

# Home Again



*A coloring book about evictions*



This is Aaliyah. She loves to eat Butterfingers. She has one older sister named Bethany. They live with their mom.

Her house always smells fresh, like the Pine Sol her mom uses to clean the floors. And after dinner, the three of them do dishes. Her mom washes, Aaliyah dries, and Bethany puts them away.

At home, Aaliyah knows exactly what to expect. She knows that she gets off the school bus at 3 p.m., has her snack at 3:10, and does her homework right after that.

Sometimes, when she is doing her homework, the words get jumbled in her head. It makes her upset. But Aaliyah has a special trick that makes her feel better.

She scrunches her eyes up, tight as she can. And she counts: *One. Two. Three.*





But one day, Aaliyah's trick doesn't work.

That day, her mom tells her they have to move because they're being evicted. Aaliyah doesn't know that word and has lots of questions.

"What is 'evicted?'," Aaliyah asks.

"Every month, I give money to someone called 'the landlord' so we can live here," her mom says. "It's his apartment, but we pay money to live here. Sometimes, landlords want the people who live in their buildings to leave, so they use an eviction to get them out."

"But can't we stay? I'll be extra good," Aaliyah cries. She's thinking of the time she dropped a dish, and it left a little ding in the floor.

She scrunches her eyes shut and counts. But when she opens them again, she still feels afraid because she doesn't know what will happen.

"There are lots of reasons evictions can happen," her mom said, patting her on the back. "But it's not because of anything you did. I will figure it out and keep you safe."

But as she tries to go to sleep that night, Aaliyah still has questions.

If your family is being evicted, you might have questions, too. Come along with Aaliyah while she figures out what is going on.



When someone is evicted, the landlord asks a judge to make them leave. Judges are people in charge who sometimes tell grown-ups what to do. If a judge says your family has to leave, then the adults in your family will be in charge of finding you a new place to live.

This process can be confusing – it's even complicated for adults!

Sometimes when families are evicted, they quickly find a new place to live! But sometimes, it takes a little longer.

When it takes longer, you might stay with friends or family. You might stay at a hotel. Or people who try to help people being evicted might step in to make sure you are warm and safe in a shelter until your family can find a new place for you to live.





Aaliyah and her family live in a hotel for a while. She doesn't like it much at first. It doesn't smell like Pine Sol, and she misses her old room. Sometimes, the sounds of people walking in the halls at night wakes her up.

She starts having bad dreams, which makes it even harder to sleep. She can't sleep even when she scrunches her eyes shut to count.

*One. Two. Three.*

Finally, she tells her mom about her bad dreams.

So her mom hustles Aaliyah and Bethany onto a bus and they go to the storage unit where they keep the things from their house. When she opens the door to the unit, Aaliyah squeals with delight.

"We can't take everything," her mom says. "But we can take enough to make the hotel feel a little like home."

Aaliyah takes her two favorite stuffed animals – a bunny and a dog – and the blanket from her old bed. Bethany takes some clothes and her favorite book. Her mom grabs a bottle of Pine Sol to clean the floors and make it smell like home.

These things help the hotel room feel more like home.

That night, Aaliyah sleeps a little better.



Aaliyah wasn't sure at first where she would go to school.

The hotel is in a different town, but her school made special arrangements so she could still go to her same second-grade class.

Lots of times, schools will make special arrangements for kids who live at hotels or in shelters because of a law that helps kids stay at their schools.

After she finishes second grade, Aaliyah's mom says she and Bethany will have to switch schools. But her mom also has good news: they found an apartment!





Aaliyah's new school is scary at first. She has stomach aches and her heart beats fast in the mornings while she waits for the bus.

Her mom sometimes talks about things that she doesn't quite understand.

But, again, she tells her mom how she is feeling. Her mom talks to her teachers so they can help make things easier for her.

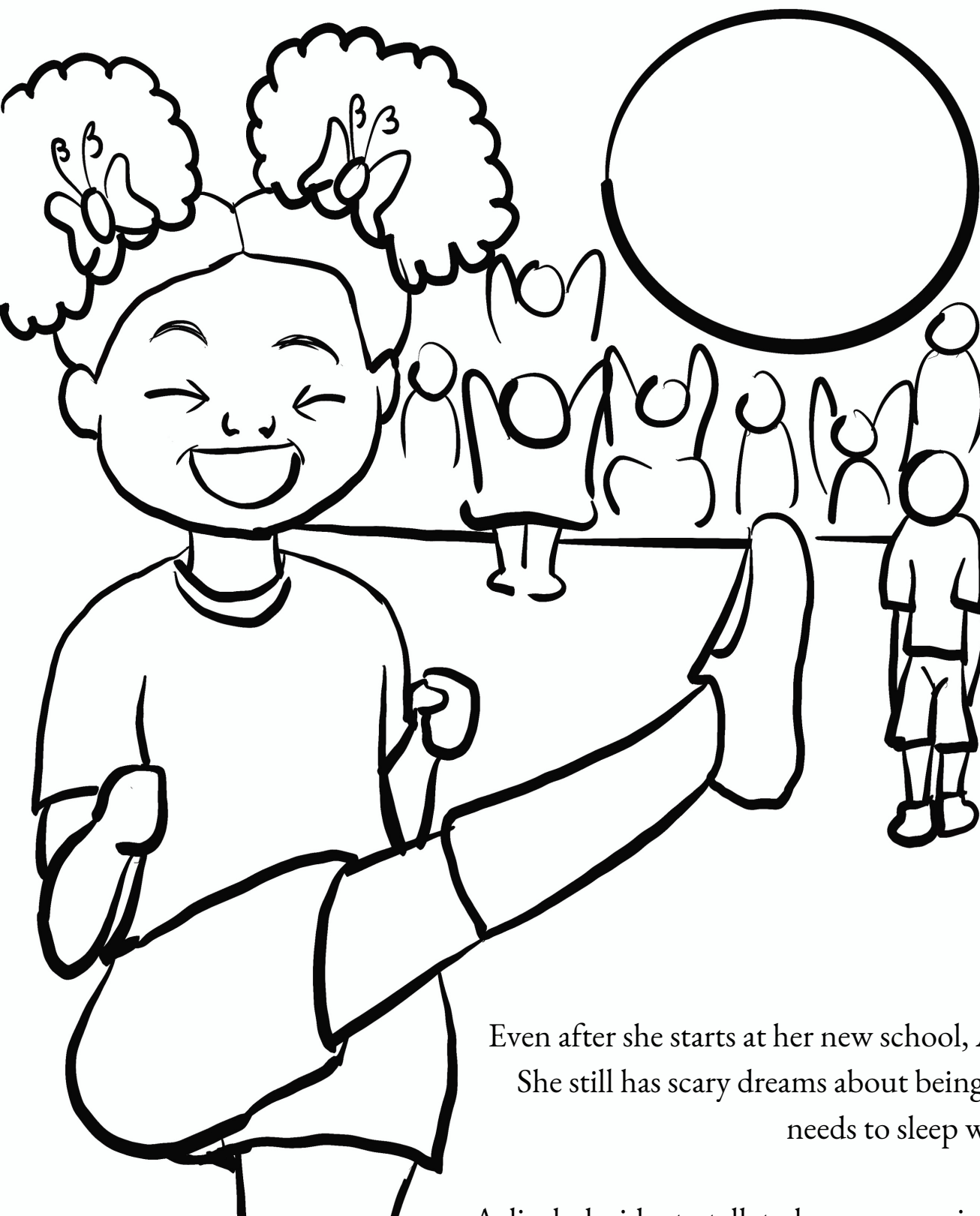
Her math teacher pulls her aside after class one day to introduce her to Ms. Anne. Ms. Anne is her special helper, her math teacher says.

When Aaliyah feels overwhelmed, Ms. Anne walks with her outside the classroom for a breathing break. They both try Aaliyah's special trick – scrunch their eyes shut and count.

*One. Two. Three.*

After a few weeks, Aaliyah makes new friends and even joins the soccer team!



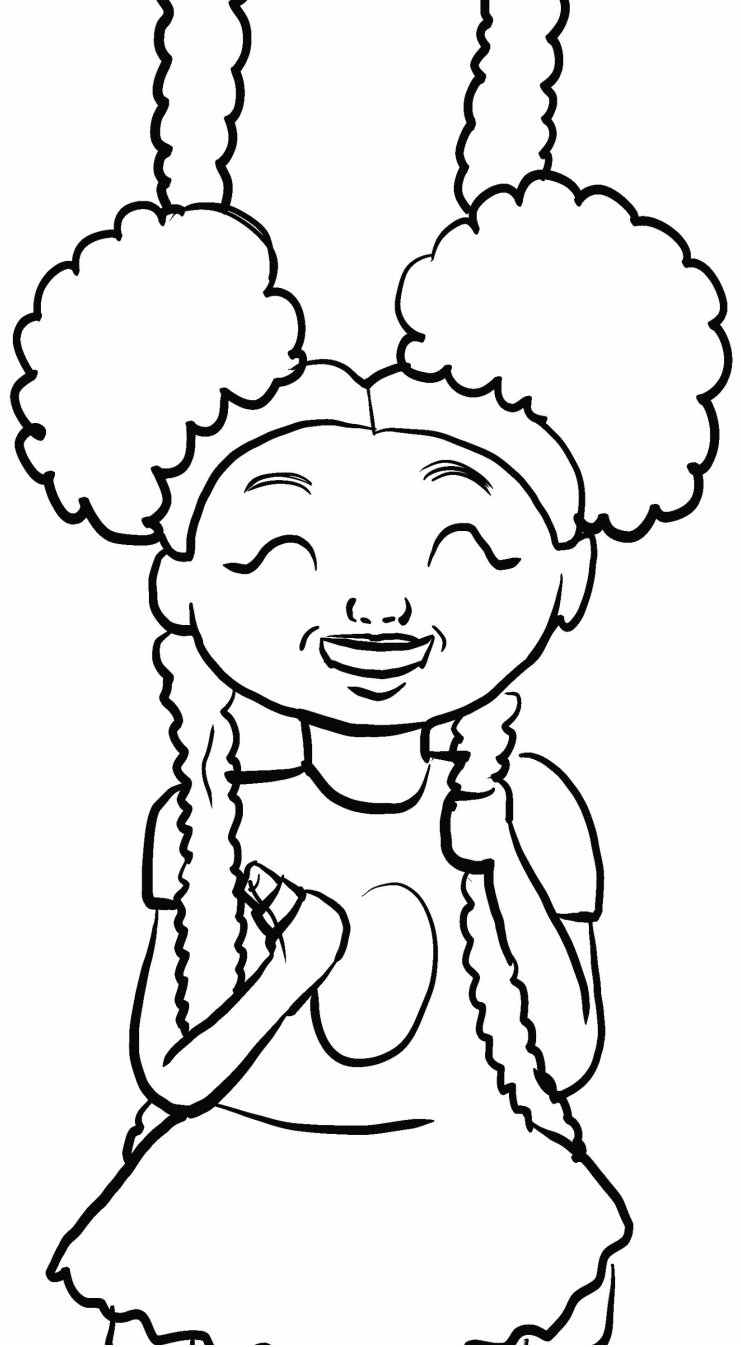


Even after she starts at her new school, Aaliyah feels sad.  
She still has scary dreams about being evicted, and she  
needs to sleep with a night light.

Aaliyah decides to talk to her mom again. Her mom gives  
her a big hug and says that she felt scared and sad  
sometimes, too. Aaliyah's mom told her she might feel  
stressed or nervous or even mad about being evicted.

In fact, everyone feels these ways sometimes, and that's ok!





Aaliyah had lots of questions through the whole process. As she got older, she wondered if other kids had been evicted, too.

One day, on the playground, she asks her friend Elijah if he has any Butterfingers, her favorite treat. He does.

Then she asks him if he knows what an eviction is. He does.

“When I was really little, I got evicted, too,” Elijah says.

She tells him about the scrunching-her-eyes-and-counting trick. Elijah tells her about a trick of his own, to take 10 of the very biggest breaths his lungs can hold. It makes him feel better.

They munch on Butterfingers and talk about where they stayed after being evicted and how they felt.

Elijah has a friend from another school who was evicted, and that friend knows someone else who has been evicted, too. Aaliyah realizes that even though lots of people don’t like to talk about it, there are plenty of people who have been evicted and feel the same way she does.



Aaliyah asks her new friends if they have advice for other kids who get evicted.

Here are some of the things they say:

“Stay calm. It’s ok to feel sad and scared.”

“I was sad about losing my room and my space. You’re going to move soon, and you’ll have your room again.”



The more she talks to the people she loves and trusts, the more Aaliyah realizes that she is not alone.

Her nightmares go away. Her stomach stops aching. She and her new friends eat Butterfingers and learn to jump rope, both very good activities for third-graders.

And, over time at her new home, Aaliyah knows exactly what to expect. She knows that she gets off the school bus at 3:30 p.m., has her snack at 3:40 p.m., and does her homework right after that.



## About this story

Thousands of families in Connecticut face eviction every year, and families with children are disproportionately likely to be evicted. An eviction can have traumatic effects on a child's mental health, health and social life.

Although Aaliyah is a fictional character, her experiences and interactions are not. Her story is based on the experiences of children who went through an eviction in Connecticut during 2022. The characters' personalities, physical appearances, conversations, and coping mechanisms are also based on interviews with those children.

The content is also informed by interviews and research from housing and child development specialists.

To read the full series, visit: [ctmirror.org/evictionsproject](https://ctmirror.org/evictionsproject).

If you have questions about this book or want to talk to a reporter about your experience with eviction, you can email [gmonk@ctmirror.org](mailto:gmonk@ctmirror.org).

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