

STORY
WALKER
365

7 to 10
YEARS

BUILDING BEAUTIFUL INSIDE

THE PRESSURE TEST

A Story by Arkedelic



STRETCH CON

THE PRESSURE TEST

1

Story
3-6

2

Activity
7-8

3

Interesting Facts
9-11

4

Complete the Story
12-13

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THE PRESSURE TEST

Mike didn't like group projects. Especially when they involved other people.

Especially when they involved Sam.

And especially when there was even the slightest chance of not winning.

"It's a science project, not a war," Sam muttered under her breath as Mike rearranged the test tubes — for the third time.

Nik raised an eyebrow. "You know, the beaker won't explode just because it's not exactly 3.6 inches from the flask."

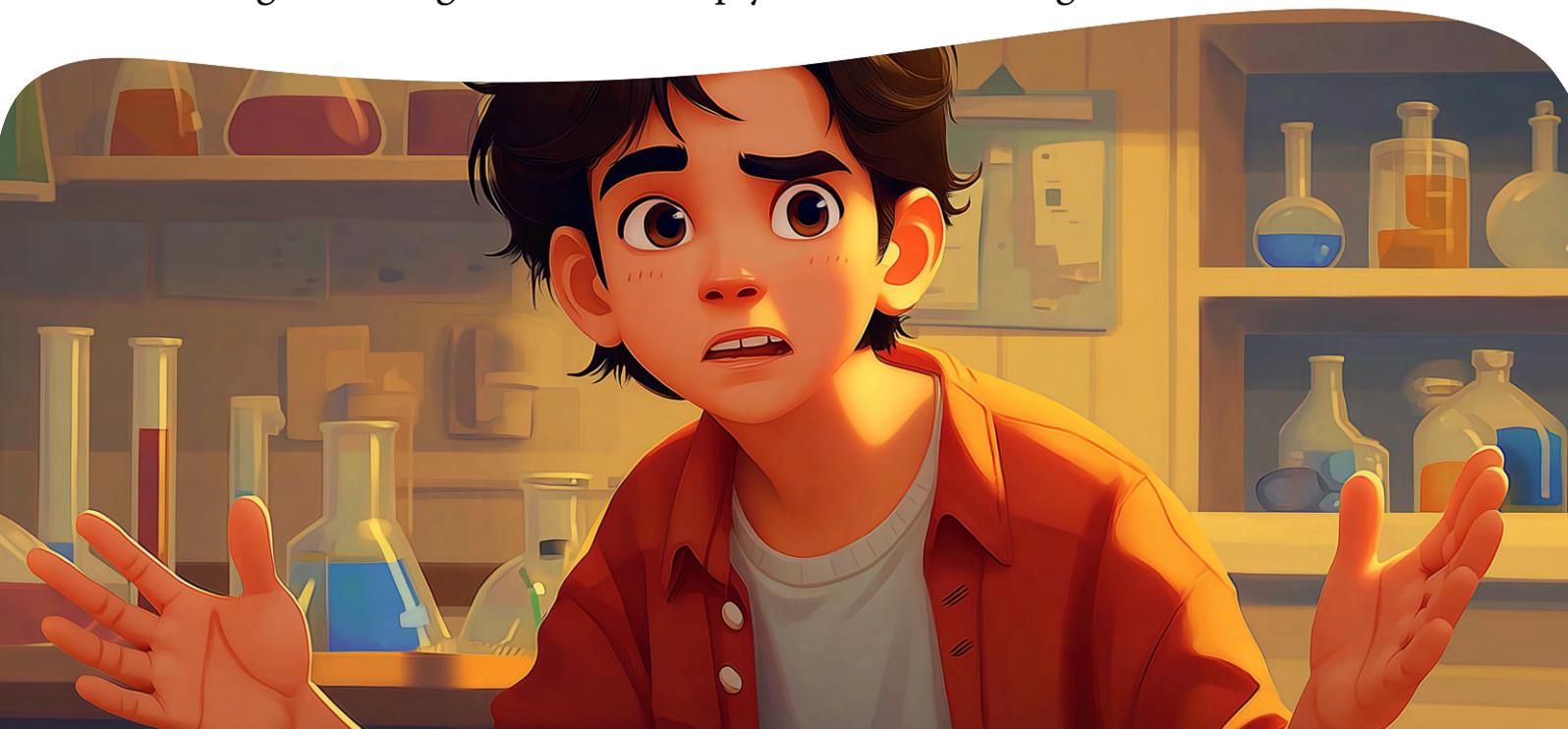
Mike snapped his fingers. "That's not how accuracy works. Precision is the whole point. We're doing a chemical reaction. One wrong move and it flops."

"Relax," said Sam. "It's a vinegar-baking soda volcano. Not nuclear fusion."

Meanwhile, just across the classroom, Mario, Sid, and Jane were laughing as they tested their homemade pinwheel turbine. It wasn't fancy, but it worked. The blades spun in the wind from a tiny fan, and even Ms. Chen, the science teacher, had smiled when she passed by.

Mike had noticed. And his jaw had tightened.

"Let's change the design," he said sharply the next morning.



Sam blinked. “What? Why? It’s already working.”

Mike refused to look at her. “Because it’s boring. Everyone’s done volcanoes. We should do a baking soda rocket instead.”

“But we only have one day left!”

Nik tried to protest, but Mike overrode him. “We have to win. You want everyone thinking Mario’s idea was smarter?”

Sam crossed her arms. “Since when is this about Mario?”

Mike didn’t answer.

The rocket test failed. Twice.

The third time, it launched sideways, hit the wall, and splattered pink foam all over the project board.

“Great,” Sam groaned. “There goes our grade.”



Mike’s face went red. “You didn’t screw the cap tight enough!”

Nik shot up. “What?! You were the one who—”

“Let’s just clean it up,” Sam said quickly.

Mike didn’t help.

During presentations the next day, Jane’s group went first. Their turbine lit up a tiny bulb and earned a small round of applause. Sid high-fived Mario.

Mike’s group went last. Their volcano worked — sort of. But the foam sputtered out, limp and slow. No sparkle. No surprise.

After class, Mike stomped out. “It’s not fair,” he muttered. “They just got lucky.”

“You mean we just weren’t prepared?” Sam replied coolly.

Mike whirled. “Oh, please. Like it wasn’t your idea to go back to the volcano. If we’d done my rocket—”

Nik had had enough. “Dude. You changed the plan, then blamed us when it didn’t

work. That's not leadership. That's... insecurity."

Mike went quiet.

The hallway suddenly felt too bright.

It was Jane who found him in the library.

Not reading.

Just sitting.

"You okay?" she asked gently.

Mike sighed. "Everyone thinks I'm the smart one. I can't mess up."

Jane sat beside him. "Is that a rule?"

Mike looked at her. "I'm the topper. My parents talk about it all the time. My teachers expect it. I expect it. If I lose... I don't know who I am."

Jane leaned back. "You're Mike. The kid who knows the periodic table by heart. Who helped me figure out that frog dissection gagging. Who once built a solar oven from a pizza box. You're smart, sure. But you're not only smart." without

He stared at the table.

"And," Jane added, "you don't have to step on people to stay tall."

Later that week, Ms. Chen returned the grades.

Mike's group had done okay. Not great. Not terrible.

Mario's group had scored higher.

Mike glanced across the room, then did something shocking.

He walked over.

"Hey," he said. "Your turbine thing? It was actually pretty clever."





Mario blinked. “Thanks?”

“And,” Mike added with a quick look at Sam and Nik, “I’m sorry. I wasn’t... great to work with.”

Sam nodded. “Next time, let’s actually work together.”

Mike smiled. “Deal. Also — maybe someone else can arrange the beakers?”

Nik laughed. “Please. Anyone else.”

That afternoon, as they all walked home, Jane nudged Mike.

“Feels better, doesn’t it?”

He shrugged. “Still kind of stings.”

“But you owned it.”

“Yeah,” Mike said slowly. “I guess that counts for something.”

And for the first time in a long time, he didn’t feel like he had to win to matter.

He just had to show up.

As himself.

THE END

THE BALLOON PRESSURE CHALLENGE

What you need:

A few balloons, a marker, and a stopwatch or timer.

HOW TO DO:

- 1** Give each participant a balloon and a marker. Ask them to write one pressure word on it — something that makes them feel tense or competitive (like “grades,” “winning,” “being first,” or “mistakes”).
- 2** Now tell everyone to inflate their balloon — not too much, just enough that it starts to stretch. Explain that each puff of air represents rising pressure.
- 3** Ask: “What happens if we keep adding pressure without pause?” Let them feel the balloon’s tension and imagine it bursting.
- 4** Then say: “Now, let’s release some pressure.” Have everyone let out a little air — symbolising talking to someone, taking a break, or admitting a mistake.

- 5 End by writing a release word on the balloon — like “breathe,” “pause,” “ask for help,” or “let go.”

Reflection/Purpose: This playful, visual activity helps children recognise what emotional pressure feels like — and how easily it builds when we’re chasing perfection. The act of releasing air shows that pressure doesn’t make us stronger; it makes us fragile. By “naming and releasing,” kids learn to self-regulate, share their stress, and value teamwork over winning. Like Mike, they’ll see that real success isn’t about never failing — it’s about staying kind, steady, and human when they do.

FIVE FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT THE POWER (AND WISDOM) OF PRESSURE



1. DIAMONDS ARE BORN UNDER PRESSURE

Deep inside the Earth, carbon is squeezed under extreme heat and pressure — more than 700,000 times what we feel at sea level! Over millions of years, this transforms ordinary carbon into dazzling diamonds. It's nature's reminder that some pressure can shape greatness.

2. OCTOPUSES USE PRESSURE TO ESCAPE!

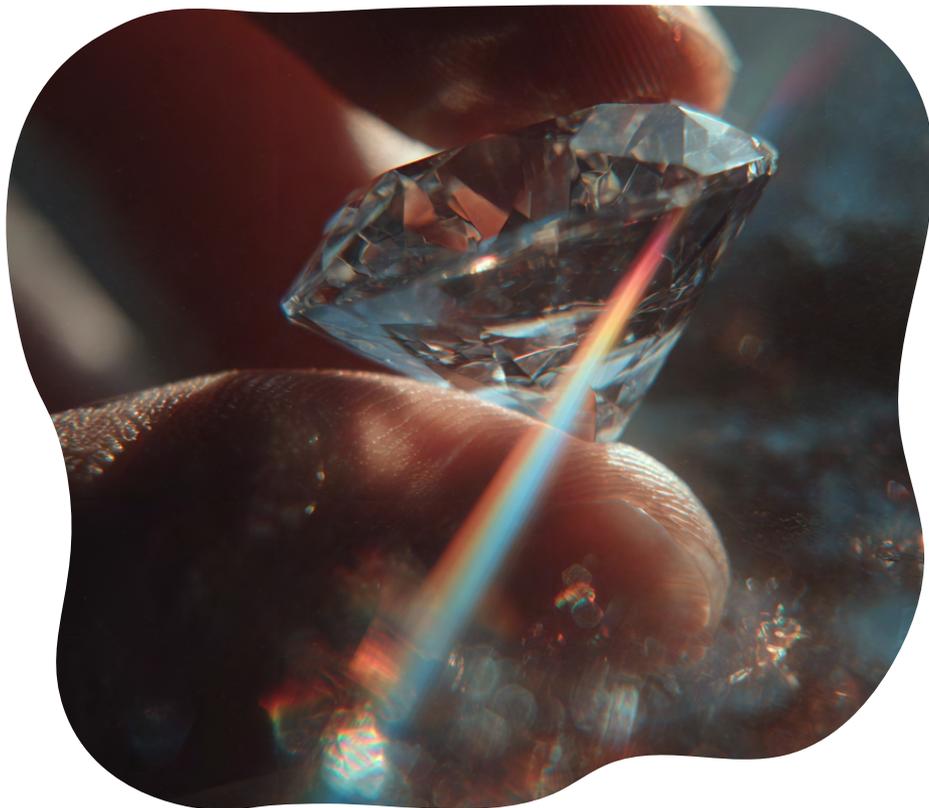
When an octopus feels trapped, it releases a sudden jet of water through its body called a siphon. This burst of pressure shoots it backward — a quick, graceful getaway move! It's not panic — it's smart release at just the right time.

3. VOLCANOES NEED TO LET OFF STEAM

Underground magma chambers build up gas and heat. When the pressure gets too high, it escapes through cracks or small eruptions — nature's safety valve. Without these tiny releases, the Earth's crust could crack far more violently.

4. THE DEEP SEA LIVES UNDER CRUSHING WEIGHT

At the bottom of the ocean, creatures survive under pressure strong enough to crush a submarine. How? Their bodies are flexible and filled with fluid, not air, allowing them to adapt instead of resist. They show us that resilience comes from bending, not breaking.



5. MACHINES ARE TESTED BY PRESSURE, TOO

Airplanes, helmets, and even sports gear go through “pressure tests” before use. Engineers pump air or water inside to check for leaks and weak spots. The goal isn’t to break them — it’s to make sure they’re safe, balanced, and ready for real challenges.



Image Courtesy: Midjourney

THE BURST BEFORE THE CALM

The science fair tent was buzzing with noise — chatter, cheers, clinking beakers, and the smell of something faintly burnt.

Youssef stood by his project board, clutching a small model volcano. “It’ll work this time,” he muttered.

Beside him, Salma frowned. “You’ve already added too much baking soda.”

“I know what I’m doing,” Youssef snapped.

“Do you?” she said softly. “Because you look like you’re about to explode more than the volcano.”

Youssef glared, then sighed. He had been up late for two nights — fixing the colours, polishing the presentation, reprinting the labels. It had to be perfect.

The judges were making their way down the aisle. His stomach twisted.

“Youssef, relax,” said Karim, their teammate. “It’s just a school fair.”

“It’s not just a fair!” Youssef hissed. “We need to win this—”

But before he could finish, the volcano began to bubble.



Foam hissed over the edge and spilled across the table. The audience gasped as the red liquid oozed onto the floor.

Youssef froze. Then he heard Karim whisper, “Too much pressure.”

Salma smiled slightly — not teasing, just kind. “It’s okay. We can clean it up. You’re not the only one who wanted it to be perfect.”

Youssef stared at the fizzing volcano — the one that looked a lot like his own brain had felt all week.

And then...

- What did Youssef do next — panic, laugh, or take a breath?
- Did the team still present to the judges, or decide to start again?
- How did the others help him “release” the pressure instead of letting it build up?
- What lesson did Youssef learn about teamwork, calm, and letting go?
- What would you do if you were in Youssef’s place — after your volcano (or temper) overflowed?

Your turn to finish the story

See you next Monday
with another interesting story!



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