

The illustration depicts a young boy with dark skin and short hair, wearing a white t-shirt with green and yellow horizontal stripes and blue pants. He is kneeling on a grey stone path, holding a grey bucket with colorful polka dots. To his left is a wooden crate filled with various potted plants, including a large one with colorful flowers and several smaller ones in different containers. The background is a textured wall with a red and teal color palette, decorated with climbing vines and clusters of red flowers. The overall style is vibrant and artistic.

JAYDEN'S

IMPOSSIBLE

GARDEN

Mélina Mangal • Illustrated by Ken Daley

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

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For Sameer, with Love—MM

For C.J. Anything is possible.

Just believe, and you can achieve. —Uncle Ken

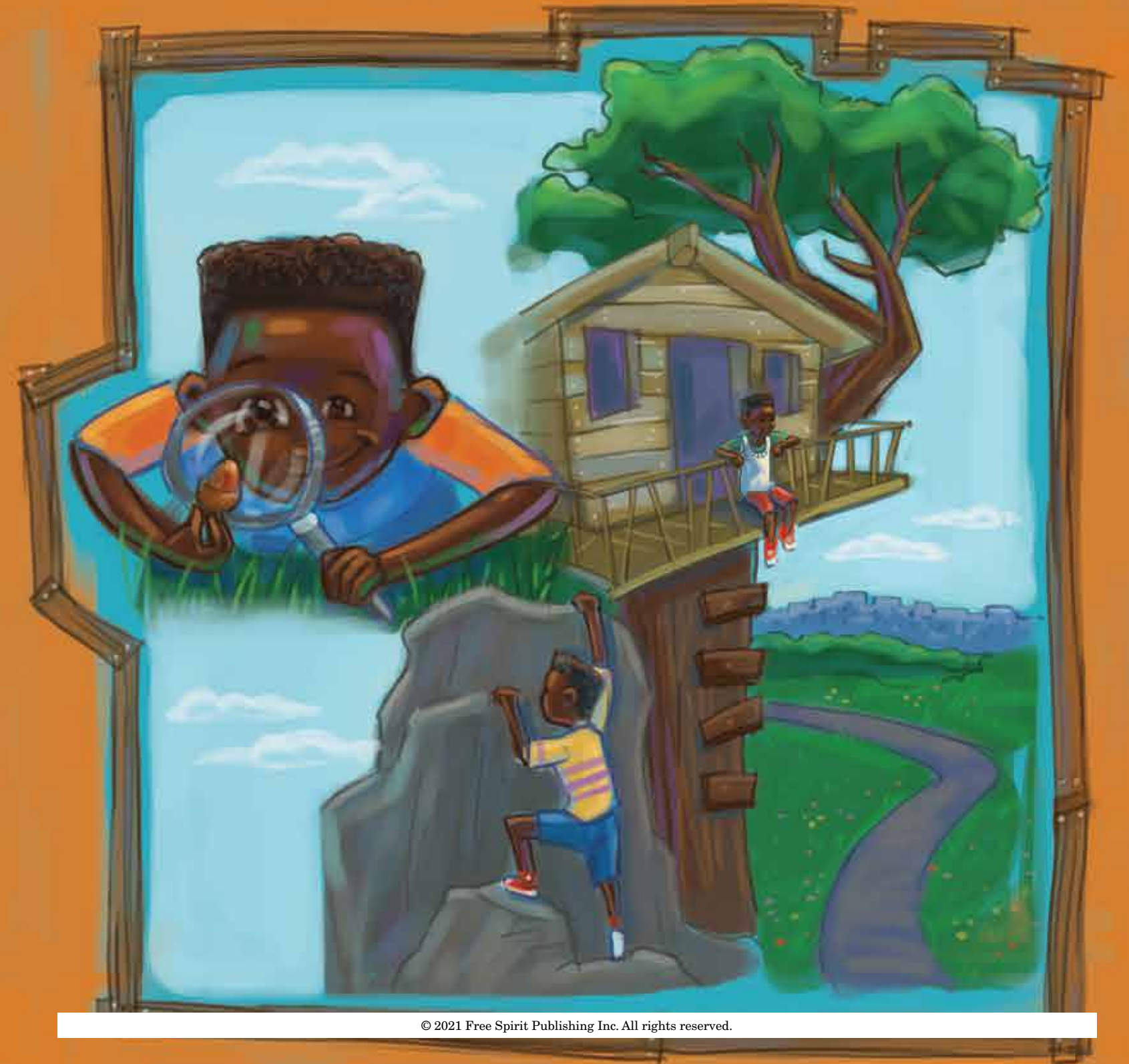


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Jayden loved nature. At school, he played outside during recess. On field trips, he pretended to be a scientist, collecting acorns, stones, and twigs.



In Jayden's favorite books, kids played in treehouses or climbed rocks.

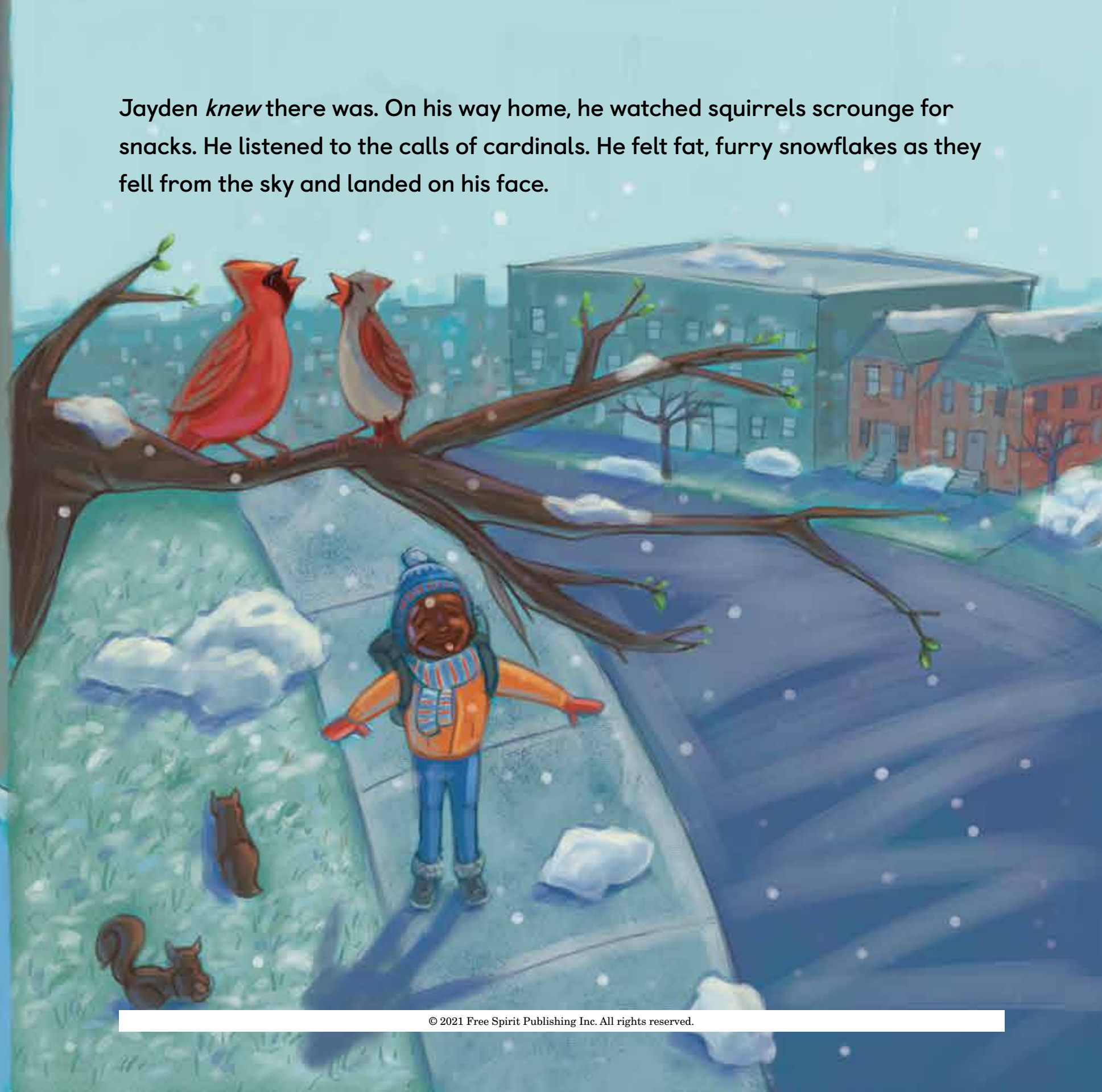




But after school, Jayden had to stay inside.

“There’s no nature here in the middle of the city,” Mama said.

Jayden *knew* there was. On his way home, he watched squirrels scrounge for snacks. He listened to the calls of cardinals. He felt fat, furry snowflakes as they fell from the sky and landed on his face.



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



When I was very young, my siblings and I were always outside: climbing trees, playing in fields of tall prairie grass, biking, and skipping rocks on the river. Nature was all around me. When I moved to the city, I realized I had to pay closer attention to appreciate the nature that surrounded me.

I still live in a big city, and I make sure to get outside each day, even in the frigid winter and on the hottest summer days. Being out in my neighborhood helps me get to know my human neighbors. It also allows me to observe my *other* neighbors—the ones that crawl, fly, or sprout. The more I observe, the more I understand and appreciate them. Even in the city, birds visit window ledges, plants crawl and climb up walls, and ants build. Noticing the smallest beings around us can give us insight into the wider world. We are just a small part of nature, but we are all connected—just as Jayden, Mama, Mr. Curtis, and their neighbors are connected. We may see neighbors all the time without discovering that we share interests with them. Until we reach out and get to know the people around us, we'll never know how we can enjoy each other's company or how we can help each other.



Look closely at the plants and animals where you live, as Jayden does, and you will notice interesting details and differences. For instance, maybe the same bird visits each day. Can you tell it apart from the other birds in your neighborhood? How does it sound? Practice making the sounds you hear. Or find a tree or other plant outside your window or door. Is it growing in a pot, the yard, a crack in the sidewalk? How does it look in the morning, and again in the evening? Write or draw what you see, including as much detail as you can.

Did You Know?

In this section you'll read about some insects, animals, and plants that may live in your neighborhood. What do you already know about them? What more would you like to learn?

ANTS

Though some people think ants are bothersome, these tiny insects help our environment. They pollinate some plants, help keep the soil healthy, and spread seeds around so plants can grow. For more information on ants, visit AntWeb at antweb.org.

CROCUSES

Crocuses are *nyctinastic* plants. That means that they close their petals at night and open them with the morning sun. For more information on crocuses, visit the website of The Old Farmer's Almanac at almanac.com/plant/crocuses. To learn more about all kinds of plants, go to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden website at bbg.org/news/category/children_families.

HUMMINGBIRDS

Hummingbirds memorize the location of every hummingbird feeder and flower in their path, so they know where to return each year. For more information on hummingbirds, visit hummingbirds.net.

MOURNING DOVES

Both parents, a male and a female, feed young mourning dove hatchlings. Many bird parents drop food into the mouths of their babies. But mourning dove hatchlings get their food themselves by taking it directly from their parents' open beaks. For more information on mourning doves (and many other birds), visit the Cornell Lab website All About Birds at allaboutbirds.org.

SCARLET RUNNER BEANS

Most parts of the scarlet runner bean plant can be eaten. Bees and hummingbirds love to drink nectar from the flowers. Humans can eat

the flowers. You can eat the green pods as well, cooking them like green beans. If the pods dry out, the seeds inside can be removed, cooked, and eaten like dried beans. Some people also dig up and eat the roots. For more information on scarlet runner beans, visit the Kids Gardening website at kidsgardening.org/growing-guide-scarlet-runner-beans.

Invite Nature in with Recycled Crafts

These activities will help you bring nature close, wherever you are. Ask an adult to help you, and enjoy observing the birds you feed and the plants you grow.

MAKE A COFFEE CONTAINER PLANTER

Materials

a clean, dry coffee can or plastic container
duct tape, permanent markers, paint, stickers, or other art supplies (optional)
rocks or pebbles (ideally the size of large marbles, but any size will work)
potting soil
seeds for planting (such as sunflower, marigold, radish, or scarlet runner bean seeds)

Directions

Decorate the outside of the coffee container with duct tape, permanent marker, or other art supplies—or just leave it as is. Next, layer the

