

The Hungry Backpack



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Oliver loved his new backpack. It was orange canvas with navy straps, a wide zippered mouth that grinned, and two round buckle eyes. A silver name tag read OLIVER. On the first day of school, Oliver packed pencils, notebooks, and a shiny red apple. But when he turned around, the backpack's zipper opened wide and—CHOMP!—the apple was gone. Oliver blinked. Did his backpack just eat?



At school, strange things happened. During math, Oliver reached for a pencil, but it was missing. Then his notebook vanished. 'Oliver,' said Mrs. Penny, her round glasses glinting, 'where are your supplies?' Oliver shrugged, but he noticed his backpack's pockets bulging and glowing faintly. At lunch, his shoes disappeared right off his feet! The backpack chewed happily, seams rippling. Oliver felt a nervous flutter.



After school, Oliver's backpack ate a chair. Then a lamp. Then the kitchen table! 'Stop!' Oliver cried, but the backpack just burped a pencil. Oliver's mom said, 'That backpack is trouble.' Oliver knew he had to do something. He remembered Mrs. Penny's words: 'Taking responsibility means fixing your own messes.' But how do you fix a hungry backpack?



The next morning, Oliver's backpack was hungrier than ever. It ate his hat, his lunchbox, and a whole bookshelf. Oliver's dad said, 'Maybe it's a magical backpack.' Oliver wasn't sure. At school, the backpack gobbled pencils, crayons, and even a globe. Mrs. Penny frowned. 'Oliver, we need to talk.' But before she could say more, the backpack let out a huge, rumbling BURP!



During recess, the backpack went wild. It ate the slide. It ate the swings. It ate the sandbox and the soccer balls. Then it ate the entire playground! One giant gulp, and the playground was gone. The backpack swelled to the size of a house, its pockets glowing brightly. Mrs. Penny gasped. 'Oliver, you must get everything back!' Oliver's heart pounded. He had to go inside.



Oliver unzipped the backpack's giant mouth. Inside, it was dark and strange. He climbed in. He landed on a soft, squishy floor made of erasers. A small pink eraser with a blue paper belt and tiny dot eyes walked up to him. 'Hello!' it said. 'I'm Eraser. Welcome to the Backpack World.' Oliver stared. 'You can talk?' Eraser nodded. 'I can also help you.'



'The backpack is lonely,' Eraser explained. 'It eats things to feel useful. But it doesn't know how to stop.' Oliver looked around. The backpack world was full of swallowed objects: pencils, notebooks, shoes, and even a whole playground slide. 'We need to teach it to carry, not collect,' said Eraser. Oliver nodded. 'But how?' Eraser smiled. 'First, we must find its purpose.'



Oliver and Eraser walked through the Backpack World. They passed a mountain of pencils and a river of glue. They climbed over a hill of shoes. 'The backpack wants to be helpful,' said Eraser. 'It just doesn't know how.' Oliver thought about all the times he had stuffed it with too many things. 'I overfed it,' he said. 'I gave it too much to eat.' Eraser patted his hand. 'Then you must help it digest.'

An illustration of a young boy with dark brown hair and large, expressive brown eyes. He is looking down at a small, glowing red backpack with a blue zipper pull. To his right is a pink eraser character with a blue band around its middle, two small black eyes, and thin black limbs. A speech bubble from the backpack contains the text: "eeler eveeeeel", "eals. 'Weeeeer", "bieel healet.".

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They found the backpack's heart—a glowing zipper pull. It pulsed with light. 'You need to talk to it,' said Eraser. Oliver took a deep breath. 'Backpack,' he said, 'I know you're lonely. But eating everything isn't the answer. You can carry my things to school. That's your purpose.' The backpack's zipper mouth quivered. It let out a small, sad burp.



The backpack spoke in a soft, rumbling voice. 'I just wanted to be full,' it said. 'Full of things, full of friends.' Oliver felt a lump in his throat. 'You can be full of friends without eating them,' he said. 'I'll be your friend. And I'll take care of you.' The backpack's buckle eyes widened. 'Really?' Oliver nodded. 'But first, you have to give everything back.'



The backpack agreed. With a giant HIC! it began to spit everything out. Pencils, notebooks, shoes, and furniture flew out of its pockets. The playground slide and swings popped out with a BOING! The sandbox and soccer balls rolled away. Oliver and Eraser held on tight as the backpack shrank back to normal size. When it was done, the playground was back in place, and Oliver stood outside, covered in eraser crumbs.



Mrs. Penny and the other kids stared. 'Oliver! You did it!' she said. Oliver smiled, but then he looked at the mess. Pencils, notebooks, and shoes were scattered everywhere. 'Now I have to clean up,' he said. Mrs. Penny nodded. 'That's what responsible people do.' Oliver sighed. 'I know.' He picked up a pencil. Eraser hopped out of the backpack and helped.



Oliver and Eraser worked together. They sorted pencils, stacked notebooks, and lined up shoes. The backpack helped too, gently carrying things in its mouth without eating them. 'See?' said Eraser. 'It just needed a purpose.' Oliver patted the backpack's orange canvas. 'You're a good backpack,' he said. The backpack's zipper mouth grinned. It burped a tiny eraser, and Eraser caught it. 'Excuse me!' said the backpack.



Mrs. Penny smiled, her dimples showing. 'Oliver, you took responsibility. That's part of growing up.' She handed him a new name tag for the backpack. It read OLIVER'S HELPER. Oliver stuck it on. The backpack's buckle eyes sparkled. 'From now on,' Oliver said, 'you carry my things, and I'll feed you only what's on the list.' The backpack nodded. Its pockets glowed softly, but not hungrily.



That night, Oliver sat with Eraser and the backpack. 'You were very brave,' said Eraser. Oliver shrugged. 'I just fixed my mistake.' Eraser smiled. 'That's the bravest thing of all.' The backpack hummed happily. Oliver yawned. 'Goodnight, Eraser. Goodnight, Backpack.' The backpack zipped its mouth shut and gave a tiny, contented burp. Oliver laughed. 'Goodnight!'



The next day, Oliver walked to school with his backpack. It carried his books, his lunch, and his shoes—without eating them. Mrs. Penny greeted him. 'Everything in order?' Oliver nodded. 'Yes, Mrs. Penny.' The backpack's zipper mouth grinned. Eraser peeked out of a pocket and waved. Oliver felt proud. He had learned that growing up means cleaning up your own messes—and that even a hungry backpack can be a friend.