

THE ART OF DEFIANCE

STIMULUS

Aisha had been sent to the headmaster for turning her classroom into a forest.

At lunch when nobody was around and nobody was looking, she had snuck into the classroom and painted an enormous picture of a vast, dark forest which covered all four walls.

Aisha's teacher walked in from the playground and dropped her mug. The shock came in waves. Ceramic smashed and scattered. The teacher was so powerlessly angry that she burst into wild fits of laughter. And now Aisha, covered in green paint, was standing before the headmaster.

'Would you care to explain yourself?' he asked.

'I like forests,' said Aisha.

'And do you think it's all right to graffiti over school property?'

'I like forests,' she repeated.

'Aisha, this is very serious,' said the headmaster. 'I don't want to punish you; I just want you to tell me why you think it is acceptable to vandalise school property.'

'Because I wish the school was a forest,' she said.

'You're really not helping me out here, young lady – do you want me to punish you?'

'Do as you please,' Aisha said plainly, looking straight in front, not making eye contact.

'Excuse me?'

Aisha continued looking straight ahead. 'Punish me if you want to.'

'I don't want to. But I am afraid that I will need to. Your parents are on their way to the school right now and I am seriously thinking of telling them that from now on, your lunchtimes will be taken away.'

'Do as you please,' said Aisha.

'I really don't appreciate your attitude.' The headmaster wiped his forehead. 'Would you like me to take away your breaktime privileges too?'

'Do as you please.'

'Very well. From now on: no breaktime and no lunchtime.'

The room was silent. Aisha continued to stare blankly at the wall in front of her.

'Don't you care that you've lost your playtime?' asked the headmaster feeling at a loss.

'Do as you please,' she repeated.

'Look, Aisha, if you just said sorry for what you did, maybe I could ease the punishment.'

Silence.

'Aisha, are you sorry?'

Her voice was soft. 'I like forests,' she said.

'Very well!' spat the headmaster. 'Should I stop you from... sitting with your friends too?'

'Do as you please.'

'Fine. No friends and no playtime. Happy?'

Silence.

'Maybe I should just expel you,' yelled the headmaster.

'Do as you please.'

'You are really pushing it. Why you aren't sorry for what you have done? For the damage you've done?'

'I like forests.'

'You're expelled!'

Aisha stared at the wall. 'Do as you please.'

Task Question:

- ✓ Should people receive a greater punishment if they are not sorry for what they have done?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ Is graffiti art?
- ✓ Does school belong to the children or the teachers?
- ✓ What's worse: breaking the rules, or not being sorry for breaking the rules?
- ✓ Was Aisha's painting vandalism?
- ✓ Was it wrong for Aisha to turn the classroom into a forest?
- ✓ How much of the world would you change if you could?
- ✓ Who decides the way the world is?

by David Birch