



CLASS IS IN SESSION ON THE SET OF

# 'ABBOTT ELEMENTARY'



BY ALEXIS SOLOSKI



The ABC sitcom "Abbott Elementary" hires about 150 young actors every season. "We just try to look for real kids that you would see in a real elementary school," the show's casting director says.

**WILLIS KWAKYE** has been going to the same school since 2021. He's an eighth grader now, a veteran. He knows his way around the classrooms and the cafeteria. And sometimes, he says, when he's in his uniform with a math worksheet in front of him, "I can even think it's real school for a little bit."

Wait. What?

Willis, who's 13, was talking about the set of "Abbott Elementary," a sitcom that takes place at a school in Philadelphia. The show, which is in its third

season, focuses on teachers, but there are also a lot of kid actors who play students. About 150 kids appear every season, raising their hands in classrooms, scurrying past one another in the hallways and giggling at their teachers' silliness.

The idea of acting in movies or TV may sound amazing. In reality, sets can be stressful places for kid actors. The work is hard and there can be a lot of pressure to do everything exactly right. But the people running "Abbott Elementary" wanted to do things

differently. They encourage the kids to talk to one another and make friends — and during filming, to just be themselves. In classroom scenes, instead of having to sit perfectly still, it's OK for them to yawn or stretch or make a face. "It feels a lot like school," says Arianna White, 13. "Except we're just filming and there's a lot of cuts." And then, there is actual school, too: There are real classrooms on the set (which is in Los Angeles) where the kid actors have three hours of lessons every day.

"Abbott Elementary" is Willis's first acting gig, so he doesn't have much to compare it with. But he does remember all the times the adults on set have been kind to him, like when Janelle James, who plays the principal, comforted him after he flubbed a line. Or the time Quinta Brunson, who created and stars in the show, greeted him in the hallway and thanked him for being there. It's all made him think that acting is for him. "Everything's really fun to do," he says. "It really makes me want to do it more." ♦



## MY NEW FAVORITE SONG



**'IS IT OVER NOW? (TAYLOR'S VERSION)'**  
by Taylor Swift  
3 minutes 41 seconds

**BY ISHAAN MANI, 11,**  
San Mateo, Calif.

**I LOVE TAYLOR** Swift's songs, because they're about things that actually happen to her. This song is especially good, because the lyrics really flow, and the feeling of the song surprises you. It starts out sad, and then it gets happy. Around the second minute, there's a big change of energy. I love it when a song starts out one way and then changes its mood. It means it has a mysteriousness in it, which makes me want to listen to it again. I've probably listened to this one at least 500 times! *Interview by Charley Locke*

CAILEY FLEMING HAS NEW CO-STARS.

## THEY'RE IMAGINARY FRIENDS.

BY JENNA MAROTTA



In the new movie "IF," Bea (played by Cailey Fleming) can see other people's imaginary friends. This one's name is Blue.

### HAVING AN IMAGINARY FRIEND

for — you guessed it — imaginary friend. And the movie stars the real-life humans Ryan Reynolds and Cailey Fleming alongside a bunch of wacky animated creatures. Cailey, 17, has also acted in two "Star Wars" films and the TV show "The Walking Dead." She says that making the new movie was "the most magical and amazing experience I've ever had." She recently chatted with The New York Times for Kids about it over video from her home in Carriere, Miss. An edited version of the conversation follows.

**IS ALMOST** a requirement when you're little. But at some point, we leave them behind. So what happens to them? That's the question at the heart of the movie "IF," which hits theaters on May 17. IF stands

**NYT Kids: Tell us about your character, Bea.**  
Cailey: She's a young girl who's going through kind of a tough time. Then she discovers that she can see everyone's imaginary friends. Ryan's character is the only other person that can see them. So they go on this adventure, trying to connect IFs with new kids, because their old kids have grown up.

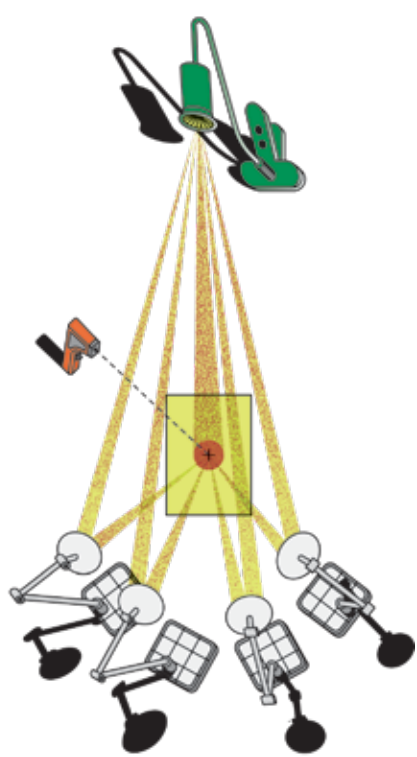
**How did you get into acting?**  
I've wanted to be on TV since I was 4. At first my mom was like, Aw, that's cute. Finally, when I was 7, she saw me acting out a scene in the middle of our hallway. And she was like, Oh, she's serious. So she registered me at this acting school near New Orleans, and I got my first agent.

**You're also a dancer, and you've got a big scene in the movie where you're dancing with the imaginary friends.**  
Originally I wasn't going to be in that scene. It was just going to be the IFs. But one day the movie's choreographer taught me a piece of the routine. She videoed it and sent it to John Krasinski, the director. Then he emailed me, "OH, MY GOSH, YOU CAN DANCE!" And I was like, "Yeah, I've been dancing since I was 1." He had no idea. So he made me dance on the stage with the IFs.

**Did you have an imaginary friend growing up?**  
I didn't, but I think they are so important! They let kids be creative, which is something I got to experience through acting. Acting allows me to keep that imagination flowing through playing different characters. Kind of like IFs do! ♦



Science



THE KID WHO BUILT A MINIATURE DEATH RAY

BY AMANDA SCHUPAK

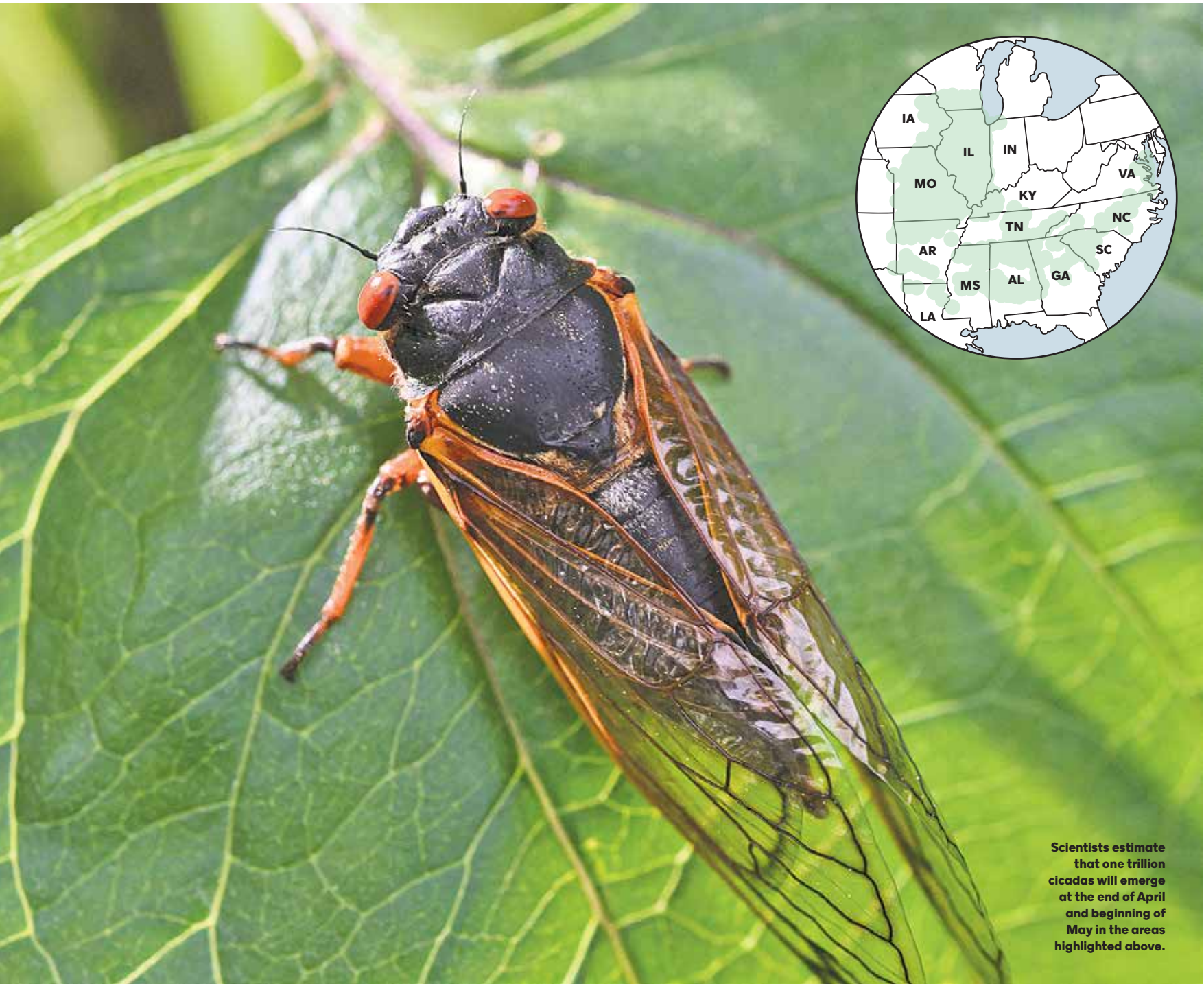
**THE YEAR: 213 B.C.** The place: Syracuse, an ancient Greek city on the Ionian Sea. Dozens of Roman battleships are attacking. But the Syracusans have a secret weapon, invented by the mathematician Archimedes. Along the city wall, soldiers position giant curved mirrors just so. As the sun's rays bounce off the mirrors and onto the Roman ships, they concentrate into powerful beams, heating up the hulls — until they get so hot, they burst into flames!

At least, that's the story of Archimedes' Death Ray, according to ancient historians. Today's historians aren't so sure it ever existed. But when Brenden Sener, who lives in London, Canada, learned about it last year, he had one thought: This is the perfect science-fair project! "Who wouldn't want to do something about a death ray?" says Brenden, 13. So he set out to recreate the weapon on a miniature scale.

He bought four small mirrors and a heat lamp. ("Concave mirrors are angled inward," Brenden explains. "They're ideal for focusing light.") He drew an X on a piece of cardboard, shined the light on it and took its temperature with a thermometer gun. Then, he placed one mirror to reflect the light onto the X. Then he added another, and so on, taking the temperature each time. (Check out the setup in the illustration above.) With each new mirror, the X got hotter.

Does that mean that Archimedes' Death Ray could have actually worked? Brenden thinks so. Christopher S. Baird, a physics professor at West Texas A&M University, isn't convinced, but he thinks Brenden "did a fun, interesting experiment and did it well."

Brenden won gold at his school science fair. He also won at a citywide science fair. In January, he even published a paper about it in *The Canadian Science Fair Journal*. He says he'd love to make a bigger, historically accurate version one day. Don't worry: He promises not to aim it at anyone. ♦



Scientists estimate that one trillion cicadas will emerge at the end of April and beginning of May in the areas highlighted above.

COMING SOON TO A TREE NEAR YOU: SO MANY CICADAS

BY AIMEE ORTIZ

**I T SOUNDS LIKE** a horror movie: After spending years buried in the ground, a horde of buzzing bugs dig themselves up. They crawl out, covered in mud, and land on *everything*.

It's not make-believe. Over the next few weeks, two broods of cicadas will emerge in the United States. At their peak, there could be a trillion of these inchlong, red-eyed critters buzzing around. What the heck is going on?

Compared with other insects, which lay eggs each spring and die off in the fall and winter, these cicadas have an unusual childhood. When baby cicadas hatch, they burrow deep underground. Then they spend years

there developing. After 13 or 17 years, they crawl out. They live for just a few weeks before the adults lay new eggs and die off and the cycle starts again. (To learn more about it, turn the page!)

This year will be extra buggy, because instead of one cicada group (called a brood) coming out, two will emerge this spring. They're called the Great Southern Brood and the Northern Illinois Brood. They won't all be in one place: They're expected to reach 16 states, from Wisconsin to Louisiana. (See the map above for more info.) The last time these two broods came out at the same time, it was 1803. Thomas Jefferson was president!

"Nobody alive today will see it happen again," says Floyd W. Shockley, a bug expert at the Smithsonian.

He estimates that the one trillion cicadas coming out this spring would stretch 15,782,828 miles if they were placed end to end — to the moon and back 33 times. That's a whole lot of bugs.

Shockley says this year's emergence will be "intense." And since they're "not great fliers and even worse landers," you might spot a lot of squished bugs on sidewalks and city streets, which "could conceivably make things slick," he says. Gross.

But if you're not a fan, don't freak. These insects are totally harmless, and they'll be gone before you know it: They'll all die in about four to six weeks. So embrace the *bzzzzz*-iest month of your lifetime while it lasts. It won't happen again for another 221 years. ♦

TOILET TO TAP RECYCLING WASTEWATER ISN'T GROSS. IT'S SMART!

BY CHRISTINE NGUYEN · ILLUSTRATION BY CRISTINA SPANÒ

**WOULD YOU DRINK** a glass of water that had been flushed down someone else's toilet? In December, California gave the OK for cities and towns to take water from their sewers, purify it and send it straight back to houses to use as drinking water. Totally disgusting, right? Nope! It's actually really smart. Climate change is making California hotter and drier. By 2040, the state's water supply is expected to shrink by 10 percent. So it needs to figure out how to save water wherever it can. And if you're grossed out by the idea, know this: Recycled purified wastewater will be as clean and fresh as any bottled water you could buy at the store. Often, it'll be even cleaner. That's because it'll go through a major process in which it's treated for every possible germ and pollutant. Water companies will still need to sign up to send purified water straight to homes, and the projects will take several years. But here's how it will eventually work.



- FLUSH!**

Everything that leaves your toilet flows into the tunnels of the sewage system. It meets up with other wastewater, like from sinks, and heads to a treatment center. There, giant combs scrape out the chunks of trash, while strainers sift out little bits, like sand, and skimmers lift out grease.
- MUNCH, MUNCH**

What's left is a cloudy liquid that's still pretty disgusting! Friendly bacteria that eat nasty germs and muck are added to the water to feast, along with chemicals and light that kill more of them. Then the future drinking water gets piped to a purification center for a few more steps.
- FILTER**

Lots of filters are up next. First, a gas is added that takes apart pollutants to make them easier to filter out. Then the water flows into straws with teeny-tiny holes in their sides that bacteria can't get through. Another filter stops viruses, medicines, pesticides and microplastics in their tracks.
- ZAP**

As the water whizzes through long tubes, it's zapped by ultraviolet bulbs. (UV light, which is a component of sunlight, kills a lot of things.) Finally, a shot of hydrogen peroxide is added to destroy any remaining unpleasantness.
- AHHH! DELICIOUS.**

In less than a day from first flush, the water at the purification center is so clean, it tastes ... bad. That's because water actually needs minerals in it to taste good. Once those are added back in, the water can be sent to houses to flow out of the tap on demand. Cheers! ♦

**TASTE TEST!**

So now you're convinced the water's clean. But how does it actually taste? We got a sample and asked five kids from San Jose, Calif., to do a blind taste test. The result: None of them could pick out the purified recycled water from a lineup that also included tap water, bottled water and distilled water. And in fact, some of them thought it actually tasted best! Here's what a few had to say.

"I get why people wouldn't want to use the water. Like, I think it's gross. But it smells like nothing. It tastes good — just like water."  
**HELEN NAGLE, 12**

"This is the best water. I thought it would be green and dark."  
**XAVIER HERNANDEZ, 7**

"It tastes like the kind of water I get at hotels."  
**SHIVANI BALA, 12**