

I've been told the human brain takes two seconds to decide how to react when receiving a new piece of information. I was about to learn this theory is false.

It was an ordinary Tuesday, the same as any other school day, and I was sitting in my Spanish classroom, trying not to lose my mind with boredom. The walls were painted white with the customary Spanish flag and map pinned up alongside 'really helpful' phrases like *Tengo catorce años/I am fourteen years old*. I was fifteen.

Of the twenty-five people in the class, at least forty percent of us weren't paying attention, but I'd lucked out with the window seat, so at least I could look out over the central courtyard, dreaming of freedom, while Mr Davies prattled on.

Of course, I was soon to learn that this was no ordinary Tuesday.

As I sat there, staring out across the grounds of the school, I ran my hands through my hair and tried my hardest to at least *look* engaged as my mind drifted to other places. My navy-blue school jumper was resting on my chair; I had made the strategic decision to be shivering but awake in my polo shirt instead of warm and asleep.

We were no more than fifteen minutes into the lesson, but it felt like fifteen hours. I didn't enjoy Spanish, and I was never very good at it. Every time I blinked, it took all

my energy and focus to reopen my eyes, and as I glanced outside again, the sky seemed to perfectly reflect my mood: endless grey clouds and a light drizzle. *Great.*

Our teacher, Mr Davies, was a tall lanky man in his early thirties, with round glasses sitting on the bridge of his nose that didn't complement his long face. He wasn't the most interactive teacher – I was taking in a generous 10% of what he was saying – but when I heard him raise his voice, I decided I should probably take a break from staring out of the window.

'For the last time, David, can you stop throwing paper and focus? Do you think I can't see you? Sometimes I think you're un-teachable.'

David was my best friend; we had known each other since we started school. We both had the same love of football and trying to be funny. I wouldn't have said we were troublemakers, but we both enjoyed a good prank as well as cracking jokes (usually at each other's expense). He was slightly taller than me, with considerably broader shoulders, and wore rectangular glasses with thick black frames, alongside a cheeky grin, as if he was always up to something.

He was sitting across the classroom, after we had been separated a few weeks ago after a very intense game of dead arm. The rules were simple: see who could punch each other the hardest. To quote Mr Davies: "there are no winners to dead arm, just two losers". But, for the record, I won.

I always enjoyed waiting to see what Dave would say when he was told off; he always thought fast on his feet.

*'Arrepentido,* Señor Davies. That means "Sorry, Mr

Davies". See? If I'm un-teachable, you're doing a great job!

'Enough!' Mr Davies chastised. 'One more peep out of you and I'll send you out for the rest of the lesson.'

Dave nodded in acknowledgment and Mr Davies continued his lecture.

I went back to staring out of the window.

I have no clue what Mr Davies was saying and writing on the board when Mrs Thomas opened the door. Tall, stern-faced, and with an abnormally large chin, the head of languages had always scared me a bit.

'Everyone leave your belongings in the classroom and head over to the sports hall, please,' she informed my half-asleep class. 'We're having an emergency assembly.'

I got out of my chair as soon as she left, delighted that we were about to miss the rest of Spanish, and headed out with the rest of my classmates.

As I was walking down the corridor, Dave came jogging over with that big cheesy grin of his, grabbing me round the shoulder.

'You got me in trouble again, mate.'

I shrugged myself out of his grip. 'How? Weren't you throwing paper?'

'Yeah, but I was trying to get your attention, arsehole. You were daydreaming again.'

I arched my eyebrows and shook my head. 'Your aim is terrible. I didn't see any paper land near me.'

Dave choked in astonishment. 'Hey, there's nothing wrong with my aim! The wind must have taken it.' His voice shifted slightly, curiosity taking over. 'So... what do you reckon this is about?'

I looked at him blankly. 'Dave, I have exactly the same

information as you. I'm just glad we get to miss class; there was a real chance of me dozing off.'

'Yeah, I saw. That's why I was trying to get your attention.' He winked. 'Just trying to be a good friend.'

I chuckled. 'You know that's a lie.' He was always trying to get me in trouble; it was like a game to him.

'Anyway, if you *had* to guess,' Dave continued, 'what would you say this assembly is going to be about?'

'I don't know.' I shrugged. 'We're probably in trouble. No one has messed around with the fire alarm recently, have they? Or started any fights?'

Dave thought for a second. 'I don't think so, we would have known if they had.'

'You never know, maybe everyone has been so well behaved we get to leave school early?'

Dave laughed. 'That's optimistic, even for you!'

I rolled my eyes as we made our way downstairs and outside into the courtyard, then towards the sports hall. There was still some drizzle, but the fresh air woke me up a little.

Spotting Amy and Laura heading over from the west wing with their own class, Dave and I waved across to them. I was surprised to see Amy – she'd been off school with flu for a while, and I could see her nose was still red from being ill.

Amy and Laura had known each other forever, but Dave and I had first met them at an athletics club, where we had formed a firm friendship. When we had all transferred to Oxford Gardens, we'd become an even tighter group.

The two of them waved back, but we didn't wait for each other; it was cold – we'd have time to catch-up later in

the warm of the lunch hall.

Once we arrived in the sports hall, Dave and I squeezed onto the end of one of the many benches lining the hall. There were only a couple of rows left; it wouldn't be long until everyone was here. I noticed Amy's short blonde hair and Laura's dark, long hair a few rows ahead, their heads bobbing as they joined in with the general chatter, debating why we'd been called here at such a random time of day.

A couple of minutes passed, then the head teacher, Mrs Roberts, walked in. She was always serious and direct, but we weren't scared of her; we respected her.

The noise immediately died down.

I was regretting not picking up my jumper. I should have known it would be cold in the sports hall.

Mrs Roberts made her way to front and addressed us with a stern, 'Good afternoon.'

We collectively replied in the same monotone way as always. 'Good afternoon, Mrs Roberts.'

As she started speaking, everyone shut their mouths. If you were caught talking during assembly, you would get the death stare. No one wanted to be on the receiving end of the Mrs Roberts' death stare. It was like she had lasers in her eyes or something.

'Firstly, I apologise for taking you out of your lessons.'

*No apologies needed*, I thought to myself.

'About ten minutes ago, we received an official government announcement. I have called this assembly to share the information with you before it becomes leaked on social media.'

Dave and I glanced at each other; this wasn't about the fire alarms. I leant forward in anticipation.