



We've all watched TV and seen how secondary school is shown, especially on American programmes. Slow-motion smiles, happy tears and hugs at graduation; everyone laughing together and having fun in 'class'; corridor fun and games, even sometimes breaking into song;¹ and people skateboarding home to their massive houses with the sun always shining.² Well, if that's what you were expecting, you might need to think again.

The reality is that there'll be a huge percentage of your school life that, in ten years' time, will be like the faint ripples on the edge of a pool you threw a stone into half an hour ago. You'll barely even be able to remember it, and it probably wasn't *that* memorable anyway.

Primary school is the same. If you think back to Reception, do you remember *everything*? Probably not. Time cracks on quickly, and we have to make sure we get the best out of every moment.

Lots and lots of what we remember is not about *what* we do

¹ Actually, that's only *Annie* and *Glee*, from what I can remember ...

² And also, now I mention it, they all seem to have REALLY WHITE SMILES, don't wear uniform and have enormously expensive cars by the time they're just about past their final exams.

(you can't remember every picture you coloured in when you were four at pre-school ...) but *who* you did it with (... but you'll remember who some of those people you were colouring in with were). Some people come and stay, and some come and go. Secondary school can be a weird time for that, though - it can be like a friendship crossroads, where some tough decisions have to be made and some real blows can be felt.

MR BURTON'S TOP TIPS FOR MAKING A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION AND MEETING PEOPLE LIKE YOU

- 1) Be you - people want honesty from their friends!
- 2) Don't be afraid to make conversation
- 3) Be nice - smile and look up!
- 4) Go to clubs that are to do with your interests - you'll bond with people there
- 5) Give it time - it takes time to make friendships!
- 6) Don't force it - some things are not meant to be!
- 7) Be comfortable - meet people where you'll both be comfortable and can properly chat
- 8) Use your lessons - if you're sitting next to someone, use it as a chance to chat (BUT NOT WHEN THE TEACHER IS!)



CLUBS AND SOCIETIES



There'll be loads and loads of new things you'll be doing in your lessons ... but also, there'll be lots more other things you can do that are extra to those lessons. For the first few weeks after your summer holidays you'll be tuning in to the new school and new school year (and probably be so tired after the holidays), so things will probably take a bit of time to get going. When the clubs start, though, choose one (at least), and

GO AND DO IT!



Whether it's sports, cookery, computer games, science, creative writing or debating, there'll be loads to choose from. They're such a good way to meet new people - people who like the things that *you do too*. And if there isn't a club or a society for the thing you love doing, talk to your teachers. I can't promise that they'll *definitely* be able to offer what it is that you want - after all, there are only so many teachers who can actually do recreating medieval battles with LEGO figurines. But they might be able to find something else that

is similar and talk to you about your interests.

Other clubs might be linked to school work or doing homework, or they might just generally give you a chance to stick around in school for a while after it's finished. If there's a new baby crying the house down at home, or if you don't have a computer to do that piece of homework on, you might like to chill in the library for an hour, or you might want to ask your teachers for a few hints and tips. Teachers might have meetings sometimes, but they're usually always

HAPPY TO HELP!



NEW FRIENDS AND OLD FRIENDS

People often come to secondary school and stick with their friends from primary school like they've been sewn together and then glued just to make sure they definitely don't come apart. Nobody else exists. They don't want to know *anyone* from any other primary schools from down the road, round the corner, in the next town or anywhere.

NO, NO, NO.

A strange thing happens, though, as lessons start to get going. You meet other people. Different places, different cultures, different ways of doing things, different thoughts. And those people are interesting. In fact, these people could be potential new friends. This is exactly what secondary school is all about - meeting new people from different backgrounds and making friends!

But balancing new and old friendships can sometimes be confusing. That's because friendships are confusing, they're hard work and they take some time to get your head around. Sometimes they can feel like they make no sense, and you

wonder why you even try! But they're so completely worth it. Stick at it - imagine you're in the canteen and this is going on right now. Stick with me; we'll act it out. Go and get a friend. I'll wait. No, go on. I'm waaaiting. Hurry up, it's Christmas soon ... right, you're back. Here goes:

DAY 1 OF SECONDARY SCHOOL

It is lunchtime. Year 7 have had an excellent first morning, and Sam and Rozeena - best friends 4EVA LOL - are discussing their weekend plans over a tuna baguette.

Are you coming to my house this weekend like we said?

Sam



Yeah, can I still stay over like your mum said?

Think so. I'll ask. My mum will take us shopping in the afternoon and we'll get the bus home and get a pizza.

Sam

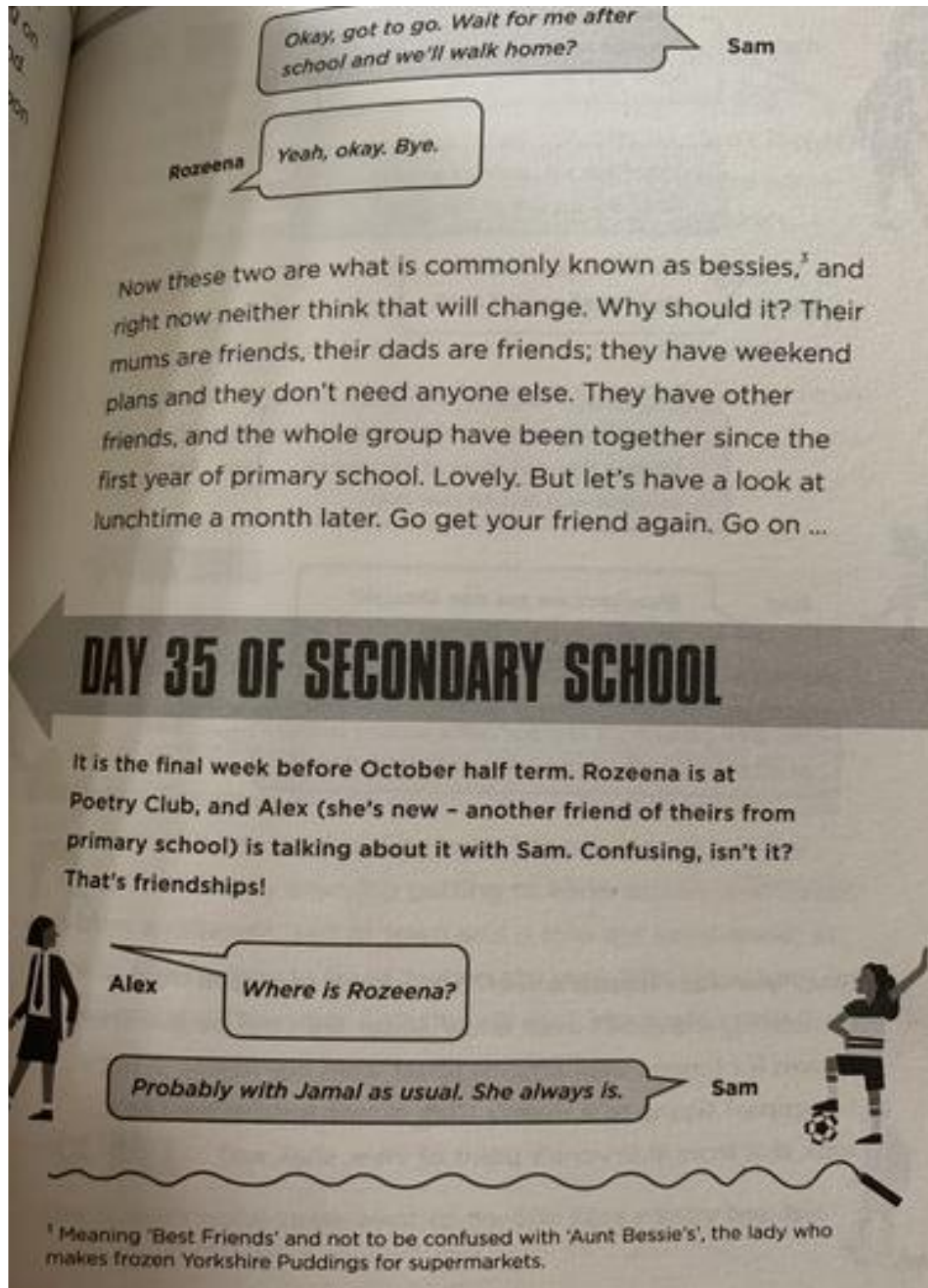
Okay.

What was your English lesson like? Who's that boy you're sat next to?

Sam

It was good. Don't know who he is, he didn't talk, but I think his name is Jamal.







Alex *She was looking at me weird the other day too. Weirdo.*

*What are you doing tonight?
Shall we go out to the shop?* Sam

Alex *Yeah, shall we tell her?*

No, not now we're not good enough for her. She can stare at her phone as usual and talk to that boy. Sam

Alex *Shouldn't we ask her, though?
We always go together.*

No, let's go without her, but put a picture online of us there so she knows we went without her. Sam



Now, how does Rozeena feel? She's been excluded from something she didn't even know about with the people she's known for longer than anyone apart from her family. What's her crime? Going to a Poetry Club during lunchtime. Let's look at it from everyone's point of view, shall we?

★ Sam

She feels like she's been pushed away from Rozeena's life because they were best friends, have been for ever and thought they always would be (they still can be, don't forget). She's hurt and upset because Rozeena seems to have some other friends and things that don't involve her, and she's feeling jealous of Rozeena's relationship with Jamal (who came from another school down the road). Sam's reaction is to try to make it look like she's having a good time without Rozeena, and make it obvious Rozeena's being excluded from plans with her group of friends. Sad face. ☹



★ Rozeena

She's being excluded from her 'old' group of friends because she's making new friends. She feels torn between the people she already knows and the exciting world of secondary school with new people and new things to do outside of lessons. She *loves* writing poems so has gone to Poetry Club to work with her teacher. She loves her old friends just the same, but is really enjoying getting to know others, and Jamal is from a different part of town and is into the same music as she is. She's going to be sad when she sees that plans have been made without her, and she will wish she hadn't seen it.



★ Alex

She doesn't quite know what to do. She likes poetry too, but



has seen how Sam reacts when people don't do what she expects. She'll go along to the shop tonight but will send Rozeena a message so she knows that it wasn't her idea. She feels weird and doesn't like how things are between them all.

So what will happen, and how can it be saved? Well, the main thing that will help is that important word 'communication'. If Sam understands that Rozeena still cares for her but is just embracing the new opportunities in school, then she might feel better. It's hard being on the outside and, unfortunately, everyone here feels like they're outside, fighting for a way back in. It might be that over the next few months and years the whole group slowly drifts apart, and that growing up, growing older and having different things to be interested in naturally means they slowly become acquaintances⁴ rather than friends. But it also might be that that doesn't happen, and things are defused because of a moment when they see each other in the corridor, away from other people, and just have a chat, talking about how they feel. Nobody can definitely say what will happen with friendships - you can't force them! But good friendships are worth working at and communication is the key.

GOSSIP

Sometimes friendships can get complicated because when someone feels they've been let down by someone else (for example Sam), they think one of the easiest ways to 'get back' at someone is by spreading a story, a rumour or gossip about them. It could be a friend, someone who's definitely *not* a friend, or it could even be a teacher, and it happens every day. This stuff isn't new - it was around in the Victorian times when I was at school, too - but it's changed recently, as social media, the internet and mobile phones have become a bigger part of what we do every day. And if you don't have a mobile phone or social media just yet, the likelihood is that you will do over the next few years. Being a teenager (or nearly a teenager) is hard. I can say 'ignore it' until I'm blue in the face, but when people are saying nasty things about you, sending pictures of you (which is *not* allowed at *all*) or are being unkind (and we know about the importance of kindness, don't we?), it's easy to crumble. The more difficult rumours for you to deal with are those that *could* be true or, in some cases, *are* true. They could be something you told someone who has slipped up and blurted it out, or they could be completely false, but whatever the rumour is, get this:



it isn't nice to go through.

Gossip can spread quickly. If we say that someone will tell five people within ten minutes, and then each of those five people tell a few more within a few minutes, then that would be bad enough, but it doesn't stop there. The phones come out and gossip can spread like wildfire - then someone from the school down the road somehow gets involved and it turns into a really big, stinking mess of a situation, and everyone who was there to start with feels dreadful about it. If it happens, open up and talk. If you get any of these messages about someone, think about how *you* would feel. Don't ever forget what costs nothing and can make every single human being's life just that little bit better every day:

kindness.



FRIENDS FOR LIFE

Use that bouncebackability that we've talked about before in these sorts of situations. Friendships are tough to navigate and keep, and just because you have known each other for ever and ever, it doesn't mean it's always going to be that way. You'll make lots of new friends as you progress through life and that's important.

Friends are GREAT.

They can help you with your homework, support you when you're feeling down, make you laugh-out-loud when you're sitting in science and the teacher does that funny thing no one else has noticed ... and whatever your squad looks like at the end of school is a true reflection of you, what you like doing, wearing, listening to and playing at that point in your life. When you move to college, it'll change; when you get a job, it'll change again. It'll keep evolving and changing, and that's part of the beauty of being a human being!

**'WALK AWAY FROM
FRIENDSHIPS
THAT MAKE YOU
FEEL SMALL AND
INSECURE, AND SEEK
OUT PEOPLE WHO
INSPIRE YOU AND
SUPPORT YOU.'**



*Michelle Obama - American lawyer, author, activist and
former First Lady of the United States*

So, enjoy your friends, but

**live your own life and
do what makes *you*
wear a smile.**

Enjoy being with people who make you happy, and if you find yourself on the outside, looking into a group, then think about whether that group is actually what you want. If it is, and you've made a mistake and could apologise for something, then do what's right. If they're being unkind (remember - being kind is so important), then there are plenty of others. Find people who are your type of people, who treat you right and who respect you for being the person you are.

Why?

Because you're brilliant, and you deserve to be respected.

