



A Mystery Message

By Lois Lewis

NARRATOR 1:

Today is the 100th birthday of Elm Street School. To celebrate the important milestone, the school is holding a number of special events.

One of those events is taking place right now in Mrs. Diaz's classroom. Let's take a look.

MRS. DIAZ:

Boys and girls, our special guest today is Dr. Harold Brown, a history professor and filmmaker. Dr. Brown has something special he'd like to share with us. Dr. Brown?

DR. BROWN:

Thank you, Mrs. Diaz. One hundred years ago, my father was the first principal of Elm Street School. He told me many fascinating facts about this building. I used the information -- as well as my own research -- to create a short movie. I'd like to show it to you now.

NARRATOR 2:

As Dr. Brown is setting up his film, city workers are repairing a cracked sidewalk in front of the school. Suddenly, Tom, one of the workers, hits something hard. He stops and calls to another worker.

TOM:

Hey, Betty, take a look at this!

BETTY:

It looks like some kind of box.... Hey, can someone give us a hand?

NARRATOR 2:

Several more workers rush over. With their help, Betty and Tom dig up a large metal box with decorative trim.

TOM: (brushing off dirt and gently shaking the box)
It sounds like something is inside.

NARRATOR 2:

With much effort, Betty and Tom pull the top off the box.

BETTY:

Check this out! We should show it to the school principal.

NARRATOR 2:

Betty and Tom head for the office to show the box to Principal Wade.

MR. WADE: (looking inside the box)

Wow! I don't know anything about this, but I know someone who might.

NARRATOR 3:

Mr. Wade takes the box to Mrs. Diaz's room.

MR. WADE: (opening the classroom door)

Excuse me, Mrs. Diaz. Some city workers found this box near the front of our school building. I wonder if Dr. Brown can tell us anything about it?

DR. BROWN: (examining the box)

Oh, my . . . I wondered what happened to this! It's a time capsule. My father told me that students put it together on the day Elm Street School opened for the first time.

ALL STUDENTS: (together)

What's in it? What's in it?

DR. BROWN:

Let's see. There's a pencil, a fountain pen, a . . .

NARRATOR 3:

Dr. Brown pulls out a glass jar with a piece of paper inside. He opens the jar, takes out the paper, and studies it.

ALL STUDENTS: (together)
What does it say? Please tell us!

NARRATOR 3:

Dr. Brown whispers something to Mrs. Diaz and Mr. Wade, who smile and nod in agreement.

MRS. DIAZ:

Girls and boys, it's a paper with a message written it. But it's a secret message. Tomorrow afternoon, you'll all have a chance to try to figure out what the message says.

MR. WADE:

In the meantime, my office assistant will make a copy of the message for each student.

NARRATOR 1:

After lunch the next day, the students get ready to figure out the mystery message. First, Mrs. Diaz sets the rules.

MRS. DIAZ:

You will work in groups of four. You can talk in a whisper only to the others in your group. You will have ten minutes to crack the code.

NARRATOR 2:

Then Mrs. Diaz arranges the students into groups, and puts a copy of the message in front of each student.

MRS. DIAZ:

Is everybody ready?

ALL STUDENTS: (together)
YES!

MRS. DIAZ: (starting her timer)

You may begin to try to crack the code.

NARRATOR 3:

The students gasp as they turn over their papers.

ERICA:

It's a bunch of numbers!

GREG:

We're doomed!

MARIA:

Hold on . . . They *are* all numbers, but no number is bigger than 26. There are 26 letters in the alphabet. Maybe each number represents a letter of the alphabet?

TONY:

Yes! Maybe if we match each number with a letter, we'll know what the message says.

MRS DIAZ:

Seven minutes left.

ERICA:

We've matched each number with a letter, but the message still doesn't make sense!

MRS DIAZ:

Five minutes left.

GREG:

Let's move the letters around to make real words!

MRS DIAZ:

Two minutes left.

MARIA:

Now move the words around so they make sense! Hurry!

MRS DIAZ:

Time's up!

TONY:

Got it! Whew! We finished just in time!

NARRATOR 1:

Mrs. Diaz collects each group's answer, folds each paper in half, and puts them in a box. She hands the box to Dr. Brown.

GREG: (raising his hand)

Dr. Brown, do you know what the message says?

DR. BROWN:

Oh, yes! My father gave me the answer years ago. I put it away and forgot about it until the city workers found the box.

NARRATOR 2:

Dr. Brown shakes the box, pulls out each paper, and checks the answers against his answer key.

DR. BROWN:

Mrs. Diaz, we have one correct answer. Group 3 has decoded the mystery message!

NARRATOR 3:

Erica, Greg, Maria, and Tony scream with delight as Mr. Wade takes their picture for the school newsletter.

NARRATORS 1, 2, 3: (together)

So, what did the message say? Can you figure it out?

25-4-1 25-20-1-15-4 19-9 3-15-12-15-8-19 9-6-19-18-20 13-5 12

18-21-15 20-1 5-20-19-5-18-20

