

## Problems

Archer Middle School had its fair share of problems. Students skipped class. Textbooks were old. Parents hardly showed up to the sports events, band concerts, or parent-teacher meetings. Desks were falling apart. Teachers fell asleep in class. A roving pack of street dogs would occasionally wander into the halls and create chaos that shut down the school for the rest of the day. These were just a few of Archer's problems.

A student named Art ended up doing something about it. It all started in Art's favorite class: math. Art studied algebra with Mr. Anderson, and his favorite parts of each class occurred at the beginning and at the end. At the beginning of each class, Mr. Anderson gave the whole class a problem to solve, and at the end of the class they discussed their answers to the problem. They worked in their regular math books and workbooks and did all sorts of regular math problems, but the one problem-solving problem that Mr. Anderson presented every day was a little bit different.

Mr. Anderson's problems were about not just algebra; they covered geometry, trigonometry, other types of math that nobody in Art's class knew the names of, and sometimes they didn't even involve math at all. The problems did, however, always have multiple solutions and no incorrect answers. All answers were correct, and Mr. Anderson let any student explain their ideas at the end of class. Art always had an idea for a solution.

To solve Mr. Anderson's problems, Art figured out clever ways to fit square blocks into a round container, calculate the correct angle to build a bridge over a highway, and even recycle soda cans to build recycling bins for paper. But the problems that related to real life - and usually had little math to calculate - were the ones that Art liked most of all. Art began to learn that every problem in life, in society, in the whole world, always had a solution - or many solutions, as he heard from his clever classmates, too.

With this attitude, Art began to see potential solutions to his school's problems. Why couldn't students earn rewards for attendance? Why couldn't teachers teach students to find their own information instead of depending on their ragged textbooks? Why couldn't they send home a newsletter about all the school events and meetings so that parents could come? These were just a few of Art's ideas, but his biggest question was this: Why doesn't somebody do something about these problems already?

One day Mr. Anderson saw Art writing some notes about school problems and his ideas for solutions.

"What's that, Art? Already finished with today's problem?" he asked.

"Oh, yeah, Mr. Anderson. I finished already. See, if you use all the money for gasoline in one car and carpool..."

"That's OK, Art, save it for the end of class. What I want to know is what you're working on right now." Mr. Anderson was speaking quietly, as the rest of the class worked away.

"This? Just some ideas I have," said Art. He felt a little embarrassed, but he continued anyway, eager to share. "Archer just has so many problems, and there are so many simple solutions to solve them. Why doesn't somebody do something about it?"

Mr. Anderson looked at Art with a big smile. "You know, Art, that's a really good question. Why doesn't somebody do something about it? Let's see... well, you're somebody, Art. Why don't YOU do something about it?"

"Me? Like what? What can I do?" Art had never thought about what he, personally, could do.

Mr. Anderson continued, "You know what's coming up next month? Student council elections. With what you're working on here, you sound like a pretty good candidate for student council, even for student council president! I'd vote for you, Art! Why don't you think about it?" And with that Mr. Anderson stood up to lead the problem solving discussion with the class.

That day, however, Art didn't raise his hand to give his solution. He sat in a daze, thinking about what Mr. Anderson had said. He WAS somebody, maybe he COULD do something about Archer's problems, even run for president! At the end of class, as Art walked out, still thinking about it, Mr. Anderson said goodbye and, with a wink, told him to come by if he had any questions about his campaign.

Art decided to do it! He'd run for president! He went to the office after school to register for the election. Mrs. Flank, the secretary, told him that the only other candidate registered already was Sasha Klimer, and today was the last day to register. So that was it, Art and Sasha in the race for the presidency.

Art gathered his best friends Sid and Sara to help with his campaign. They decided that their campaign slogan would be "Problem Solving." They made posters and sat out at a table in the hall to answer people's questions. But hardly anyone came.

Unfortunately, Art's campaign was not nearly as attractive to students as Sasha's. She had professional posters made with her picture all over, she handed out candy and buttons in the halls, and she played music at her table - where everyone wanted to be, because Sasha was already the most popular girl in school.

Art felt hopeless about winning and didn't know what to do to turn things around. He remembered Mr. Anderson telling him to come by if he had any questions about his

campaign. The next day was going to be the big debate and the election, so Art marched into Mr. Anderson's room after school.

"Mr. Anderson, I'm losing bad!" Art cried. "I think I should just give up!"

Mr. Anderson looked up from his grading and asked Art to sit down. "It's a tough race, and you're up against a popular candidate. But Art, what I saw you working on that day was exactly what needs to be said and done at this school."

Art looked up, seeing a determination and seriousness in Mr. Anderson's face that he had never seen before. Mr. Anderson continued, "Why don't you go out there tomorrow and tell Archer what Archer needs to hear! Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some grading to do."

And with that, Art had no choice but to walk right out of the room. Mr. Anderson was being firmer and more serious than ever! Art went home to ponder what to do, but before the end of the evening, he had begun to lose faith in his campaign altogether. He would just go to the debates tomorrow, lose gracefully, and cast one vote for himself against the tide of votes for Sasha.

The next day, Art was still resigned to losing the race. His friends were not much inspiration but plenty of consolation - they stayed close and quiet while they watched Sasha and her huge circle of friends acting like they had already won.

When the debate came, all the students were gathered on the stands in the gym. The lights were low except for spotlights on two podiums, where Art and Sasha would stand. Mrs. Tomlin, the principal, introduced the two candidates, and they both walked up to their podiums. Art was calm with surrender, and Sasha was beaming with pride in her popularity.

Sasha quickly got applause for her opening statement: "Thank you, everyone! I love you all, and it's so great to be up here! I can't wait to be your president because we're going to have so much FUN this year! We're going to party like never before!" The crowd erupted into crazy cheering.

Art took a deep breath and looked at the crowd. He noticed a lot of students he hardly ever saw in class or at school at all. He looked at the teachers, half of them asleep sitting in chairs around the stands. He watched Mr. Bello, the science teacher, nod off and lean back in his chair, just as the legs to the old chair broke and collapsed under him, and he kept sleeping on the ground. Art looked at Sasha, smiling away and raising her arms and doing a little dance.

He suddenly realized what Mr. Anderson meant and why he was so serious! When the cheering died down, it was Art's turn to talk, and he was more ready than ever. "I'm all for having fun. I love a good party as much as any of you. But I'm here to talk about some

problems. See, the fact that many of you hardly show up to class every day, that's a PROBLEM."

The crowd went dead silent, as Art continued. "And the state of our ancient, ragged textbooks, with torn covers and missing pages, that's a PROBLEM. Parents who have never stepped foot inside our school: PROBLEM. Furniture all over the school falling apart: PROBLEM." Art spoke faster and faster with more and more confidence. "Teachers sleeping in class: totally unacceptable PROBLEM! Street dogs rampaging through the halls: yes, big PROBLEM."

Art finally slowed down. "I think you'd all love Sasha as your president, and that she'd love to be your president. I'm sure we'll have a lot of fun with her in charge, and I'm all for having fun. But let's face it: Archer has PROBLEMS. And we need to solve them. There are solutions all around us. And whether I win or lose, the question is: Do we want to continue with our problems, or do we want to SOLVE PROBLEMS?"

When Art finished, he paused and couldn't believe what he had just done, in front of the entire school. He looked around at the silent crowd, and at his shocked opponent next to him. He felt horribly embarrassed and wished he could disappear, but he stayed at his podium to stare back at the crowd.

Suddenly, the silence broke with a slow clapping coming from somewhere in the crowd. Then someone else joined in and someone else, then dozens of people and more and more. Students started standing up and holding their hands up to clap, louder and louder! There was a thunder of applause, and even Sasha was applauding! Art finally noticed Mr. Anderson, standing and smiling big again at him.

Before Art knew it, he had swept the election for president and the very next day carried his momentum into the student council to start getting things done. Sasha had won a seat on the council, too, and she volunteered to be director of social events, and everyone else came with tons of ideas to solve all the problems that Art had listed, and more! Art became more of a somebody, doing more of a something, than he had ever expected.

## 1. Who introduced the candidates at the debates?

- A. Mr. Bello.
- B. Mr. Anderson.
- C. Mrs. Tomlin.

**2. What was Sasha's campaign message?**

- A. She was smarter and more popular than Art and should be elected.
- B. She had lots of good ideas about how to solve problems at Archer.
- C. She would make sure there would be lots of parties and fun.

**3. Which of the following was a main problem that Art wanted to see fixed at Archer Middle School?**

- A. Students complained about school.
- B. Parents never visited the school.
- C. Teachers refused to teach.

**4. What helped Art decide to speak at the debates, even though he thought no one cared to hear him after Sasha's speech?**

- A. He saw Mr. Bello sleeping in the broken chair, which reminded him why he was running for president.
- B. He saw Mr. Anderson smile at him, and he didn't want to let him down after receiving his help.
- C. He had to because it was his turn to speak, and he didn't want to be laughed at for being silent.

**5. How did Art's best friends help with his campaign?**

- A. They told students on the playground to vote for him.
- B. They helped him create his campaign slogan.
- C. They made phone calls to tell students to vote for him.

**6. Why did Art decide to make his campaign slogan, "Problem Solving"?**

- A. He got the idea for running for office during math problem solving time.
- B. He thought it would be a catchy slogan and would help motivate others.
- C. Wanting to fix the problems at school motivated him to run for office.

**7. What was the main reason the students applauded for Art at the debates?**

- A. Art's speech reminded them that they needed to have school spirit.
- B. They agreed that the problems at the school needed to be fixed.
- C. Art's speech was over and they were just trying to be polite.



**8. What did Art say about Sasha in his speech to the school?**

- A. She and the students would love her to be president.
- B. She was the reason the school had so many problems.
- C. She would be able to solve problems at the school.

**9. When did Art begin to worry about losing the campaign?**

- A. The month before the debates, when no one came to his table to talk.
- B. The day before the debates, when he realized how popular Sasha was.
- C. The day they held the debates, when Sasha gave her popular speech.

**10. What kind of relationship will Sasha and Art probably have on Student Council?**

- A. Sasha will spend her time on the council planning her next presidential campaign.
- B. They'll cooperate on council projects, respecting each other's skills and ideas.
- C. They'll have different interests, so Art will only work on his ideas and Sasha will only work on hers.

**11. Why did Art decide to run for student council?**

- A. He wanted to be popular like Sasha.
- B. He thought he was smart enough to win.
- C. Mr. Anderson encouraged him to be a candidate.

**12. Why was Math Art's favorite class at school?**

- A. He liked being challenged by the unusual problems that Mr. Anderson had them solve.
- B. He was really good with numbers and liked to show how smart he was to the class.
- C. He really liked Mr. Anderson because he gave him special attention during class.

**13. What is this story mostly about?**

- A. How bad some schools in the United States can get.
- B. How teachers can change things when the problems get bad enough.
- C. How one person with strong beliefs can make a big difference.

**14. How did Art feel about sharing his school problem-solving ideas with Mr. Anderson?**

- A. He knew his solutions to school problems were the best.
- B. He was excited to show how he could solve other problems.
- C. He felt a little embarrassed about sharing his thoughts.

**15. What happened to Sasha after Art won the election?**

- A. She became angry but took a job on the Student Council anyway.
- B. She won a council seat and volunteered to run the social committee.
- C. She got jealous because Art became more popular than she had been.

**16. What was the main problem in this story?**

- A. The school had a lot of problems and no solutions.
- B. The teachers didn't care about the school's problems.
- C. Art couldn't figure out how to win the election.

**17. What was Art like?**

- A. He cared about solving school problems but didn't think he was important enough to be listened to.
- B. He had always been a popular student, but he didn't want to become a school leader.
- C. He was smart and liked to show off how well he could solve all kinds of problems.

**18. How did Mr. Anderson feel about Art?**

- A. He thought Art should learn from Sasha how to be popular, make friends, and win the election.
- B. He thought he could see something special in Art that even Art didn't realize.
- C. He thought Art would need a lot of help to identify problems at the school.

**19. Why did Sasha think she would win?**

- A. She told her friends she would fix problems at Archer right after her election.
- B. She had a plan to make Art look like he wasn't smart and would be a bad leader.
- C. She thought that being known as a fun person would be enough to get her elected.

**20. What was Art's first reaction right after he finished his speech?**

- A. Disbelief that he actually said what was on his mind.
- B. Shock that his speech had been so powerful.
- C. Embarrassment when he saw all the students staring at him.