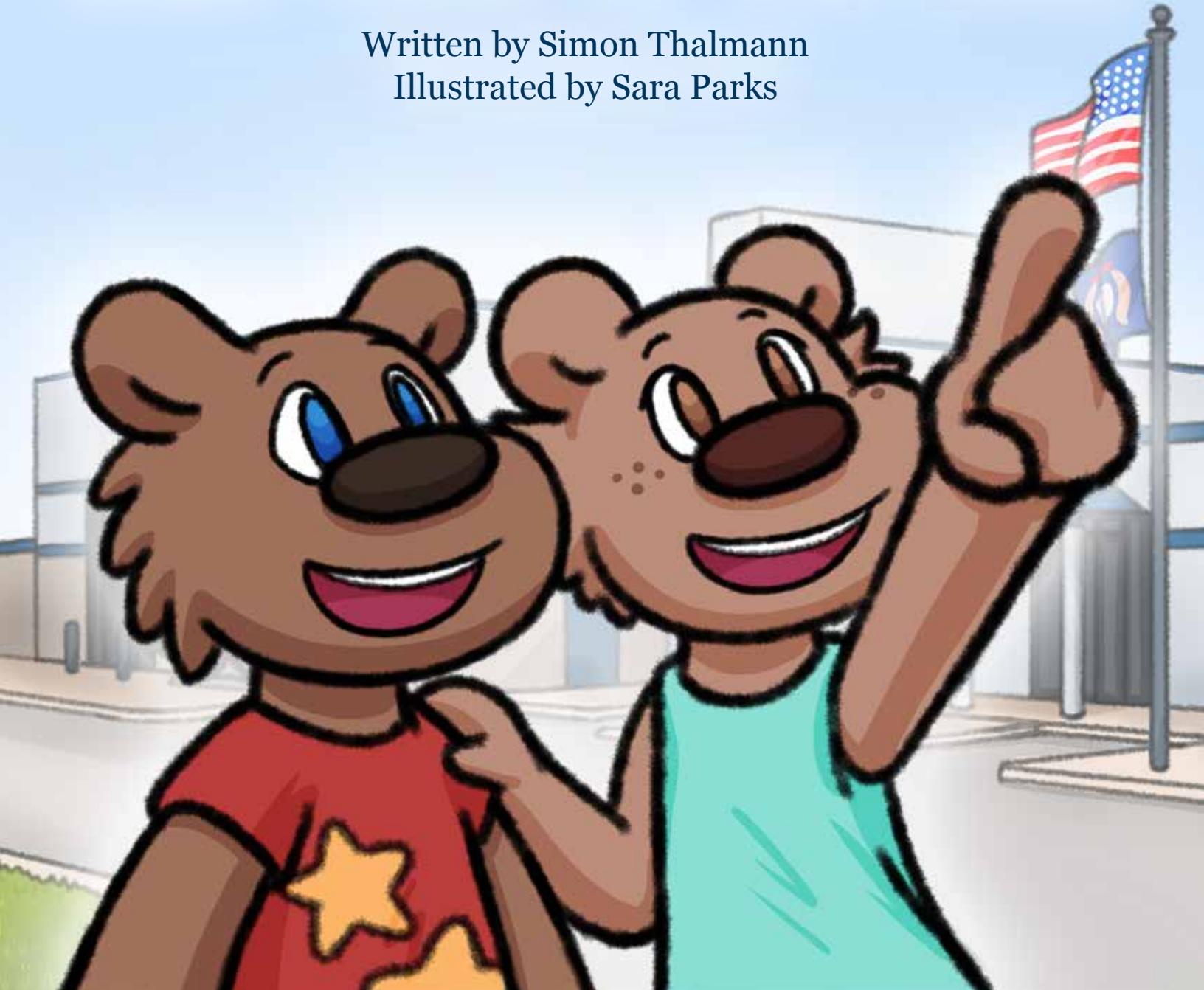


# Blaze Goes to the RMTC

Written by Simon Thalmann

Illustrated by Sara Parks



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Blaze sat down on the school bus next to his classmate, Bella. She looked excited. “Guess where we’re going on today’s field trip?” she said. “My mom’s school! She goes to Kellogg Community College.”

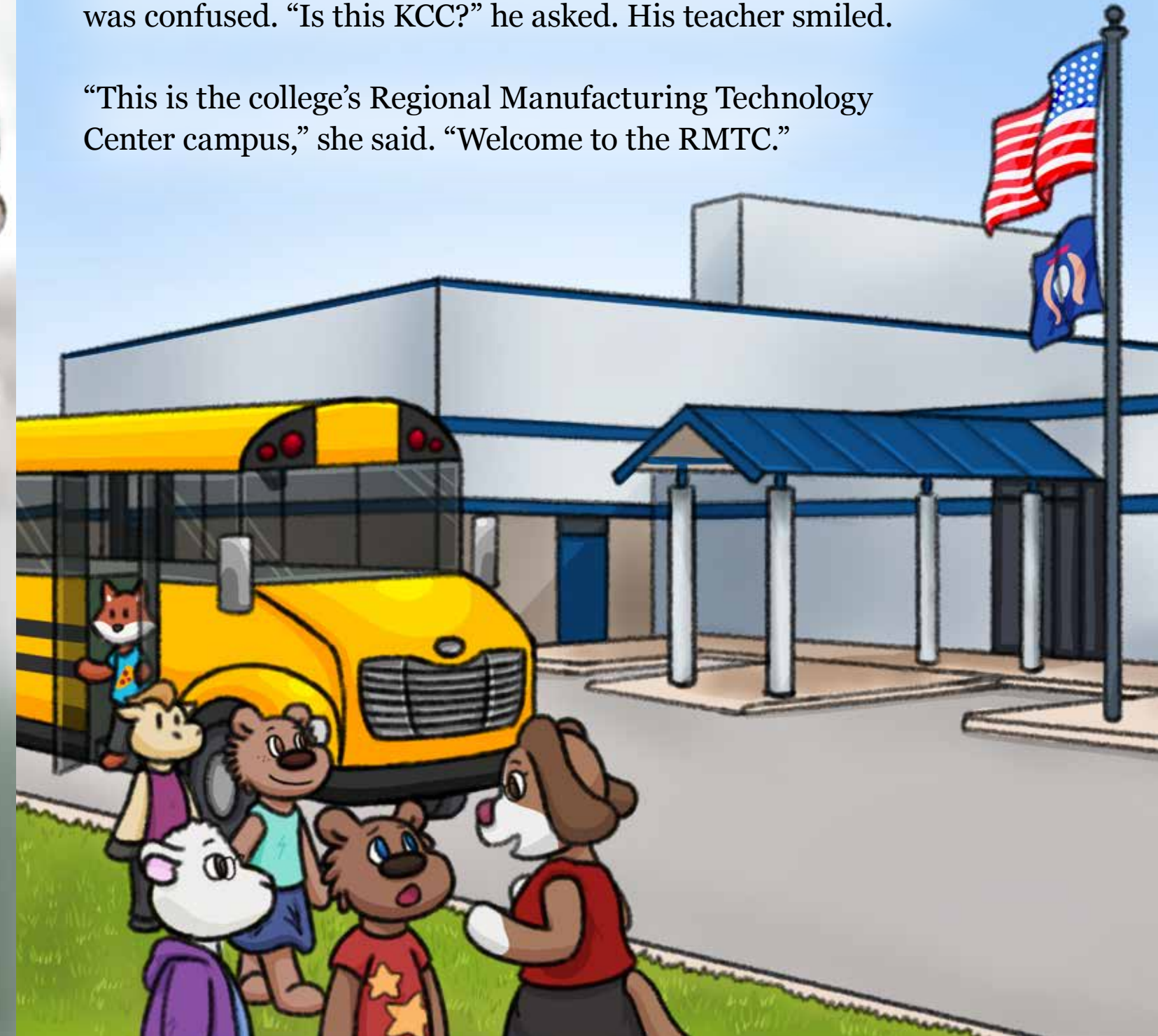




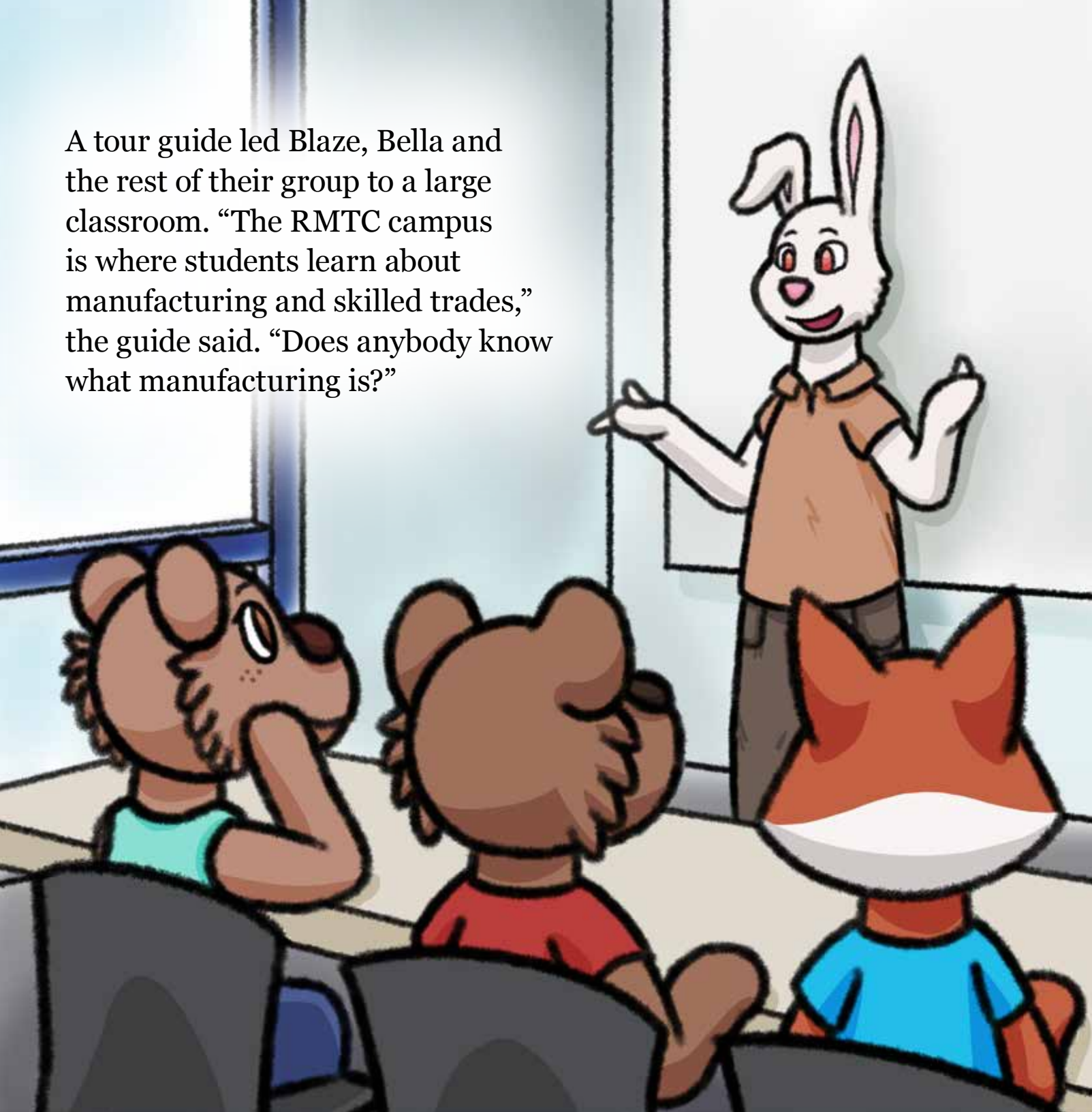
When the bus stopped in front of an unfamiliar building, Blaze was confused. "Is this KCC?" he asked. His teacher smiled.

"This is the college's Regional Manufacturing Technology Center campus," she said. "Welcome to the RMTC."

Blaze remembered his last field trip to Kellogg Community College. It was so fun! They learned all about the different kinds of things they could do in college. Now he was excited, too.



A tour guide led Blaze, Bella and the rest of their group to a large classroom. “The RMTTC campus is where students learn about manufacturing and skilled trades,” the guide said. “Does anybody know what manufacturing is?”

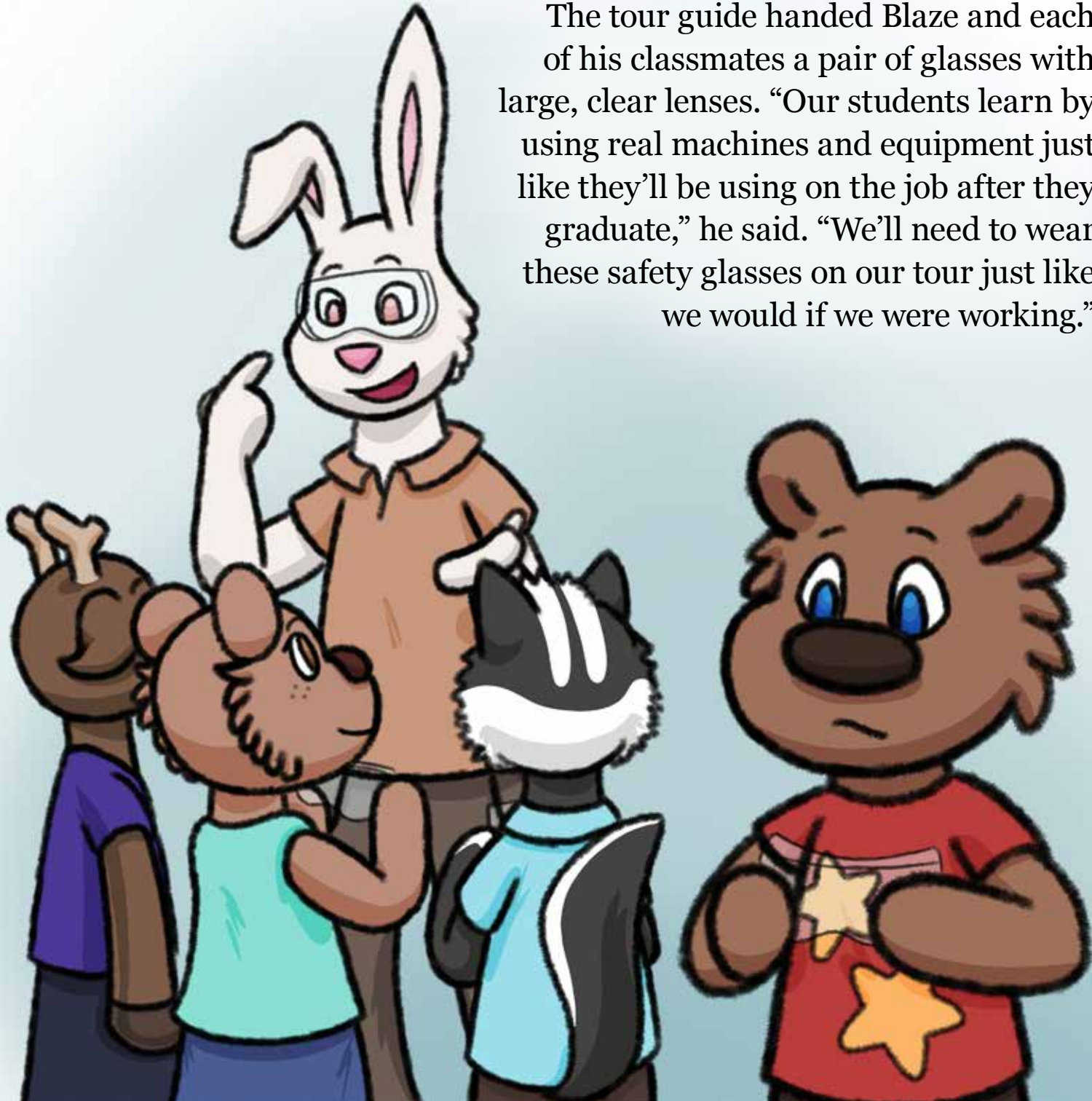


Bella raised her hand. “Manufacturing is when you make something,” she said. The tour guide nodded.

“That’s right,” he said. “Your clothes, your school bus, even this building. Everything we use was manufactured by someone who started as a student just like the ones who train here at the RMTC.”



The tour guide handed Blaze and each of his classmates a pair of glasses with large, clear lenses. “Our students learn by using real machines and equipment just like they’ll be using on the job after they graduate,” he said. “We’ll need to wear these safety glasses on our tour just like we would if we were working.”



Blaze put on a pair of the glasses and looked at Bella.  
“How do I look?” he asked.

“Like my mom!” she laughed.

Blaze tried to picture Bella’s mom in a college classroom.  
He didn’t know that parents could go to school.

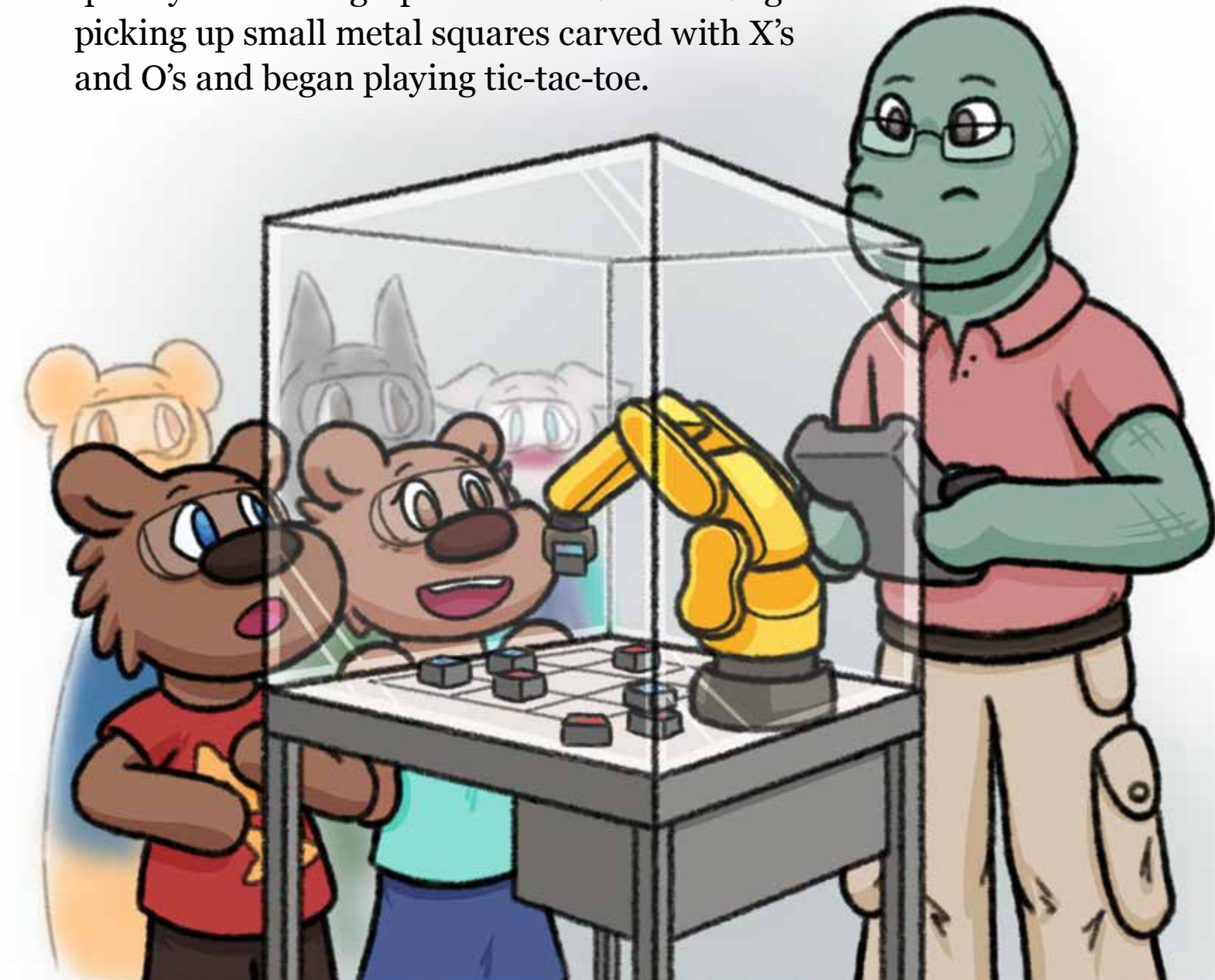


“Wow!” Blaze said. The room was even bigger than their gym at school, he thought. The machines seemed to go on as far as he could see. “But where are the classrooms?” he asked.

“This is the classroom,” the tour guide said.



The class started its tour in the robotics area. An instructor holding a remote control stood next to a table with a large metal arm coming out of the top. He pushed a button and the arm moved quickly. The class gasped as the robot arm began picking up small metal squares carved with X's and O's and began playing tic-tac-toe.

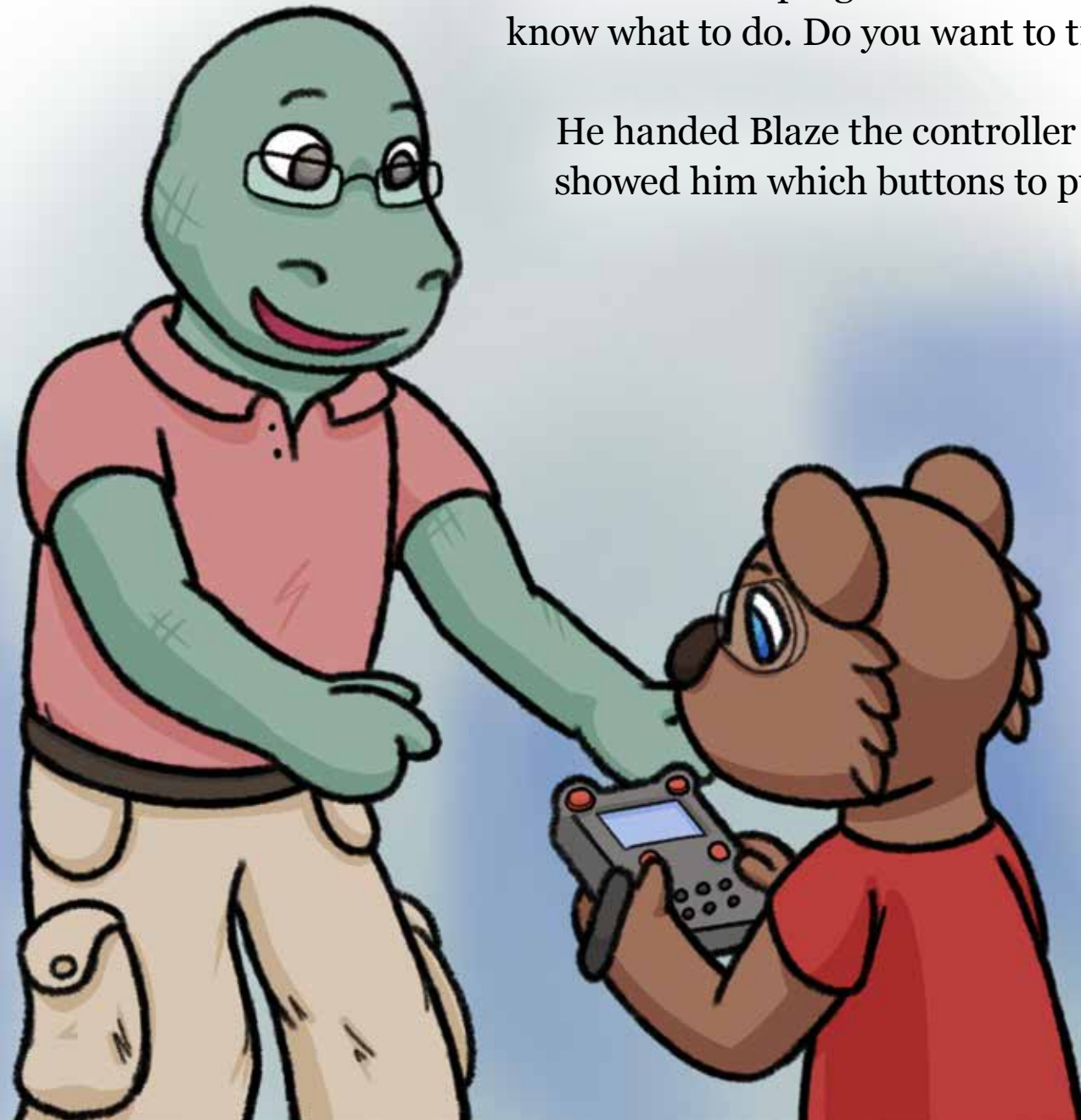


“We use robots in manufacturing,” the instructor said. “Robots can lift more weight than people, they don’t get tired, and they can go places people can’t go as easily, like underwater or into really hot or really cold environments.”

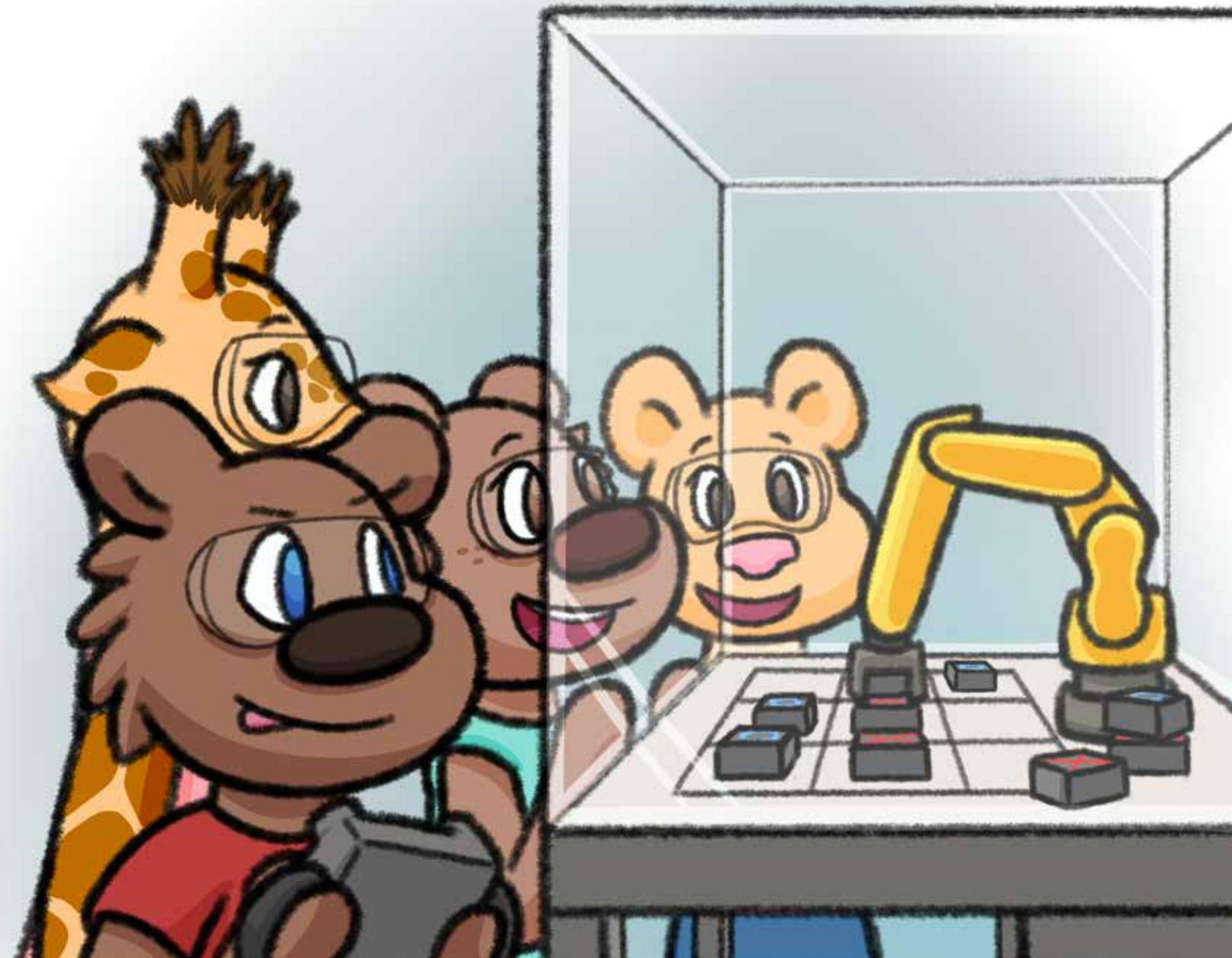


“But we still need people to fix them when they break down,” the instructor said. “And to program them so they know what to do. Do you want to try?”

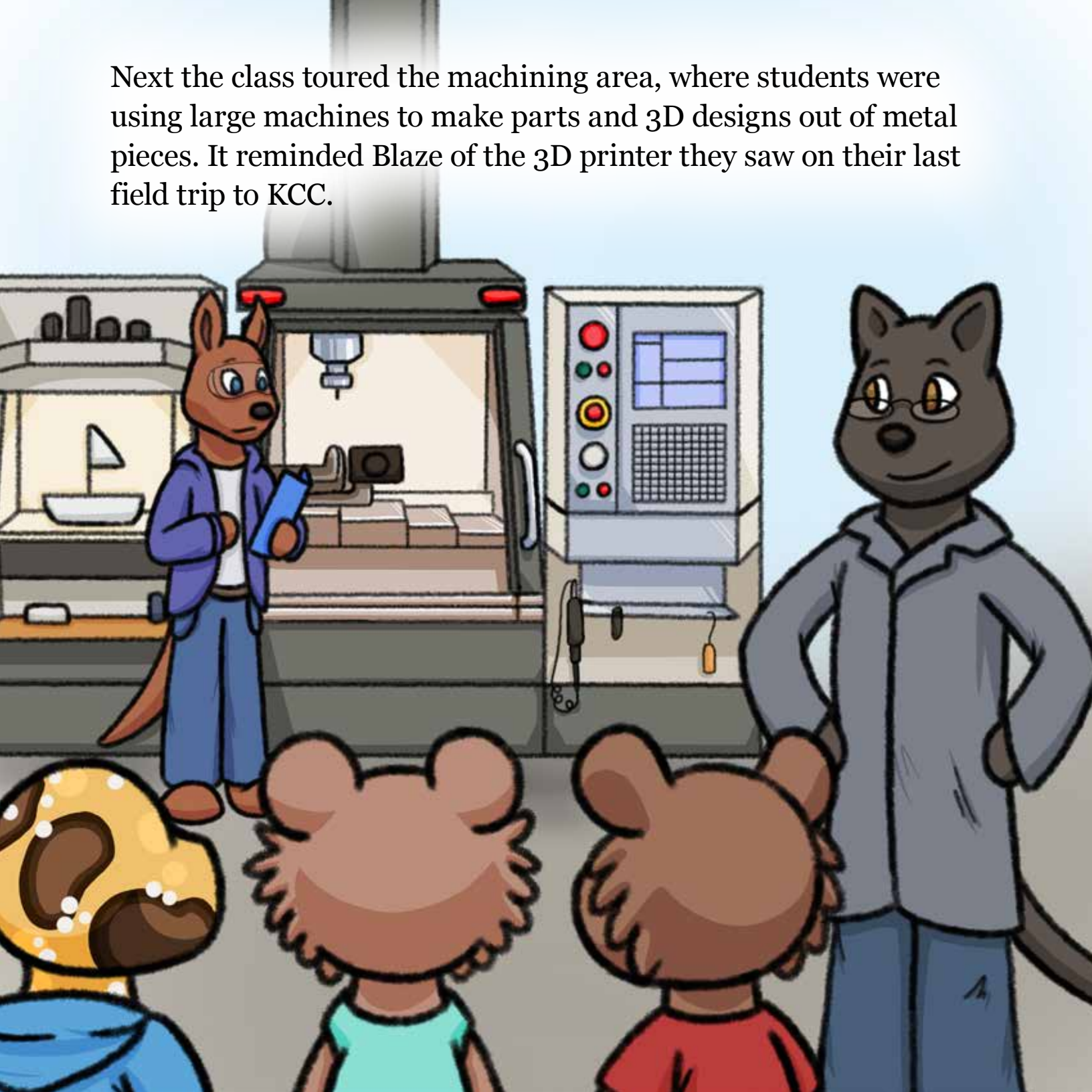
He handed Blaze the controller and showed him which buttons to push.



Blaze pushed a button and the metal arm bent and picked up a large block marked with an X, then dropped it gently on the table. The class cheered. It's like playing a video game, Blaze thought.



Next the class toured the machining area, where students were using large machines to make parts and 3D designs out of metal pieces. It reminded Blaze of the 3D printer they saw on their last field trip to KCC.



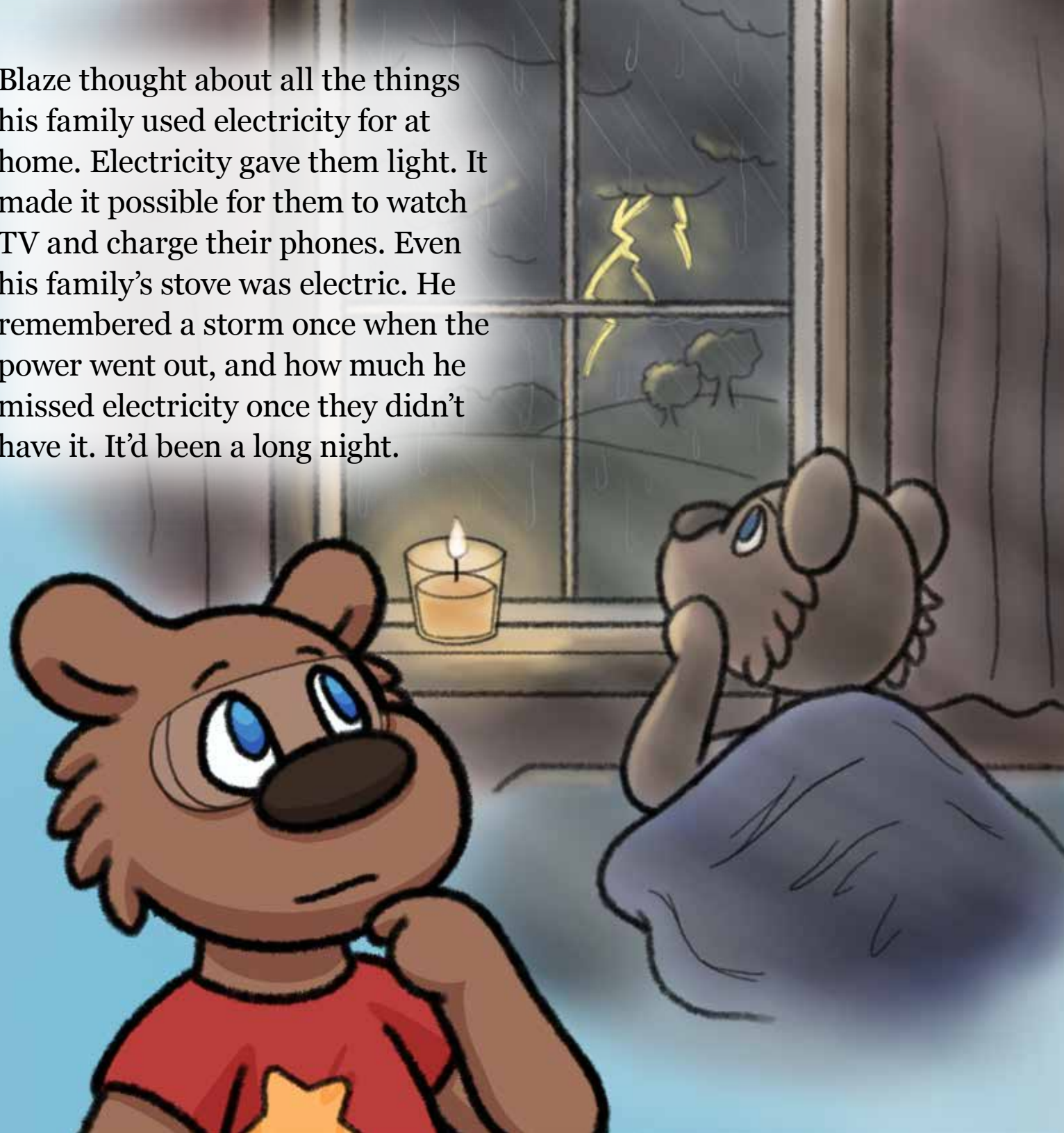
“Students here learn how to operate, fix and take care of machines,” the machining instructor said. “But they also learn basic skills like how to read blueprints, measure parts and grind them to make them smooth and fit just right. These are all important parts of the manufacturing process.”



“The students here learn how to hook up electrical wiring and how to keep electricity going in all kinds of environments,” one instructor said. “At businesses, schools, even your houses!”



Blaze thought about all the things his family used electricity for at home. Electricity gave them light. It made it possible for them to watch TV and charge their phones. Even his family's stove was electric. He remembered a storm once when the power went out, and how much he missed electricity once they didn't have it. It'd been a long night.



Blaze watched as Bella practiced connecting a wire to a light switch. She looked like a natural. I sure am glad we have electricians, Blaze thought.



Blaze felt the same way when the class visited the pipefitting and the heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration labs, where they learned how students become technicians that keep buildings and machines running properly, everything from fans and coolers to plumbing in homes and businesses.



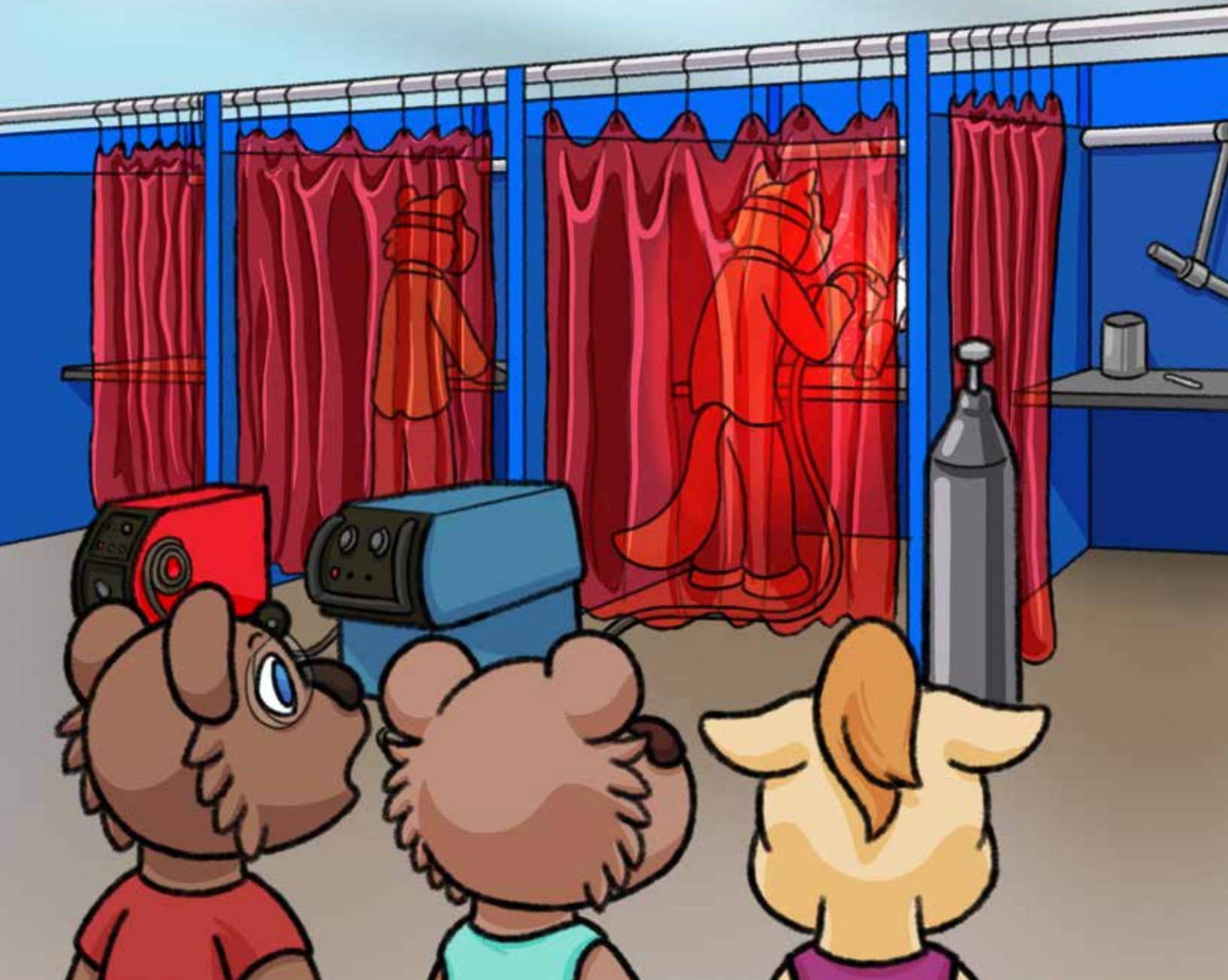
“HVAC technicians and pipefitters keep your air conditioners running in the summer and your furnaces working in the winter,” the instructor said. “They fix the coolers that keep food from spoiling at grocery stores, at restaurants and in your home.”

Bella smiled at Blaze. “Without them, there would be no ice cream!” she said.

Blaze thought the HVAC technicians were heroes.



The last stop on the tour was the welding lab, which was full of blue metal booths covered with heavy red curtains. Through the curtains, Blaze could see welding students working in flashes of light. A burning smell and loud crackling sounds filled the room.



“These students are welding,” the instructor said. “Using heat to melt metals together and make them stick together permanently.” He handed each student a large helmet with a small dark square on the front that Blaze thought looked like the lens on a pair of sunglasses. “You should never look directly at the light when welding, as it can burn your eyes,” the instructor said. “All welding students have to wear one of these special helmets for safety.”



Blaze put on the helmet. It was so dark!  
“Welding is a necessary part of the manufacturing process,” the instructor said.  
“Most of the things we use every day have either been welded or were made using equipment or machines that were welded.”



Suddenly there was a flash of light and a shower of sparks as a welding student began to weld two pieces of smooth, flat metal together. The sparks crackled. When the student was done, the two pieces were connected by a small bump of metal that hadn't been there before. Everyone removed their helmets, including the welding student.





It was Bella's mom. "What do you think?" she said.

Bella rushed forward and gave her mom a big hug. "You did great!" Bella said.

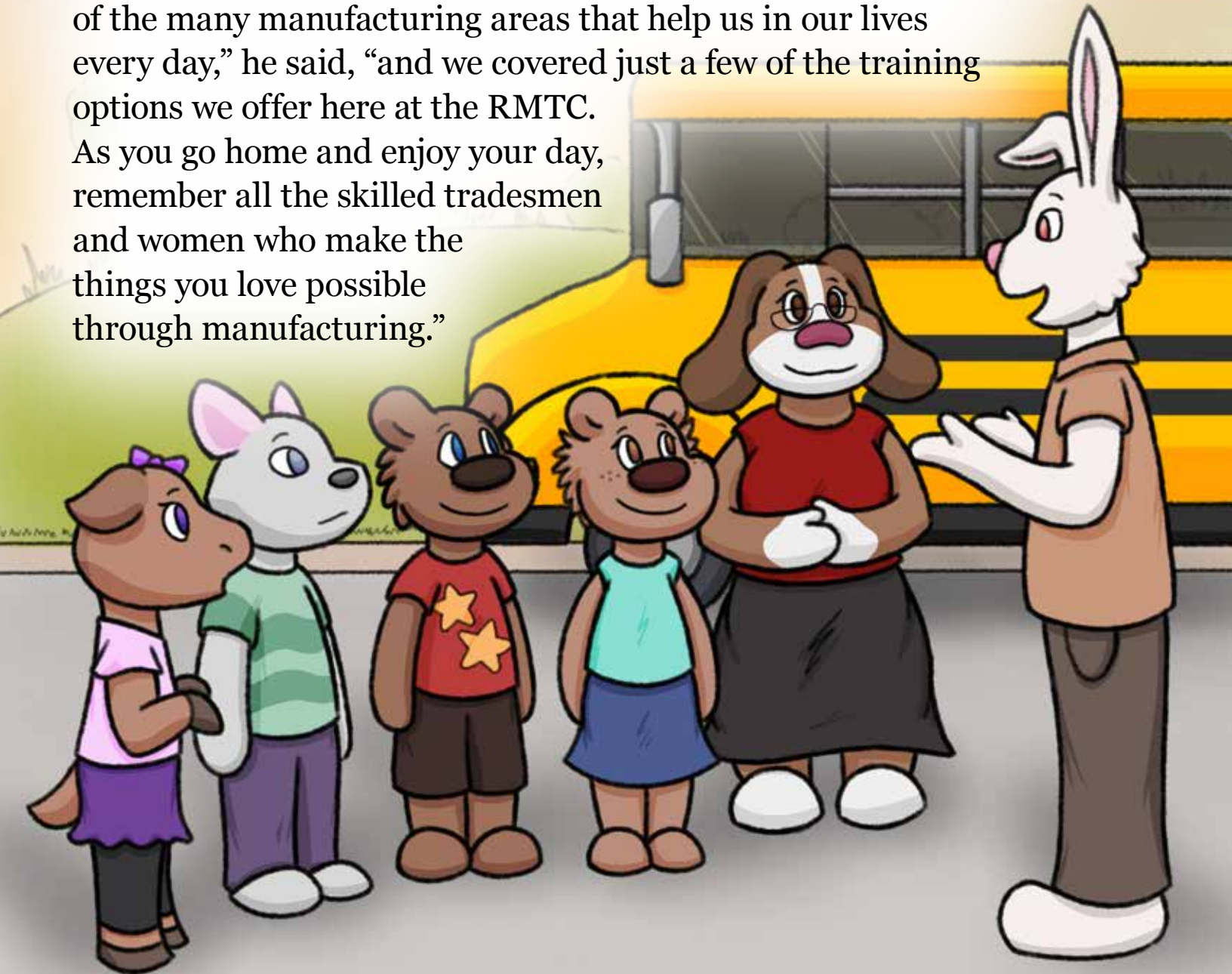


Bella had told Blaze her mom was a student, but he was still surprised to see her. "Do a lot of parents go to school?" he said. Bella's mom smiled.

"We have students of all different ages here at the RMTc, even students who are still in high school," she said. "Some are training for new jobs, while others are working but want to learn a new skill. Others just like taking classes for fun."



After the tour, the guide thanked the class for visiting and led the students back to their school bus. "Today we got to see just a few of the many manufacturing areas that help us in our lives every day," he said, "and we covered just a few of the training options we offer here at the RMTC. As you go home and enjoy your day, remember all the skilled tradesmen and women who make the things you love possible through manufacturing."



Blaze had a lot to think about on the bus ride back to school. He'd never thought about manufacturing before, but now he'd be seeing it everywhere. Every time he looked at a light switch or refrigerator, watched television or played a video game on his computer, he'd think about the people and the jobs that made them possible. He wondered if someday he could make things like that, too.



Bella tapped his shoulder. “How do I look?” she said. The tour guide let them keep their safety glasses, and Bella was wearing hers now and holding a pencil like a welding torch.

“Like your mom!” he said.

They both laughed.





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