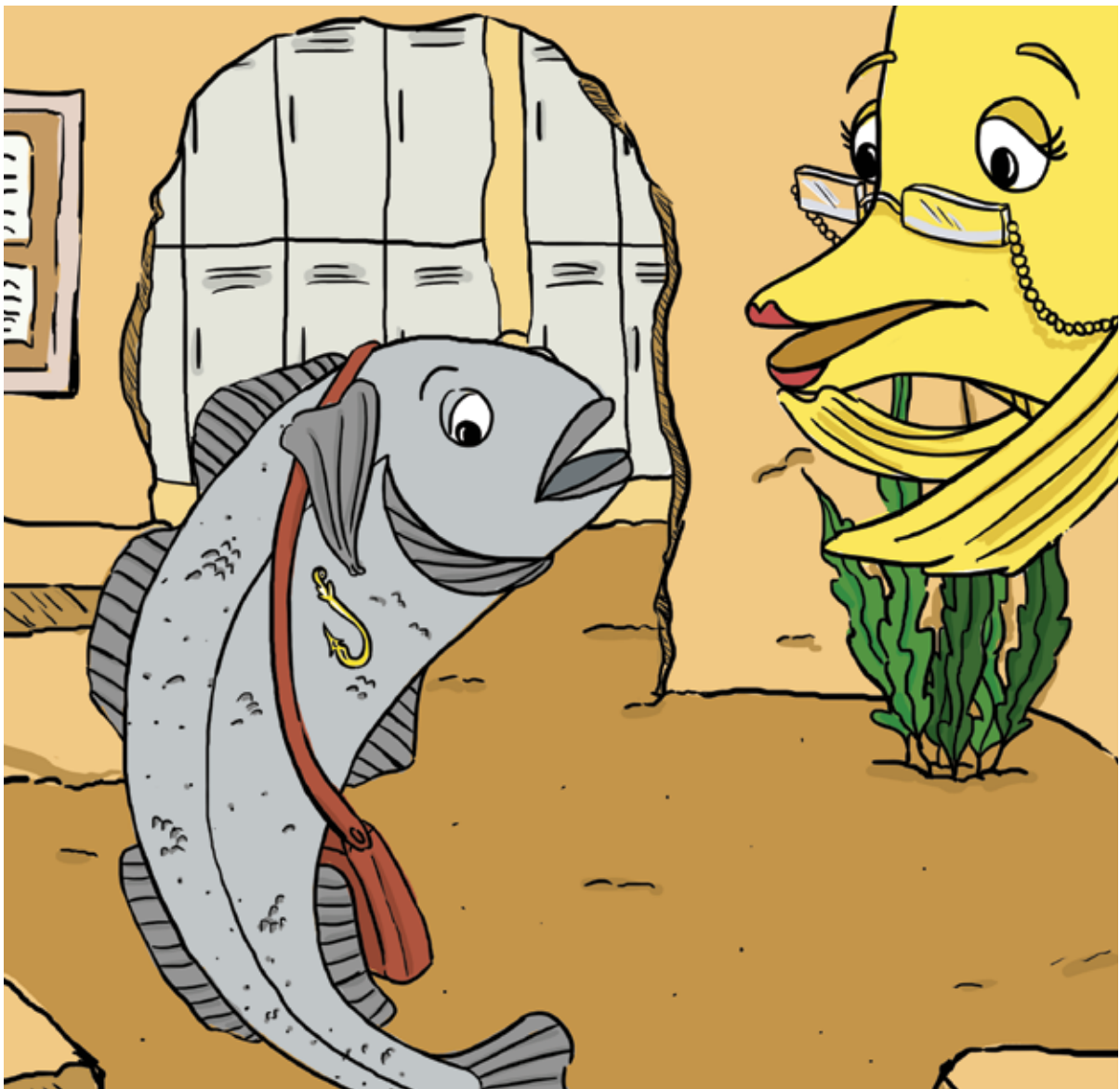


# The Golden Hook

The Right to Believe and Have Faith

Written by Dustin Milligan • Illustrated by Jasmine Vicente



**Written by:** Dustin Milligan

**Illustrated by:** Jasmine Vicente

**Editor:** Leonard Judge

**Copy Editor:** Anja Pujic

**Cover Design:** Meredith Luce

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130 Slater Street, Suite 960  
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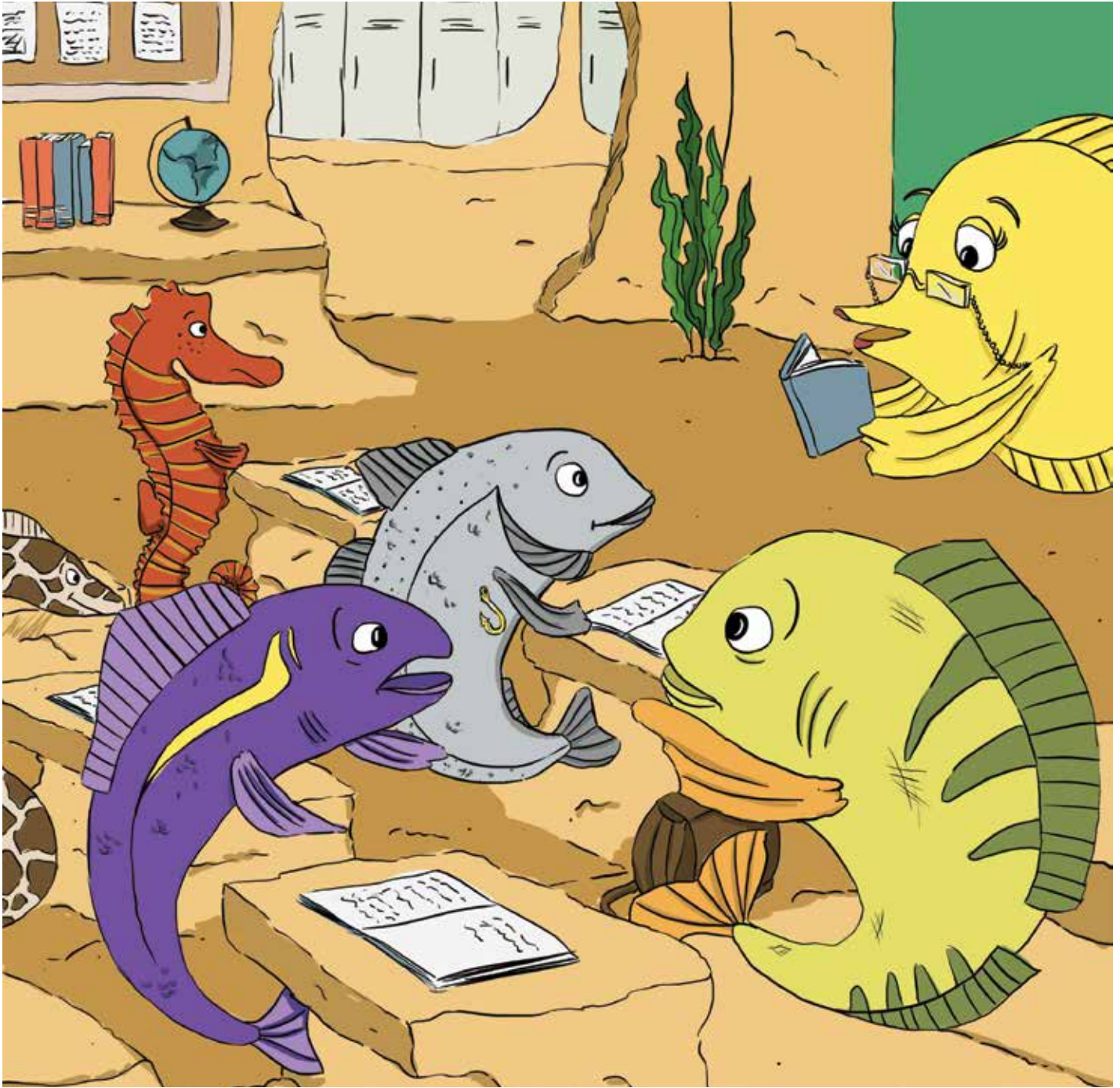
**I**n a time not so long ago, beneath the waters of St. John's Harbour in Newfoundland and Labrador, there lived a cod fish named Aatma.



Aatma was an unusual fish because he wore a small golden hook behind his right fin.

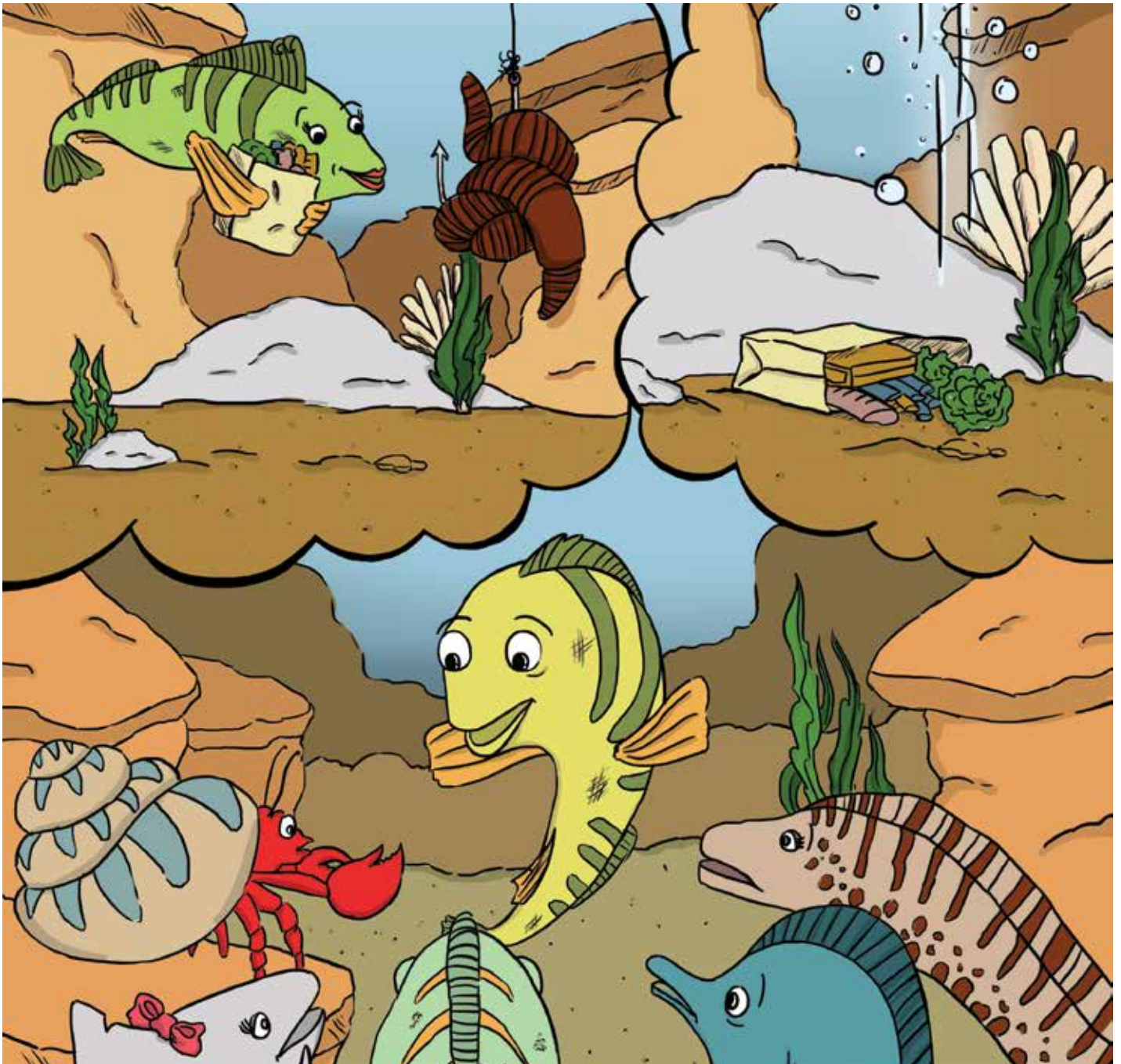
He wore the hook as part of his religion.

Aatma practised the religion of *Newfinism*.



The students at Aatma's school were afraid of hooks.

They thought that hooks were dangerous. Hooks had taken away some of their friends and family members.



Rick Percher was the class clownfish and the future host of the *Rick Percher Report*. He had a good reason to be afraid of hooks.

When Rick was just a child, his mother went to the market to buy some worms. On her way home, she saw a giant, juicy earthworm floating in the water. She was so hungry that she bit into the worm. Just then, a hook caught her mouth!

Rick never saw his mother again.



Then there was Eel Young. He was the rock star type, but he feared hooks just as much as everyone else.

Eel's older brother was an expert guitar player. He had taught Eel how to play when he was little. One night, when Eel's brother was swimming home, he saw a line in the water. He thought it would make a perfect guitar string. So, he reached for the string. Just then, a hook caught his fin.

Eel never saw his brother again.



The children at Aatma's school had all been warned about hooks. Hooks scared them. The children avoided them at all times because they thought hooks were far too dangerous to mess around with.

One day, Eel Young and Rick Percher noticed the hook behind Aatma's right fin. Frightened, they quickly swam to their teacher.

Rick said:

*Teacher! Aatma has a hook behind his fin!  
Please protect us and send him aswim!  
Send him to Labrador! Kick his fin out the door!  
Save us before his hook pulls us ashore!*

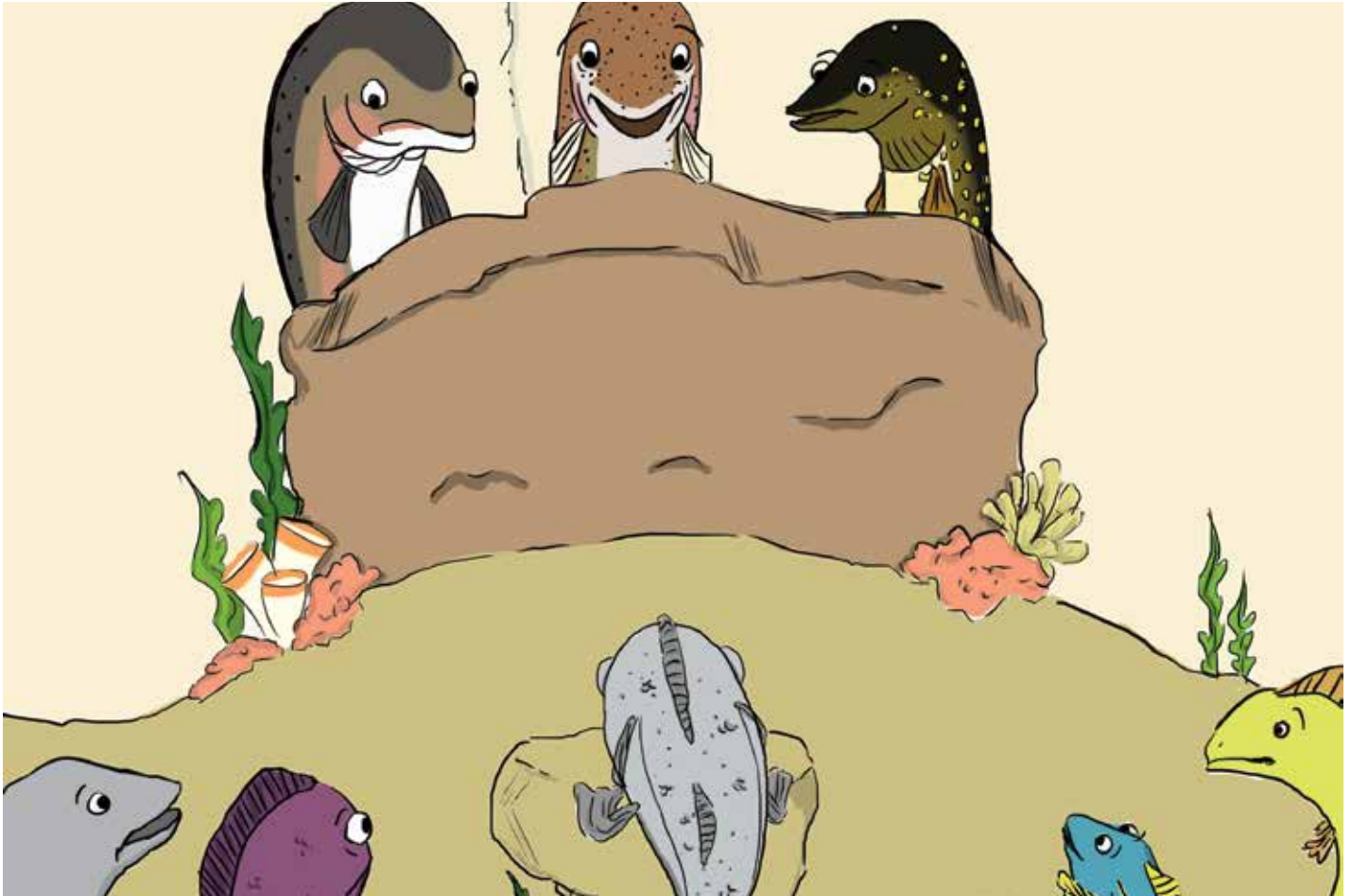




Aatma's father had an idea.

That Friday, the School-of-Fish Board was meeting. It made all the important decisions for the school.

Aatma and his father swam to the meeting. Both of them wore golden hooks behind their right fins.



Around a reef, a salmon, an eel, and a pike sat listening to the different concerns of each speaker.

When his turn came, Aatma spoke:

*Dear members of the School-of-Fish Board,  
I ask that my student status be restored.  
While I understand the school's safety rule,  
Religious symbols should be allowed at school.*

*The golden hook poses no harm.  
It really is no cause for alarm.  
It's our practice from St. John's to Dubai,  
And I won't harm so much as a fry!*

*Unless I can wear the hook on my fin,  
I cannot go to school ever again.  
Please reconsider the safety rule,  
I **MUST** wear the hook when I attend school.*



After a long pause, the salmon trustee replied:

*You are a good fish, we can all agree,  
But we are also concerned with school safety.  
For some, the hook is a frightful sight.  
In fact, a hook took my friend one night!*

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## *Note for Parents and Teachers:*

This story seeks to teach children about the freedom of religion, which is guaranteed by section 2(a) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. This section provides that:

*Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms...  
(a) freedom of conscience and religion.<sup>1</sup>*

The right to freedom of religion prohibits state interference with an individual's religious beliefs and practices. As explained by the Supreme Court of Canada:

*[t]he essence of the concept of freedom of religion is the right to entertain such religious beliefs as a person chooses, the right to declare religious beliefs openly and without fear of hindrance or reprisal, and the right to manifest religious belief by worship and practice or by teaching and dissemination.<sup>2</sup>*

Freedom of religion is not, however, an absolute right. It must be balanced with other values and it cannot be used to justify harm to others.<sup>3</sup>

The Supreme Court of Canada explained the meaning of and limits to the right to freedom of religion in *Multani v. Commission Scolaire Margeurite-Bourgeois*. This case involved a decision by a school board that prohibited a young Sikh boy from wearing a metal *kirpan* (a ceremonial dagger worn on a cloth belt) to school. The board based its decision on its "no-weapon policy" and a concern for student safety. The boy and his family challenged the school board's decision as a violation of the boy's freedom to practise his religion.

In reviewing the school board's decision, the Supreme Court of Canada had to balance the student's right to carry on his religious practice of wearing a *kirpan* (similar to the golden hook) with the concern for safety at his school. In its decision, the Court found that banning the *kirpan* did very little to improve school safety, but had a significant and detrimental impact on the student's freedom to practise his religion. It noted that *kirpan*s were not used as weapons in schools; that the student was non-violent; that the religious symbolism of the *kirpan* did not represent violence; and that the *kirpan* was necessary as part of the student's religion.<sup>4</sup> This is similar to the rationale employed by the School-of-Fish-Board in allowing Aatma to wear his golden hook to school.

The Supreme Court further stated that schools should teach students about the kirpan's significance and religious diversity to avoid fear and misunderstanding. In this story, the students' initial reaction to the golden hook demonstrates society's common fears towards minority religious beliefs and practices when they are not understood. By the end of the story, Aatma was invited to explain the significance of the golden hook to his peers. Once the students had a better understanding of the religious practice, they were able to overcome their initial fears regarding the hook. They were able to see beyond their own customs and religious or non-religious traditions. This understanding permitted Aatma to attend school as an active citizen in his community.

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## *Questions for children:*

- 1.** Why does Aatma wear a golden hook? Why wasn't he allowed to wear the golden hook to school?
- 2.** Why did the School-of-Fish Board decide that Aatma could wear his golden hook to school?
- 3.** What is a religion? Do you have a religion or know anyone who does?
- 4.** Why is it important to respect people with different religions?

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<sup>1</sup> *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, s 2, Part I of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982 (UK)*, 1982, c 11. Religion is also included as a ground of discrimination in s 15, which prohibits religious discrimination.

<sup>2</sup> *R v Big M Drug Mart Ltd*, [1985] 1 SCR 295, 18 DLR (4th) 321 at para 94.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Multani v Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeois*, [2006] 1 SCR 256, 264 DLR (4th) 577.