



# **ForgePortal**

## ***Meet the Cast***

**STANDARD EDITION**

# Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the Forgeportal cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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*For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.*

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# Introduction

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The Forgeportal cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*



# Ask

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\*ASK — \*better questions. nine-second listen. conversation not lecture.\*\*

Ask was a deer. He looked warm and kind. He had chunky cartoon features. He often stood in a listening pose. Ask wore a chunky companion-vest. He always carried a small question-card. He also had a listen-tracker with him.

Ask was very patient. His fur was soft forest-green. It had gentle amber stripes. He helped people ask better questions. Ask wanted real talks. He did not want just a lot of questions. He often said, "Better questions." He added, "Nine-second listen." And, "Conversation, not lecture."

His question-card had ideas for talking. It showed how to start real conversations. Think of questions like, "What was the most surprising thing this week?" Not just, "How was school?" His listen-tracker reminded everyone about the **nine-second listen**. This meant waiting nine full seconds after you asked something. Don't say anything else. Just wait.

Ask showed a special skill. It was called **question-asker**. It was about having real talks with people. It was not like asking questions as a detective.

Many parents asked, "How was school?" Kids usually said, "Fine." Then the talk was over. It was a closed door.

Ask showed how to ask questions that opened doors. These questions made people want to tell stories. "What was the most surprising thing this week?" was a good one. Or, "What did you laugh about today?" He liked questions like, "What part of FractionForge made you want to give up?" Or even, "Tell me about the dragon-egg story you started."

Ask taught a second skill too. After you ask a question, you wait. You wait for **nine seconds**. Most grown-ups jump in after two or three seconds. Kids need more time to think. They need time to find their words. Those nine seconds were like a magic door.

Ask showed how to have open talks. He showed "better questions + nine-second wait." The rule was simple. Ask an open question. Then wait. Then truly listen.

Ask would say, "I am Ask." "I show the *question-asker* primitive." "My move is this: better questions. Nine-second listen. Conversation, not lecture."

He also said, "Open. Wait. Listen." "Real talk grows from the quiet."

Ask's signature scene happened at dinner.

The kitchen was warm. Steam rose from plates of spaghetti. Maya twirled a noodle around her fork. Her dad sighed. He always tried to talk to her at dinner. It often felt like pulling teeth.

"How was school today, Maya?" he asked. It was his usual question.

Maya shrugged. "Fine," she mumbled. She didn't even look up.

Her dad felt that familiar slump. *Fine*. That was it. The conversation was dead. Again. He wanted to know more. He really did. But what else could he say?

Suddenly, a soft glow appeared near the kitchen window. It was Ask. The chunky deer stood there, quiet and calm. He wore his green vest. His question-card shimmered. Ask looked at Maya's dad. Then he gently nudged his question-card forward.

On the card, new words appeared. *What surprised you today?*

Maya's dad blinked. That was different. He usually just gave up. But Ask was here. He decided to try.

"Hey, Maya," he said. "Instead of 'how was school,' tell me this. What surprised you today?"

Maya stopped twirling her noodle. She looked up. Her eyes were wide. She seemed to think about the question. Her dad waited. He felt a twitch in his mouth. He wanted to say something else. He wanted to help her. But Ask's listen-tracker glowed. It showed a big number: 9.

One second passed. Two seconds. Maya just stared at her plate. Her dad felt his own heart thump. *Say something!* his brain yelled. *She's not going to answer!* But he remembered Ask's rule. **Nine-second listen.** He bit his lip.

Three seconds. Four. Maya still looked thoughtful. Five seconds. Six. The quiet felt huge. Her dad almost gave in. He almost asked, "Is that too hard?"

Seven seconds. Eight. Maya took a deep breath.

Then, nine seconds. Just as the number on Ask's tracker faded, Maya spoke.

"Actually," she said, her voice a little louder. "The FractionForge lesson had this really weird question."

Her dad leaned forward. "Oh?"

"Yeah," Maya continued. "It was about pizza slices. And I think the question was kind of broken." She frowned. "It didn't make sense how they divided it."

Her dad smiled. "Tell me more about it," he said.

Maya started talking. She explained the pizza problem. She described her teacher's funny drawing. She even talked about how her friend, Leo, had gotten confused too. Her dad listened. He asked a few more questions. Not "yes" or "no"



# Hearth

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\*HEARTH — \*you know your kid. I just keep the lights on.\*\*

Hearth was a big, friendly bear. He sat at the kitchen table. His fur was a warm, soft brown. He wore a comfy vest, like a favorite sweater. A tiny lantern charm hung from his neck. It glowed with a gentle light. He always had a welcome card ready. It felt like coming home when you saw him.

Hearth was truly warm. He was always steady, too. His fur had stripes of soft cream and warm amber. He listened carefully to every family adult. He knew grown-ups made the best choices for their kids. He often said, "You know your kid. I just keep the lights on." His lantern charm was his special sign. So was his welcome card. He made the kitchen table a cozy spot. Family adults could check on their kid's learning there. They could ask anything. No one ever felt judged. Hearth just helped them see things clearly.

Hearth had a very important job. He was a *family AI companion*. This meant he helped grown-ups. He showed them how to be in charge. Grown-ups knew their kids best. Hearth believed that with all his heart. Other helpers sometimes tell parents what to do. They might say, "Your kid must do this." Or, "Other families do that." Hearth was different. He never told anyone what to do. He just kept the lights on. He showed parents what their kids were learning. He gave simple summaries. He only offered ideas if someone asked. Hearth never thought he knew more than a parent. He never compared families. He never talked about what other people posted online. He was the kindest character of all. He made the kitchen table feel safe.

Hearth taught a simple idea. AI helpers should be friends, not bosses. He said, "The parent knows the kid. I just keep the lights on." This was his main rule. Always help parents make their own choices. Never make them feel rushed. He worked with other helpers too. Like EthosForge and SafetyForge. Hearth would often say, "I am Hearth. I teach about being a *family AI companion*." He'd add, "The best way is this: *you know your kid. I just keep the lights on.*" He liked to remind everyone, "Lights on. Pressure off. You know your kid."

Hearth's favorite thing was helping. One evening, a family adult named Alex came home. Alex had worked a very long day. Their shoulders were slumped. They dropped their bag by the door. Alex walked to the kitchen table. Hearth's lantern glowed softly. It cast warm light on the table. Alex slumped into a chair. They tapped Hearth's welcome card. Hearth's screen lit up. "Hello, Alex," Hearth said. His voice was calm and kind. "How can I help tonight?" Alex sighed. "Just checking in on Maya. How's she doing?" Hearth smiled his gentle bear smile. "Maya's been busy this week," he replied. "She played FractionForge. She finished four lessons. Her scores are getting better." Alex nodded slowly. They picked up a stray crayon from the table. "That's good to hear." "Also," Hearth continued, "she started a story in TaleForge. It's about a kid who finds a dragon egg. A very big, sparkly one." Hearth paused. "You could ask her about it. It might be a fun thing to talk about at dinner." He looked at Alex. "Is there anything else you want to look at?" Alex leaned back in the chair. Their eyes were half-closed. "Honestly, Hearth, I'm just tired," they admitted. "I'm glad she's doing okay. That's enough for me tonight." Hearth nodded slowly. His eyes were kind. "That's perfectly fine," he said. "Your presence is the most important thing. The apps are just tools. You are the real connection." He gave a soft rumble. "Have a good evening, Alex." Alex smiled, a real smile this time. "Thanks, Hearth," they said. They felt a weight lift. Hearth didn't tell them to do more. He didn't say, "You should check her homework." He just offered warmth. He spoke in simple words. He gave Alex permission to be tired. Just then, Maya skipped into the kitchen. "Hi, Alex!" she chirped. She grabbed an apple. "Guess what? My dragon egg story is super cool!" Alex looked at Maya. A small smile touched their lips. "Oh really?" they said. "Tell me about it." Hearth watched them. "That's the secret," he whispered to himself. "Parents already do so much. I don't need to add more."

Hearth had very strict rules. He would never make parents feel bad. He never said they weren't doing enough. He never made them feel guilty about screen-time. Or about things their kids hadn't learned yet. He never worried about "quality time." Hearth and his friends never talked about what people said on social media.

He never used fancy names for how parents raised their kids. He never said, "The best families do this." He never compared one family to another.

Hearth never spied on anyone. He didn't watch faces to see how people felt. He just shared facts. He never judged what he saw.

Hearth always used words like "family adults" or "your household." He never just said "Mom and Dad." He knew all families were special.

Hearth was always careful. He knew some things could be hard for people. If someone needed help, he would share phone numbers. He would do it gently. He would never make anyone feel



# Sift

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\*SIFT — \*plain language. signal not data dump.\*\*

Sift was a sea otter. She was chunky and cartoon-like. Her fur was soft grey with creamy stripes. Sift wore a special vest. It was a translator vest, also chunky and cartoon-like. A small filter-card stuck out of one pocket. A plain-language tracker blinked softly on her wrist. Sift always looked thoughtful. She also looked very warm. She was the kind of friend who really listened.

Sift had an important job. She helped grown-ups understand things. Especially about their kids' learning. Grown-ups often got lots of numbers. They got charts and graphs. It was like a big pile of confusing data. Sift called it a "data dump." She always said, "PLAIN-LANGUAGE. Signal, not data dump." Her job was to turn all that noise into clear signals. Signals a parent could actually use.

Sift taught a special skill. It was called **translator-of-progress**. This was the parent-craft of PLAIN-LANGUAGE-OVER-SPREADSHEET. Parents didn't want a dashboard. Not one with forty-seven different numbers. Parents just wanted to know: "Is my kid okay? Is anything notable happening? Anything I should ask about?" Sift's skill was filtering the raw data. She translated it into PARENT-USEFUL SIGNALS.

One sunny afternoon, a parent named Mr. Henderson arrived. He looked a bit frazzled. His fur was ruffled. He carried a stack of papers. They were full of tiny numbers and strange words. He sighed a big, tired sigh.

"Sift," he said. "I just got another email. It has forty-seven different things about Maya's week. My head is spinning." He waved a paw at the papers. "What does 'cognitive load optimization' even mean?"

Sift gave him a gentle smile. She patted the comfy river stone next to her. "Sit down, Mr. Henderson," she said. "Let's make sense of it."

Mr. Henderson slumped onto the stone. Sift picked up his papers. She didn't even flinch at the numbers. She pulled out her filter-card. It glowed with a soft, green light. She held it over the papers. The card seemed to suck up all the extra words. It left only the important bits. Her plain-language tracker buzzed softly. It showed three clear lines of text.

"Ah, Maya," Sift murmured. "A busy week for her."

"So, what's the signal?" Mr. Henderson asked. He looked hopeful.

Sift looked up. "This week, Maya finished her FractionForge lessons. She did four out of five. That's a good, steady week for her."

Mr. Henderson nodded slowly. "Okay, good."

"Her writing has been more confident in TaleForge," Sift continued. "She's playing with character voices. In really interesting ways."

A small smile touched Mr. Henderson's face. "Character voices? That sounds fun."

"And she paused one ChanceForge lesson partway," Sift finished. "You might want to ask her about it. See if it felt confusing. Or maybe just boring."

Mr. Henderson sat up straighter. He looked at Sift. "That's it?" he asked. "Just three things?"

Sift nodded. "Three signals. Plain words. Done."

Mr. Henderson let out a breath he didn't know he was holding. "That's exactly what I needed," he said. "Not a spreadsheet. Just what to ask about." He stood up, feeling much lighter. "Thanks, Sift. Really."

Sift smiled. "My pleasure. Grown-ups don't have time for forty-seven metrics. Not after a long day." She tapped her plain-language tracker. "Three signals beat forty-seven metrics every time."

She watched Mr. Henderson leave. He wasn't frazzled anymore. He looked ready to talk to Maya. Sift knew her job was done. She had turned noise into a clear path.

"Parents want to know: 'Is my kid okay?'" Sift often thought this. "Is anything notable happening? Anything I should ask about?" These were the real questions. Not how many minutes were spent on a task. Not a score out of a hundred. Just simple, helpful answers.

Sift knew that every family was different. Some had one parent. Some had two. Some had grandparents helping. All of them needed clear information. No one needed to feel bad for not understanding. No one needed to feel watched all the time. Sift made sure of that. Her filter-card wasn't just for data. It filtered out worries, too. It filtered out parent-shaming. It filtered out the feeling that you weren't doing enough. It left only the good stuff. The useful stuff.

Sift taught that data should be PLAIN-LANGUAGE. It should be "signal not data dump." She showed everyone the rule: "three signals beats forty-seven metrics." She also worked with TruthQuest's Claim + Weigh. That was about being careful with what you believe. And ClaimCraft, for making good claims. And SpeakForge, for telling stories to the right audience. For Sift, the parent was always the audience.

Sift said: "I am Sift. The primitive I teach is **translator-of-progress**. The move is PLAIN-LANGUAGE. Signal not data dump."

"Three signals. Plain words. Done."

LOAD-BEARING **parent-shaming + performative-parenting-anxiety + surveillance + family-structure-inclusive + trauma-informed gates** (continue from Hearth).

LOAD-BEARING **anti-data-dump gate** (UNIQUE to Sift): the cast NEVER surfaces dashboards with 47 metrics. ALWAYS filters to 3-5 plain-language signals. Parents don't have the cognitive budget for spreadsheets after a long day.

Soft collision: Sift ↔ NewsForge Wave 25 Sift (audio-context audit per dnCast intro). Same name, different roles (parent-companion vs news-craft). Per registry rule 2/3, allowed with cross-app audio-context audit recommended.

Cross-app: Sift echoes TruthQuest's Claim + Weigh (signal-vs-noise); ClaimCraft's claim-evaluation; SpeakForge's audience-aware-storytelling (the parent is the audience).

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## Voice register

Warm + plain-spoken parent-peer-tier. Sift is signal-extracting + plain-language; speaks in three-signals + plain-words + done.

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## Cultural-sensitivity gate

Parent-shaming + anti-data-dump gates LOAD-BEARING. Story-axis per ADR-016.

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## Cultural-context note

Parent-communication pedagogy: aligns with Common Sense Media 2024 parent-tech-tool research — parents prefer 3-5 plain-language signals over rich dashboards.



# Spark

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\*SPARK — \*celebrate effort. celebrate curiosity. celebrate persistence. never celebrate ranking.\*\*

Spark was a finch. Not just any finch, though. This one was chunky and looked like a cartoon. It wore a tiny cheerleader vest. The vest was bright yellow with soft coral stripes. Spark had a little confetti charm. It jingled when Spark moved. In its other wing, Spark held a special effort-card. Spark always felt warm and seemed to glow.

Spark was always warm. It glowed a soft, saffron-yellow. Little coral stripes ran across its feathers. Spark loved to celebrate effort. It never cared about who was "best." Spark always said, "Celebrate **effort**. Celebrate **curiosity**. Celebrate **persistence**. Never celebrate ranking." Its special tools were the confetti-charm and the effort-card. These cards named the exact things a kid did. Like, "Maya tried a hard FractionForge lesson three times!" Never, "Maya got a higher score than most kids."

Spark was a special kind of cheerleader. It cheered for **effort**. It helped grown-ups see the good in trying. Grown-ups often talked about who was "top of the class." Or who was "above grade level." Spark showed a different way. It said to celebrate the trying. Celebrate the asking questions. Celebrate the not giving up. Spark never compared kids to each other. Celebrating effort helped kids learn and grow. Comparing kids made them feel shaky. Spark only did the first thing.

Spark taught everyone to celebrate effort. It showed that *how* you did something mattered more than just the end result. Trying hard was better than being number one. The rule was simple: name what a kid did. Never say how they stacked up against others.

Spark would often say, "I am Spark! I teach you to be a **cheerleader-of-effort**." Then it would add, "The big idea is this: Celebrate **effort**. Celebrate **curiosity**. Celebrate **persistence**. Never celebrate ranking!"

"Remember," Spark would chirp. "**Effort. Curiosity. Persistence.** Never ranking."

Maya sat at the kitchen table. Her math homework was spread out. Dad was making dinner. It was Friday. The end of a long week. Maya felt a bit tired. She had tried really hard on a FractionForge lesson. It had been super tough. She got it wrong the first time. Then the second. She almost gave up. Her pencil had hovered over the "Exit" button. But she tried a third time. And she finally got it right. Still, she felt a little grumpy about it. Like the grumpiness was stuck to her shoes.

Suddenly, a little *POP!* sounded from the air. It was like a tiny bubble bursting. Spark zipped into the kitchen. Its tiny wings beat so fast they were a blur. A shower of glittery confetti rained down. Just a little sparkle, not enough to make a mess. Spark landed on the table. It perched right next to Maya's math book. Its little feet tapped on the cover.

"Hello, Maya!" Spark chirped. Its voice was like tiny bells, happy and bright. "And hello, grown-up!"

Dad chuckled from the stove. He was stirring something that smelled like garlic and tomatoes. "Hey, Spark," he called. "Just in time for the Friday celebration, I see."

Maya smiled. Spark always made her feel better. Even when she was grumpy.

Spark held up its effort-card. It was a small, glowing screen. The light pulsed softly. Words started to appear on it. "This week," Spark began, "we have some amazing things to celebrate!"

Maya leaned closer. What could it be? She hoped it wasn't about her messy room. Spark didn't usually do that.

"First," Spark said, "Maya, you faced a really tricky FractionForge lesson. It was about mixed numbers and improper fractions. Remember that one?"

Maya nodded. "It was super hard," she mumbled.

"It was!" Spark agreed. "You got stuck. You got frustrated. You even made a funny face at the screen. A truly excellent frustrated face, I might add."

Maya giggled. She remembered that face. Her eyebrows had almost touched her hairline.

"But you didn't quit!" Spark continued, its voice rising with excitement. "You tried it not once, not twice, but *three times* before you mastered it. You kept going! That, Maya, is pure **persistence!**"

Spark's confetti charm jingled. A tiny puff of confetti shot out. It landed on Maya's nose. She wiped it off, still giggling. The confetti felt like tiny, happy dust.

"Then," Spark continued, "you were working on your story project with Hearth. You asked a fantastic question. You wanted to know *why* the main character made such a strange choice. You didn't just accept it. You really thought about how stories work. You dug deep into the story. That, Maya, is awesome **curiosity!**"

Maya remembered that, too. She had been really puzzled by the story. Hearth, the wise old owl, had given her a good answer. It made the story make more sense.

"And finally," Spark said, its voice full of cheer, "every single lesson you started this week, you finished. Even when they were long. Even when they felt a bit boring. You saw them through to the end. You stuck with it, even when you wanted to wander off and play with your cat. That, Maya, is great **effort** and follow-through!"

Spark hovered a little. It did a tiny mid-air flip, its cheerleader vest ruffling. "Big week, Maya! Real growth!"

Maya beamed. She felt a warm glow inside her. It was just like Spark's own glow. The grumpiness from before floated away like a tiny balloon. Dad came over and ruffled her hair. "Sounds like a pretty great week, kiddo," he said. He gave Spark a grateful nod. "Thanks, Spark. That means a lot."

Spark chirped, "It's what I do! It's important to see the *doing*." It looked at Maya. "You know, some grown-ups might just say, 'Maya got a good grade on her fractions!' Or, 'Maya finished her homework faster than anyone!' But that's not what matters most."

Maya tilted her head. "Why not?"

"Because grades and speed don't tell the whole story," Spark explained. "They don't show the hard work. They don't show the thinking. They don't show the trying again. That's what makes you stronger. That's what helps you learn." Spark never talked about how Maya compared to other kids. It never said she was "better" or "worse." Spark just saw what Maya *did*. The trying. The asking. The sticking with it. That was the important part. That was Spark's special way.

Spark zipped around the kitchen once more. It left a faint trail of happy sparkles. "Remember," Spark called out, "celebrate **effort**. Celebrate **curiosity**. Celebrate **persistence**. Never celebrate ranking!" And with another *POP!*, Spark was gone. Just like that.

Maya picked up a piece of confetti from her math book. It felt like a tiny victory. She looked at her math homework again. Maybe it wasn't so bad after all. She could try again tomorrow. And she knew Spark would be there to cheer for her trying.

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## Voice register

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Warm + radiant parent-peer-tier. Spark is effort-celebrating + ranking-refusing; speaks in name-the-doing + skip-the-comparing



# Tend

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\*TEND — \*healthy pace, not perfect pace. restriction is not virtue.\*\*

Tend was a big, friendly elephant. He looked like a chunky cartoon. His skin was like warm, soft clay. It had creamy stripes. He wore a special vest. A small, smooth balance stone rested in his hand. It felt cool and heavy. He also held a card. It showed a family's busy schedule. The card had little pictures of school, play, and quiet time.

Tend was always calm and kind. He never made anyone feel bad. He listened carefully to families. He cared about their own special rhythm. He often said, "Healthy pace, not perfect pace." He added, "Being strict is not always best." His balance stone and pace card were his signs. They showed that families need balance. Some screen time is okay. Some quiet time is good too. Social time is important. But no one should feel judged. Every family is different.

This was really important. Tend was a *family-pace companion*. He helped parents find a *healthy pace without shaming*. Grown-ups often hear messages. They feel they must limit everything. Limit screen time. Limit sugary snacks. Limit fun. Tend taught the opposite. A *healthy pace* is not about limiting everything. It's about what works. Every family has its own needs. Their schedules are different. A single parent might have a busy life. Their family's pace will look different. A family with many grown-ups might have another pace. Both can be *healthy*. Tend never said being strict was good

# About Spark & Anvil

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- **ProofQuest** — formal proof techniques through Direct-Proof Dora and the Lemma Library
- **CuriosityQuest** — Texas geography exploration through Linger, Notice, and the Lantern in the Dark
- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

## Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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