



# Bans can Backfire

When rules cause trouble

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.56675/aet3bb>

**ISBN:** 9789403769486

**Design:** DOORLORI / Lori Lenssinck



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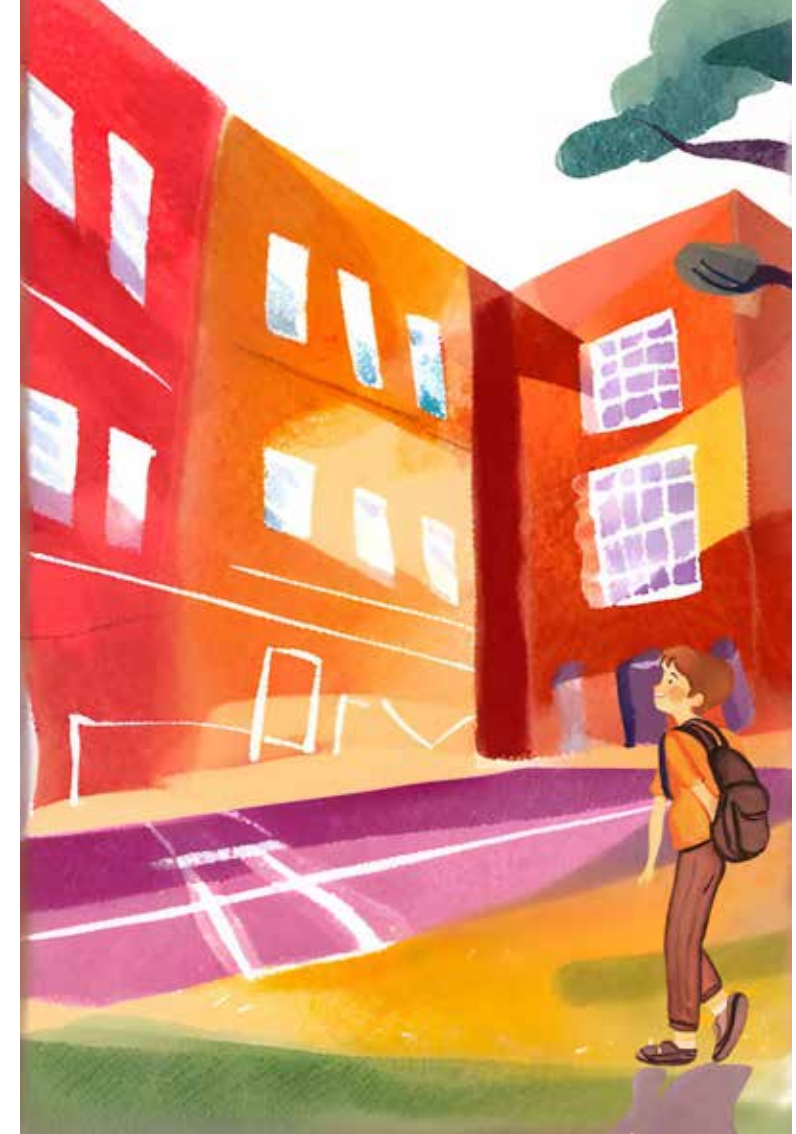
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## Chapter One

# Where a mysterious object appears at school

When Alma and Tim arrived at school that morning, they were very surprised to find the playground completely deserted. Where had all the other kids gone? Usually, the school was teeming with classmates running in all directions, greeting friends, swapping football cards and figurines, or telling their teachers about their weekend. Usually, the air was filled with laughter, shouts and even the occasional tear. But on this day, an eerie silence hung over the schoolyard.





Suddenly, Alma grabbed her brother's sleeve and pulled him towards the school hall, where excited whispers could be heard. All the children were gathered around an object that Tim, who wasn't very tall, couldn't see. Without waiting for him, his sister had already pushed her way through the crowd, using her elbows to reach the mysterious object. A few prods and a few crushed toes later, she stood in front of what looked like a giant fridge. Through the glass gleamed tantalising pink cans with the gold brand name 'Pinkamax' shining brightly.

"Have you ever had one?" a familiar voice asked. Alma turned to find herself face to face with her friend Joan.

"No, have you?"

"I've had it once. My Irish cousin Louise brought some when she came to visit. It's really good."

"Then what are we waiting for?" exclaimed Alma.

She took a coin from her pocket and placed it firmly in the slot of the machine. It made a mechanical sound and spat out a pink tin into the dispenser. Alma grabbed it decisively, turned to the awestruck crowd

of children, opened it and took a long sip. A wonderful taste filled her mouth, thousands of tiny bubbles tickled her tongue, and for a brief moment she felt a perfect sense of bliss. But as soon as the liquid was swallowed, the feeling disappeared. Immediately, Alma eagerly took another sip, then another, until the last drop was gone. Raising the empty can triumphantly in the air, she declared dramatically: "De-li-cious!"

That was all it took. Within moments, every child was frantically rummaging through their pockets and schoolbags in search of a coin or two.



Within minutes, a long queue had formed outside the new machine, and within hours the whole school was filled with children sipping the precious drink. The bins overflowed with pink cans, and teachers quickly noticed a change in their students' behaviour. Not only did they spend all their breaks queuing for Pinkamax, but many

were even late for class. The drink also had an energising effect on them, making classroom management impossible. Pupils couldn't concentrate for more than five minutes; they stood up for no reason, chatted loudly, played with their stationery and constantly asked to go to the toilet. The teachers complained to the headmaster, Mr Sobek, who decided that something had to be done – and quickly.



## Chapter Two

# Where Mr Sobek takes drastic action

The following Monday, Tim arrived at school alone because his sister was unwell. When he saw the glum faces of his classmates, he knew something was wrong. With a sinking feeling, he rushed to the assembly hall and was horrified to discover that the Pinkamax machine had been removed over the weekend. The empty spot where it once stood was surrounded by dazed children, their arms limp, some still clutching the coins they had prepared earlier that morning to buy the delicious pink drink before classes began. A sign had been posted in its place:

*“By order of the headmaster, and for the welfare and peace of all, students no longer have access to the Pinkamax vending machine.”*



“The Pinkamax boxes aren’t on sale here yet,” Joan explained. “The company that makes them wanted to test them in a few places first, to see

“I don’t care about their stupid machine!” one child suddenly declared. Tim recognised Manuel, a boy in Alma’s class. “We’ll just buy Pinkamax somewhere else, that’s all!” he continued defiantly.

“It’s not that simple,” replied Joan, who had approached the small group. “I overheard Mr Sobek talking to a parent and he explained that the machine had been sent to the school as an experiment.” “Experiment?” Tim asked. “What do you mean?”

if people liked them. That’s why they sent the vending machine to the school”.

“To test Pinkamax on children!” Tim exclaimed.

“Exactly,” Joan confirmed. “At first Mr Sobek thought it was a fun idea, especially as the cans were free if he agreed to install the machine in the school.”

“And what about our money?” Manuel protested. “All the coins I spent – where did they go?”

“The school kept them to pay for the end of year play,” Joan explained.

“The Drama Club is rehearsing a play about...”

“That’s all very nice,” Tim interrupted, “but what have they done with the machine?”

“That’s the mystery,” Joan sighed, shrugging her shoulders.

### Chapter Three

## Where Alma and Tim discover a hidden treasure

When Tim got home, he went straight to his sister's room. He found her still in her pyjamas, idly scrolling through her phone while absentmindedly finishing off a box of caramelised almonds she had received for her birthday. Unlike him, who would have loved to spend all day reading comics in bed, he knew Alma hated being alone at home with no one to talk to. To distract her, Tim told her about the sad fate of the Pinkamax machine.

"This is outrageous!" Alma fumed, sitting up in bed. "They can't do this



to us!"

"I'm afraid they can," Tim replied resignedly.

"Well, we're not just going to sit back and take it," Alma insisted. "In fact, I have an idea. Come on," she said, suddenly standing up and starting to get dressed.

"You don't look well. I think you should stay home..." Tim hesitated, already suspecting that his sister was about to drag him into an ad-

venture that would probably get them into trouble.

"Don't worry, I'm feeling much better!" Alma said with a broad grin. "Come on, don't be a wimp."

She grabbed two large rucksacks they usually used for holidays and threw her coat on. Intrigued and a little worried, Tim followed her.



When they arrived at the school, Tim hesitated again. It was strictly forbidden to enter after hours. Tired of her brother's hesitation, Alma pushed open the school gate, which was always left unlocked on Monday evenings because of the late Drama Club rehearsals. After a few mo-

ments of hesitation, Tim followed her inside.

It was eerie to walk into the school as night fell. Tim shivered. The shadows of the trees against the darkening sky seemed huge and menacing. Suddenly aware that Alma was no longer by his side, he ran after her, catching up just as she slipped into the building. She led him through a maze of corridors before entering a storage room where she switched on



the light. Tim blinked against the harsh glare of the fluorescent lights. As his eyes adjusted, he noticed a faint pink glow. Looking closer, he realised it was coming from a huge stack of boxes marked 'Pinkamax'.

"I knew it!" Alma exclaimed triumphantly.

"How did you know they kept the cans in the storeroom?" Tim asked in astonishment.

"When you told me that Pinkamax wasn't sold here yet, I thought that the school must have received a large supply to refill the machine," Alma explained. "Come on, help me!"

She rushed to the nearest box, tore it open... and let out a cry of disappointment.

The box was empty. Desperately, she opened the next one. And the next. But they were all empty. Frustrated, she kicked the first empty box and dragged her brother grumblingly towards the exit.

They had just stepped back into the dark courtyard when they suddenly





bumped into large plastic containers. These were the school's rubbish bins, usually left by the caretaker near the gate. Hidden in the night, they had almost walked right into them.

Tim suddenly had an idea. He lifted the lid of one of the bins, reached inside – and pulled out a bright pink unopened tin. Alma stared at him in amazement.

“You found them!” she whispered excitedly. “Just in time, before the school throws them all out!”

She opened her rucksack and began to stuff it with tins. Tim hesitated. Was this really the right thing to do? Sneaking into school was one thing, but taking the cans was another. But, he reasoned, the school had thrown them away, so they clearly didn't want them. Besides, the rubbish collectors would come at dawn.

Loaded with their heavy backpacks, the children hurried home, thrilled with their discovery.



## Chapter Four

# Where a strange business begins at school

Alma couldn't resist very long telling Joan about her Pinkamax treasure. Her friend immediately begged her for some, and soon another pupil spotted one in Joan's bag. Seeing his desperate and envious look, Joan directed him to Alma. Within days, word had spread around the school.

At first, Alma and Tim were happy to share a few tins with their classmates. But they only managed to get about fifty cans that night, and soon they were running out. That's when they started to be more selective about who they gave the cans to. Some students, eager to keep drinking Pinkamax, offered to buy the cans at the same price they had

paid for them at the machine. Alma and Tim quickly agreed and decided to use the money to buy several boxes of caramelised almonds, one of their favourite snacks.

“I liked it better when you gave the drinks away for free,” Manuel grumbled one day as he handed over a couple of coins.

“If you don’t like it, just stop coming for more. Nobody’s forcing you,” Alma replied, avoiding his gaze.

She handed him a tin and quickly shoved the coins into her pocket.

“We’d better not stay here too long,” she added hastily.

Bringing the tins back to school had indeed become risky. Mr Sobek had quickly realised that pupils were still drinking Pinkamax, and he was fu-



rious. He soon put up a new sign in the playground: “*Drinking Pinkamax on school premises is strictly forbidden. Any student caught with a can will face severe consequences*”. The threat didn’t deter the children – it only made them more careful. Alma and Tim now only handed out cans in a hidden corner behind the school, away from prying eyes. And because of the extra risk, they doubled the price.

As Alma walked away from their secret exchange spot, Manuel caught up with her again.

“I could get Pinkamax somewhere else, you know...” he said mysteriously.

“What do you mean?” Alma frowned.

“I heard that your friend Joan also sells Pinkamax. And for a lower price.”

“That’s impossible! Where would she get more cans from?” Alma asked suspiciously.

“Her Irish cousin brought a whole suitcase full when she visited last weekend.”

“That’s nonsense!”

“We’ll see,” Manuel shrugged and walked away.

## Chapter Five

# Where Joan gets into trouble

It had been three days since Alma had last spoken to Joan. She felt betrayed and angry. Many students now preferred to buy Pinkamax from Joan, who had started selling her stock clandestinely in the same hidden spot behind the school. That's where disaster struck.



Look up highlighted words in the glossary at the end!

One evening, three older pupils approached Joan. Before she had time to react, they grabbed her bag and ran off. Luckily Joan wasn't hurt, but she was terrified. Shaking and in tears, she rushed home and immediately called Alma to tell her what had happened. As soon as Alma heard her friend's story, she forgot all about their



quarrel. Her hands clenched into fists. She was angry but determined. They had to find a way to get back the stolen bag – and more importantly, the precious tins. Even if this meant hurting others, or getting hurt.

Tim quickly realised that his sister was up to something. It didn't take him long to get the whole story out of her. But for once he wasn't afraid. Not of getting caught, not of getting

into trouble. This was too serious. And Tim knew there was only one thing he could do.

When Grandma Arlette heard her grandson's story, she was shocked. The very next day she arranged a meeting with Mr Sobek, the headmaster, to demand that he restore security around the school and put an end



to this absurd underground traffic ✱ of pink cans. Mr Sobek, furious that his bans were being ignored and that his school was in such disarray, agreed to meet them in his office immediately. Despite Alma and Tim's desperate protests, Granny Arlette insisted that they accompany her to the meeting.

"Madam," Mr Sobek began, "I want to thank you for bringing to my attention the chaos in my school."

"It is not the chaos that concerns me," Granny Arlette replied sternly, "it is the violence that is beginning to take hold among your pupils."

"Absolutely, absolutely," Mr Sobek agreed, nodding. "It's intolerable, and I'm glad you had the wisdom to bring the culprits here." He shot a sharp glance at Alma and Tim, who shrank into their chairs.

"The culprits?" Granny Arlette asked, raising an eyebrow. "Mr Headmaster, the only culprit in this room... is you."



## Chapter Six

# Where Granny Arlette Proposes a Solution

Mr Sobek was stunned into silence. Alma and Tim turned to their grandmother in surprise. Granny Arlette sat up straight in her chair, clearly enjoying the effect of her words.

"What do you mean?" Mr Sobek finally muttered. "I did everything I could to stop this problem! As soon as I realised the damage this ridiculous drink was



causing, I removed the machine, threw away all the remaining cans and strictly forbid students from drinking Pinkamax on school premises.”

“Oh, you’ve certainly done a lot,” Granny Arlette agreed. “No one denies that. But you have to admit – your plan didn’t work very well.”

“What do you mean?” Mr Sobek asked, frowning.

“Well,” Granny Arlette said with an ironic smile, “your pupils have never drank so much Pinkamax as they are drinking now.”

“These little troublemakers have no respect for the rules!” Mr Sobek

snapped, glaring severely at Alma and Tim.

“Rules or no rules,” Granny Arlette said unperturbed, “the consequences of your ban have been disastrous. A student was attacked because of that drink! We’re lucky nothing worse happened...”

“The students responsible will be severely punished,” Mr Sobek assured her.

“Perhaps,” Granny Arlette agreed. “But that won’t solve the real problem.”



Mr Sobek looked frustrated. “So what do you suggest I do instead? The Pinkamax craze is disrupting classes, filling the school with litter and making my teachers miserable! I must do something!”

“Of course something must be done,” said Granny Arlette.

“Exactly!” Mr Sobek said, relieved that she had finally understood.

“But not this,” Granny Arlette added firmly. “Perhaps you could start by explaining to the students why you think they should drink less Pinkamax?”

Mr Sobek didn’t answer. He suddenly realised that he had never really discussed the problem with the pupils. The thought unsettled him. Behind his stern expression, he genuinely cared about his students, and had truly believed that banning Pinkamax was the best decision.

Sensing his hesitation, Granny Arlette pressed on.

“When you saw that the children kept drinking Pinkamax even after the machine was removed, you could have set some fair rules instead of enforcing a harsh, absolute prohibition.” ✖

“Fair rules?” Mr Sobek repeated gruffly, though his tone betrayed a flicker of curiosity.

## Chapter Seven

# Where the Drama Club receives a gift



The school year was drawing to a close. Things had returned to normal at Alma and Tim's school, and what Mr Sobek still referred to in his most solemn voice as "The Pinkamax Affair" was a distant memory.

That night was the end of year play, and Alma and Tim were excited to see the drama club's performance, with Joan in it. Before heading to his seat, Tim made a quick detour to the school hall, where a new vending machine had been installed. Unlike the old one, this one offered

a selection of drinks that were healthier than Pinkamax. It was one of the decisions taken at the big meeting after Granny Arlette's talk with the headmaster.

Everyone had been invited to take part in the discussion – even the parents. And what a discussion it was. Manuel's mother had argued vehemently for a total ban on Pinkamax, citing safety concerns. Meanwhile, Alma and Tim's father had suggested that instead of banning it altogether, they should simply regulate how and when Pinkamax could be consumed. Mrs Bril, Alma's teacher, had suggested moving the vending machine to the staff room. Joan, on the other hand, had proudly announced that her cousin Louise could arrange for regular deliveries of Pinkamax to the school at a discount. ✖

"No need for that," Manuel had cut in. "The company has just announced that Pinkamax will be available in every shop in town from next week." "Disaster!" Mr Sobek had groaned, already imagining his school being flooded with pink cans once again.



“No need to panic,” Alma and Tim’s father had said calmly. “If anything, I think it’s a good thing,” he had added.

“A good thing?” Mr Sobek had stammered. “Are you serious? Considering the chaos this ridiculous drink caused when there were only a handful of cans in circulation, imagine the disaster if students can buy as much as they want!”

“Maybe,” their father had insisted, “it was not the drink itself, but the fact that it was rare – and then forbidden – that made it so tempting”.

Some parents and teachers weren’t convinced. Many still sided with Mr Sobek: they had to make sure Pinkamax didn’t disrupt school life again. In the end, a compromise was reached: students would only be allowed to drink Pinkamax at school on Fridays, at lunchtime. It was Manuel’s mother who had suggested replacing the old machine with one that offered healthier drinks.

At first, the students had been excited when Pinkamax had finally hit the shops. They had rushed to buy it, eager to enjoy their long-awaited fizzy

drink. But after a few weeks, the excitement had worn off. Soon the pink cans had all but disappeared from the school bins.

The end of year play was about to start. The school hall, now packed with spectators, buzzing with laughter and chatter. Mr Sobek took the stage, beaming with pride.



“Dear students, dear colleagues, dear parents...” he began. Then, catching the sharp gaze of Granny Arlette from the front row, he quickly added: “And dear grandparents!” A few laughs went through the audience. “It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all here

tonight for our end of year performance. As the school year comes to a close, I would like to thank everyone who has helped to make this wonderful production possible. Enjoy the show!”

Just as he was about to leave the stage, he hesitated, then turned back. “Oh! I almost forgot!” he added. “I’d also like to thank the generous anonymous donor who sent each member of the drama club a box of delicious caramelised almonds. I have just tried a few myself and I have to say... they are absolutely addictive!”

From the audience, Alma ✱ and Tim’s father leaned over to his wife and muttered: “And so it starts again...”



THE END

## To go further...

Did you enjoy Alma and Tim's adventure? Here are some questions to help you think about what happened. Each level gets a bit more challenging, so give them a try!

### Understand

1. Why did so many students want Pinkamax? How did they behave when they couldn't have it?
2. Why do you think Mr Sobek decided to remove the vending machine? What problems was he trying to fix?
3. How did students find ways to keep drinking Pinkamax? What risks did they take to get it?
4. The school originally wanted to use the Pinkamax money for the end-of-year play. What happened instead?



### Dig Deeper

1. Do you think banning Pinkamax was a good idea? Why or why not?
2. What do you think about the way Alma and Tim handled the situation? Would you have done something differently?
3. Why do you think some students were willing to pay more for Pinkamax after the ban?
4. What could Mr Sobek or the teachers have done differently to avoid the problems that occurred?



### Explore Big Ideas

1. Why do people sometimes want things more when they are told they can't have them?
2. What are some problems that can happen when things are banned?



Are there times when banning something works well?

3. How do secret markets form? What are the dangers of getting something in a secret way instead of openly?
4. How can rules be made in a way that people are more likely to follow them?



# Legal Glossary

## Addiction

A strong and sometimes harmful need to regularly have or do something. Addiction can refer to substances like drugs or alcohol, but also to habits such as playing video games, eating junk food, or shopping too much.

## Clandestine

Something done in secret, often to avoid detection or punishment. Clandestine activities are usually carried out to bypass rules or laws.

## Prohibition

A decision to forbid something completely, usually because it is seen as harmful. Prohibitions can apply to substances, activities, or behaviours.

## Regulation

An official rule or set of rules that controls how something is done or used. Regulations are used to manage risks and ensure safety without necessarily banning an activity or product entirely.

## Traffic

The illegal or secret trade of goods, especially those that are banned or hard to obtain. Traffic can involve substances like drugs, but also restricted items or counterfeit goods.

The researcher behind the story

## Dr. Thomas Joyce

Thomas is an assistant professor of criminal law and criminology at Tilburg University. He teaches and does research on organized crime. A big part of his work is about illegal markets. This story connects to his research by helping us think about how banning different items can have unexpected results!



The Author of the story

## Dr. Alice Dejean de la Bâtie

Alice is an assistant professor of Criminal Law at Tilburg University. With the advice and explanations from Thomas, Alice wrote this story as part of a project aimed at making academic research more accessible to children. She believes that her colleagues' work is essential and fascinating for understanding our society and building a fairer world. For her, it's important to share this knowledge with children because they are the leaders of tomorrow. Alice is convinced that children can grasp complex ideas, as long as they are explained in simple and clear language. Do you think she is right?







## What is the Law?

This story is part of the series *Alma and Tim Learn about the Law*, inspired by the work of researchers at Tilburg University. Designed especially for young readers, it opens a window onto the fascinating world of law, justice, and human rights.

But what are law and justice exactly? Law is made up of rules that help us live together peacefully. These rules tell us what we're allowed to do and what we should avoid so that everyone feels safe and respected. Justice, in turn, makes sure that these rules are followed fairly. It helps resolve conflicts and protects those who need it, ensuring everyone is treated with respect. Through the adventures of Alma and Tim, you'll discover how these ideas of law and justice play an important role in our daily lives.

When a mysterious vending machine appears at school, Alma and Tim are thrilled to try the fizzy pink drink inside. But soon, chaos erupts. Students can't get enough, and classes are turned upside down! The headmaster bans the drink, thinking it will solve the problem. Instead, it only makes things worse. Secret deals, rising prices, and even theft follow as students find risky ways to get their hands on the forbidden cans.

Can Alma and Tim fix the mess before things spiral out of control?

*This story is part of the series 'Alma and Tim Learn about the Law', inspired by academic research about justice, criminal law, and human rights. It includes a legal glossary and questions to help young readers explore the social issues, legal principles, and big ideas behind the story.*

