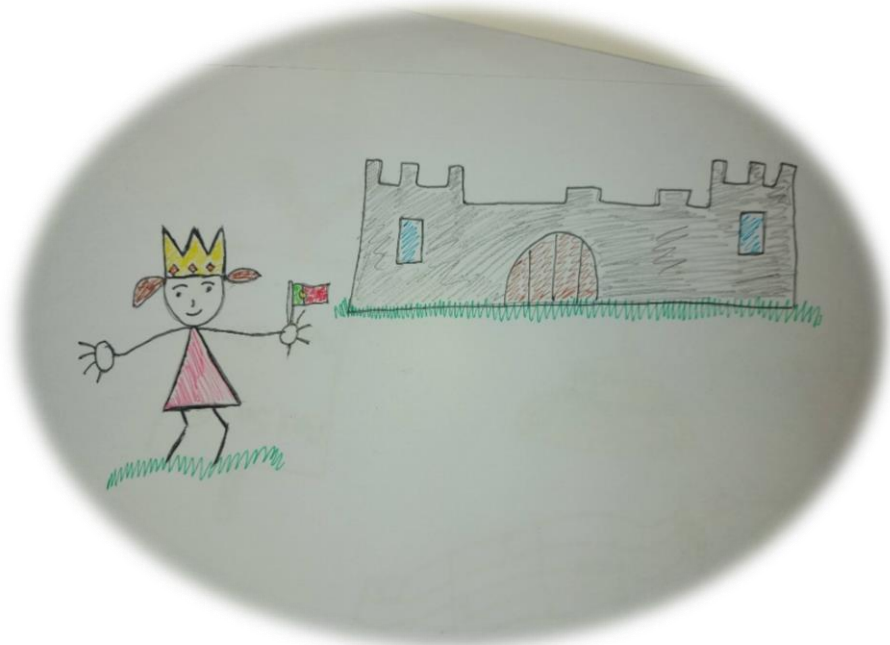


Once upon a time, there was a princess called Sofia who would one day become the Queen of Portugal. She was the only daughter of the King, and her training to become a true queen began the day she was born. The royals in Portugal were all very clever people: her mother, the Queen, wrote poetry for the people. They were all so moved by her words that many of the townsmen cried. Her father, the King, wrote all of his own speeches, and ruled the kingdom by motivating people with his powerful voice. Even her bedtime stories were written for her by the knights, who adored the princess from the day she was born.



One evening, the Queen came in to read Sofia a bedtime story. She tried to read her stories for herself, but the letters on the page just didn't make any sense to her. They were just shapes on a white page in Sofia's eyes, no matter how hard she tried. This upset her, and she began to cry. As her mother dried her tears, she comforted Sofia.



"You'll be able to read one day, Sofia, don't worry. You just don't understand how sounds work yet, but when you do, you'll be able to see that all of these letters make up syllables that you will be able to transform into words." Said the queen, wiping away another tear from her daughter's face.

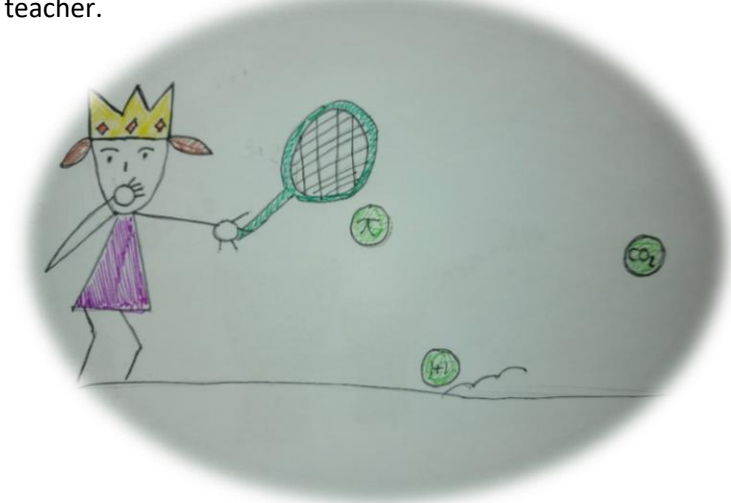
"But mummy, what is a syllable? How do I find them?" questioned Sofia, frustrated that she was too young to know these things already.

“They’re the beat of our words” replied her mother. Sofia thought carefully about this, but eventually as her eyelids got heavier and heavier, she drifted off to sleep, resting for school the next day.



At school, Sofia was excited to start her learning. She sat through lessons in maths, science and sports. But what she was really waiting for, was her literacy lesson. She wanted to learn how to read! She spoke to her classmates about what her mother had told her the night before, and together, they asked their teachers if they would be learning about the mysterious syllables. In response, their teachers came up with a plan to try and help their awareness of sounds and how they combine to make words, in the hope that it would help them to develop their reading and writing skills. Music and art were not studied in Sofia’s school, but in some of the best schools in the country, they were. They decided that artistic training might improve their pupils’ literacy and language skills, and so they

asked for the help of Mr. Silva the music teacher and Mr. Cubas the art teacher.



Long ago, there had been a feud between the two men, so they hated each other to the very core. Their anger had bubbled and boiled for years and years, and they tried to outperform each other in every task. However, they knew that Sofia and her friends needed a special education and vowed that they would turn their hatred into some healthy competition. Inspired by a study by Maria Manuel Vidal and others, they decided to each take half of the class and teach them either music or art for an hour every week, hoping that their subject would help the children understand to syllables and sounds more.



However, they needed to fairly see which class would improve more. Every child did a special test to see if they already had any knowledge of syllables, which they would do again at the end of the year to see how much they each improved. The Queen had signed a form to allow Sofia to take this test, as it was not part of the normal school day. Sofia found the test very hard, but she didn't give up and tried again and again to find the beat of the words. Then in the second part of the test, she listened to separate sounds and tried to put them together to make words. She hadn't heard of every word before, and she wondered if some of them were real at all. But they sounded right for her Portuguese tongue, so she tried hard anyway. Finally, she was given sets of pictures of items that when named, rhymed with each other. Her task was to see which ones matched up to each other in terms of their sound. After a while though, a buzzer sounded, and her test was over.



Sofia loved music. The kingdom choir often sang songs for her family on special holidays, so she was very excited when she found herself in Mr. Silva's class every week. In their lessons, they sang a welcome song, before learning how to drum to a beat together. They learned about pitch and sang scales of music, and chanted sounds over and over again. Sofia's best friend Ana was in Mr. Cubas's class, and she told Sofia all about their painting, drawing and sculpting classes that she had each week. Sofia found it interesting but wondered why they were studying different things. Maybe, she thought, it was to see which talent was better, to put an end to the feud between the two teachers.



At the end of year, both classes had finished their music and arts lessons, and they did the special test again. This time, every child found it easier as they had learned so much that year. However, Sofia was sure that she found it much easier than Ana did. And she was right. Mr. Silva's class did significantly better this time than Mr. Cubas's children did.



Sofia raced home from school that day and told her mother about her fantastic test results. Being the clever queen that her mother was, she explained to Sofia:

“You see darling, music is very similar to words. They are built in a very similar way, so I have no doubt that your learning about melody and rhyme has helped you to understand words more”. The Queen considered this amazing impact that music had had on her daughter and thought about how it might help others. She knew of children in the kingdom who suffered with language difficulties and vowed to make sure that the work of Mr. Silva could help them too, to make Portugal the best kingdom in the world. As for Sofia, she slowly began to learn how to read, and lived happily ever after...



THE END

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