them a talk with no markers at all."



Waypoint gave a talk that was all good ideas in a heap, with no signposts: she jumped from the problem to a fix to a different problem to a fact to the first fix again. The room got that uneasy, lost look. "I have no idea where we are," a young speaker admitted.

"Right — good ideas, no path," Waypoint said. Then she gave the *same* ideas again, but this time she planted markers: "I'll cover three things. First... second... and last..." The room relaxed instantly; heads nodded along. "Same ideas," she said. "But now there's a trail to follow. Listeners can only stay with you if they know where 'with you' is going."

A young speaker grinned. "So I should tell people my plan BEFORE I start the parts!"



"Tell them the map, then walk the map," Waypoint said. "A promise up front — 'here are my three points' — and a little flag at each turn. That's all it takes to keep a whole room from wandering off."

Resonance asked Waypoint to teach the cast before their big group talk. "Hark can listen and Echo can read the room," Resonance said, "but if the talk has no path, even the best listeners get lost. Will you give them the trail?"

Waypoint was delighted. When she teaches, she gives one rule: "Open with your map — say how many parts there are and what they are. Then plant a marker at every turn: 'first,' 'now here's the next part,' 'and finally.' Close by looking back at the path you walked. The listener should never have to wonder *where are we?*"



Truss was giving a tight argument but the listeners kept losing the thread between his points. Waypoint handed him three markers. Truss tried again: "I'll make one claim, give you two reasons, then tell you why it matters." Suddenly his strong argument was also a *clear* one. "My points were always solid," Truss said. "You just built the path between them so people could walk it."

After the rehearsal, Waypoint sat down, idly planting tiny flags in the soft grass beside her, the way she always fidgeted.

For a long time, Waypoint had carried a small, nagging doubt. The others made *content* — Truss made arguments, Pitch made the voice soar, Easel made the pictures. All Waypoint made was little words like "first" and "next." She'd wondered, sometimes, whether signposts were even real speaking, or just filler — empty markers around the parts that actually mattered.

But sitting in the gentle academy evening, watching a young speaker open with a clear map and lead a whole room calmly from start to finish, Waypoint felt the doubt melt into a quiet, steadying gladness. Her markers weren't filler. They were *kindness* — the thing that kept a listener from feeling lost and anxious, the small flags that said *I've got you; here's where we go*. A talk without a path leaves people stranded; a talk with one feels like being walked home. That mattered. A warm, settled calm spread through her, and she planted one more little flag, content, already mapping the path for her next talk.

Volley

*FIELDING QUESTIONS — *catch it, then send it back clean*. When someone asks you a question, you don't freeze or dodge — you take it in, find the real ask underneath, and return a clear answer. A good Q&A is a friendly volley, not a duel.*



At the SpeakForge academy, where creatures practiced being understood, Volley was a quick, light-footed creature who loved the moment *after* a talk most of all — the part where hands go up and questions come flying.

Where other speakers tensed up when a question arrived, Volley relaxed. She'd catch the question gently, turn it over to find what was really being asked, and send back a clean, calm answer — a friendly volley, back and forth, never a fight. A question that would have made another speaker freeze just made Volley light up.



"Someone asked you a really hard question and you didn't panic at all!" a young speaker said.

"Questions are my favorite part," Volley said, bouncing lightly on her toes. "I'm Volley. I keep the fielding — *catch it, then send it back clean.*" She mimed catching something from the air and tossing it back. "Someone serves you a question. You don't freeze, and you don't dodge. You catch it, find the *real* ask underneath, and return a clear answer. A good Q&A is a volley between friends — not a duel you have to win."

Resonance, the warm academy mentor, said, "Show them the two ways it goes wrong."



Volley demonstrated freezing first: a question came, and she went stiff and silent, eyes wide, saying nothing. "That's the freeze," she said. "Scary, and the asker leaves with nothing." Then she showed dodging: a question came, and she talked fast about something *else* entirely, never answering. "That's the dodge. Sounds busy, says nothing." Then she did it right: a question came, she took one breath, and said, "Good question — I think you're really asking *this*, and here's my answer." Calm. Clear. Done.

A young speaker leaned in. "What was the breath for?"

"The breath buys you a second to find the real question," Volley said. "Lots of questions are messy on the outside. Underneath, there's one clear thing they want to know. Take a breath, find *that*, and answer *that*. You're not being tested. You're being *asked* — and answering is a gift you get to give."



Resonance asked Volley to teach the cast before their big public talk. "They can each give a wonderful speech," Resonance said, "but the moment a hand goes up, half of them turn to stone. Will you teach them the volley?"

Volley was thrilled. When she teaches, she gives one rule: "When a question comes, breathe once. Repeat it back in your own words — 'so you're asking...' — to make sure you caught it. Then answer the real thing, simply. And if you don't know? Say so honestly, and offer to find out. That's a real answer too."

Pitch, who could project to the back wall but dreaded questions, got asked something tricky. She breathed. "So you're asking whether this works for big rooms *and* small ones?" The asker nodded. Pitch answered it cleanly — and grinned, astonished she hadn't frozen. "I caught it," she said. "I actually caught it." Then someone asked Pitch something she genuinely didn't know. She paused, then said, "I'm not sure — but I'll find out and tell you." And the room nodded, trusting her *more*, not less.



After the rehearsal, Volley flopped down, still lightly bouncing one foot, the way she did even at rest.

For a long time, Volley had hidden a worry under all that quickness. The others built things *ahead* of time — Truss planned arguments, Waypoint mapped paths, Easel prepared pictures. Volley's whole craft happened in the unplanned moment, with no script. She'd wondered if that made her less of a real speaker — just someone good at improvising, with nothing solid prepared.

But resting in the warm academy evening, remembering Pitch's astonished "I caught it," Volley felt the worry dissolve into a bright, settled warmth. Catching a question without freezing, finding the real ask, answering honestly — even saying "I don't know, but I'll find out" — that wasn't winging it. It was a craft built on something steady: the trust that you don't have to be perfect, only honest and present. The unscripted moment wasn't her weakness; it was the place she felt most herself. A glad, easy calm spread through her, and she bounced her foot, content, already hoping for a hard question tomorrow.

Mosaic

***BUILDING ON OTHERS** — *take the pieces and make a picture.* In a real conversation you don't just wait for your turn — you connect what people said. "You mentioned X, and that fits with Bel's Y..." A discussion becomes a whole when someone fits the scattered pieces together.*



At the SpeakForge academy, where creatures learned not just to speak but to talk *together*, Mosaic was a warm, watchful creature who carried a little pouch of colored tiles — and who listened to a whole group before she ever fit the pieces into a picture.

In a discussion where everyone was tossing out separate ideas that bounced off each other and went nowhere, Mosaic would gather them up. "You said we need it faster," she'd say, "and that connects to what Bel said about fewer steps — put those together and we've got our answer." The scattered thoughts suddenly became one whole thing. She didn't talk over anyone. She made everyone's pieces *fit*.



"You made all our random ideas turn into one good plan!" a young speaker said.

"Because they were never random," Mosaic said, laying a few tiles into a pattern. "I'm Mosaic. I keep the building-on-others — *take the pieces and make a picture*." She set one more tile in place. "In a real conversation you don't just wait for your turn to drop your own idea. You connect. 'You said this, and it fits with what they said.' A discussion becomes a *whole* when someone fits the scattered pieces together."

Resonance, the warm academy mentor, said, "Show them the two ways a discussion falls apart."



Mosaic demonstrated the first way: everyone talking *past* each other, each waiting only to say their own thing, no one connecting anything. "That's a pile of tiles, not a picture," she said. Then the second way: one loud voice flattening everyone else's ideas under their own. "That buries the pieces." Then she did it right — she caught two people's separate ideas and snapped them together: "Your point and yours are actually the *same* point from two sides." The two speakers lit up, suddenly allies.

A young speaker frowned, thinking. "So I should listen for how my idea connects to theirs — not just push mine?"

"Build, don't bury," Mosaic said. "When you say 'building on what you just said,' two things happen. The idea gets bigger — and the person feels *heard*. You can disagree and still build; you just connect to what's true in what they said first."



Resonance asked Mosaic to teach the cast before their big group discussion. "Each of them can give a fine speech alone," Resonance said, "but put them in a circle and they talk over each other. Will you teach them to build?"

Mosaic was glad to. When she teaches, she gives one rule: "Before you add your idea, name someone else's first. 'You said X — and building on that, I think Y.' Listen for the pieces that fit. When the discussion ends, fit the whole thing into one picture so everyone sees what the *group* made together — not just who talked most."

Hark, who was wonderful at listening but usually went quiet after, tried it. "Echo said we should think about who's in the room," Hark offered, "and building on that, I think we should ask them first." Echo beamed — her idea hadn't vanished; it had *grown*. "You took my piece and added to it," Echo said. "It feels like we're making this together." And they were.



After the rehearsal, Mosaic sat with her pouch of tiles, slowly arranging them into a little picture, the way she always did when she was thinking.

For a long time, Mosaic had hidden a quiet ache. The others each had a *thing* that was clearly theirs — Pitch's big voice, Truss's sharp arguments, Easel's pictures. Mosaic's craft was made entirely of *other people's* ideas. She'd wondered, in low moments, whether she had any voice of her own at all, or whether she was just an echo who rearranged what everyone else already said.

But sitting in the soft academy evening, watching Hark and Echo discover they'd built something together that neither could have made alone, Mosaic felt the ache turn into a deep, glowing warmth. Connecting ideas wasn't *having no idea of her own* — it was the rarest idea of all: seeing how separate things belonged together, and making people feel heard while she did it. The picture was hers. The pieces were everyone's, but the *seeing* — the fitting-together — that was her gift, and it made the whole group kinder and smarter at once. A warm, settled belonging spread through her, and she set the last tile in place, content, the little picture complete.

Usher

*TAKING TURNS — *everyone gets a seat at the talk.* Good group conversation runs on shared rules — one voice at a time, make room for quiet people, don't hog the floor. The norms aren't bossy; they're what makes a discussion fair enough for everyone to speak.*



At the SpeakForge academy, where creatures learned to talk *together* without it turning into a pile-up, Usher was a kind, attentive creature who stood a little to the side of every group — not to be in charge, but to make sure the conversation had room in it for everyone.

When a discussion got loud and tangled, with the fast talkers steamrolling the quiet ones, Usher would gently open a space. "Let's let them finish," she'd say, "and — Wren, you've been waiting; go ahead." Just like that, a voice that had been stuck found a seat. She never bossed anyone. She kept the talk *fair* enough that everyone could speak.



"You made sure even the shy ones got to talk!" a young speaker said.

"That's the quiet work of it," Usher said, gesturing toward an empty space as if pulling out a chair. "I'm Usher. I keep the turn-taking — *everyone gets a seat at the talk.*" She nodded around an imaginary circle. "Good group talk runs on shared rules. One voice at a time. Make room for the quiet ones. Don't hog the floor. The rules aren't bossy. They're what make a conversation fair enough for everyone to speak."

Resonance, the warm academy mentor, said, "Show them what a discussion is like with no turn-taking at all."



Usher let a group talk with no rules: three loud voices crashed over each other, two quiet ones never got in, and nothing anyone said could be fully heard. "That's not a discussion," Usher said. "That's a traffic jam." Then she added the simplest norms — one voice at a time, and a glance toward whoever hadn't spoken. Instantly the same group became a real conversation, all five voices in it.

A young speaker, one of the quiet ones, spoke up. "I always have things to say but I can never find a gap to say them!"

"That's exactly who the rules are for," Usher said warmly. "Turn-taking isn't to slow down the loud people for fun. It's to leave a door open for the people who'd otherwise never get through. A norm is just a promise: *your turn is coming, and we'll save it for you.*"



Resonance asked Usher to teach the cast before their big group discussion. "They're all wonderful one at a time," Resonance said, "but together they either talk over each other or freeze up. Will you teach them to share the floor?"

Usher was glad to. When she teaches, she gives one rule: "Agree on how you'll talk *before* you start. One voice at a time. Watch for who hasn't spoken and invite them in. If you've talked a lot, hold back and make room. And when someone's finishing, don't pounce — let the silence breathe, then take your turn."

Pitch, whose big voice tended to fill every gap, practiced holding back. She noticed Hark hadn't spoken, and instead of launching in, she said, "Hark, what do you think?" Hark, surprised and glad, finally shared the idea he'd been holding. "You made space for me," Hark said. "I had this the whole time but couldn't get in." Pitch realized that *not* talking had let the best idea into the room.



After the rehearsal, Usher lingered, straightening the circle of seats even though everyone had gone, the way she always tidied the space for the next talk.

For a long time, Usher had carried a lonely worry. The others were *in* the conversation — Pitch projecting, Truss arguing, Mosaic connecting. Usher was always a little to the side, tending the rules instead of speaking her own ideas. She'd wondered if she was even part of the discussion at all, or just the doorkeeper who never got to come inside.

But standing in the quiet academy evening, remembering Hark's surprised, grateful "you made space for me," Usher felt the loneliness ease into a warm, quiet pride. Keeping the floor fair wasn't standing *outside* the conversation — it was holding the whole thing up so it could exist at all. Every voice that got a turn, every quiet creature who finally got through the door, was there because someone tended the space. That was her place in the circle, and it was a real one. A soft, belonging warmth settled over her, and she set the last seat straight, content, the circle ready and waiting for every voice that would fill it tomorrow.

About Spark & Anvil

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. SpeakForge is one of 140+ apps in the portfolio.

More chapter books from Spark & Anvil

Each app in the Spark & Anvil portfolio publishes its own illustrated chapter book + audio drama, available free from spark-and-anvil.com/books. Highlights include:

- **GambitTales** — chess tactics through Sir Pinwell, Lady Skewer, Queen Vesper, and the Twin Knights of Fork Hill
- **ProofQuest** — formal proof techniques through Direct-Proof Dora and the Lemma Library
- **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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