

BACK TO SCHOOL MATTERS

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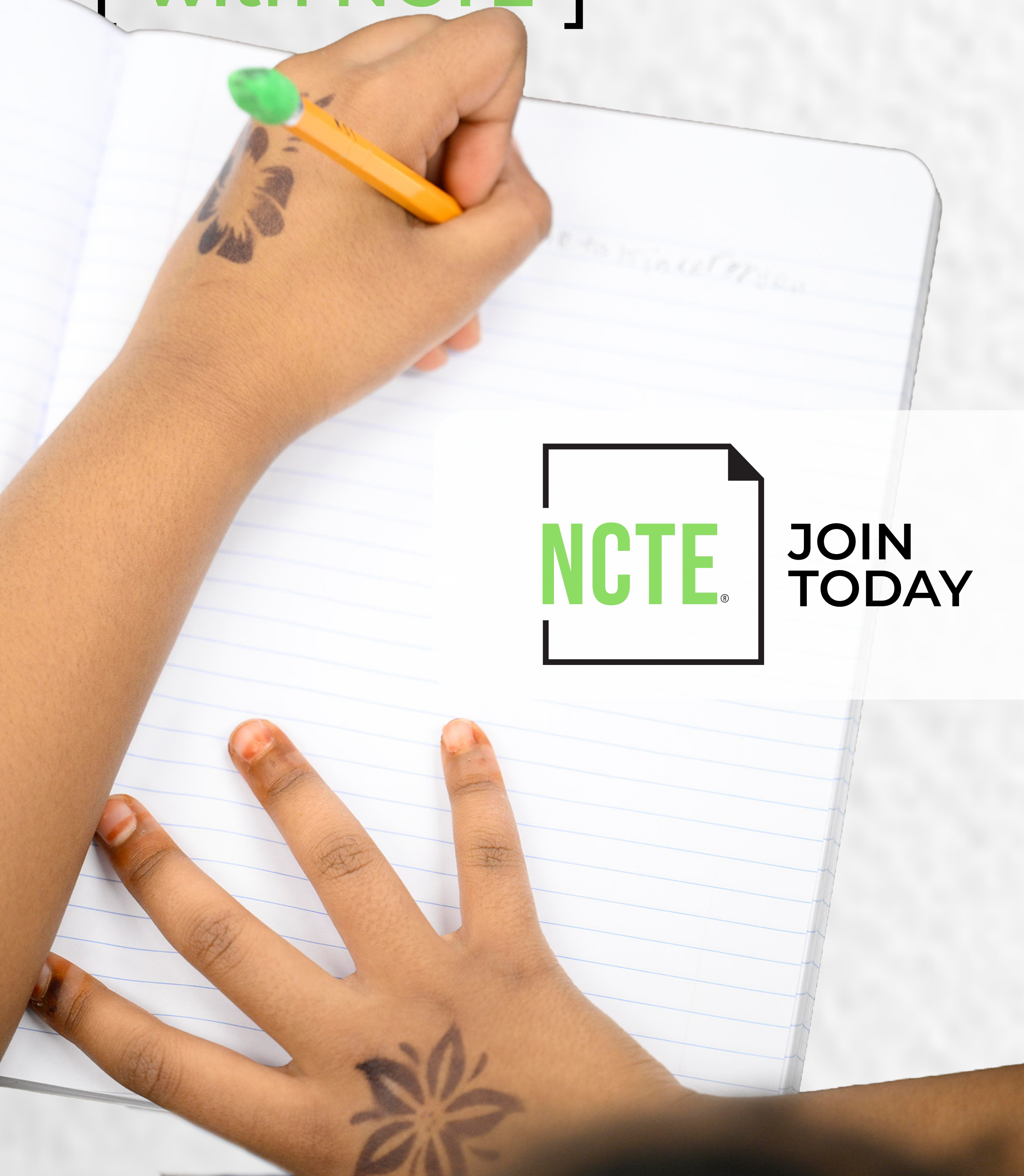
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56 ♦ NUMBER THE STARS

But she didn't. Instead, Kirsti pointed at her line. "I'm going to visit my Uncle Henrik," she chirped. "and I'm wearing my brand-new shiny black shoes!" The soldier chuckled and moved on.

Annemarie gazed through the window again. The trees, the Baltic Sea, and the cloudy October sky passed in a blur as they continued north along the coast.

"Smell the air," Mama said when they stepped off the train and made their way through the narrow streets. "It's lovely. It's the smell of home. It brings back memories for me." The air was breezy and cool, and not unpleasant. It smelled of salt and fish. High against the pale clouds, seagulls soared and cried out as if they were mourning.

Mama looked at her watch. "I wonder if Henrik will be back yet. But it doesn't matter. The house is always unlocked. Come on, girls, we'll walk. It isn't far, just a little under two miles. And it's a nice day. We'll take the path through the woods instead of the road. It's a little longer, but it's so pretty."

"Didn't you love the castle when we went through Helsingør, Ellen?" Kirsti asked. She had been talking about Kronborg Castle ever since they had seen it, sprawling massive and ancient, beside the sea,

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from the train. "I wish we could have stopped to visit the castle. Kings live there. And queens." Annemarie sighed in exasperation with her little sister. "They do not," she said. "They did in the old days. But there aren't any kings there now. Denmark only has one king, anyway. And he lives in Copenhagen."

But Kirsti had pranced away, skipping along the sidewalk. "Kings and queens," she sang happily. "Kings and queens."

Mama shrugged and smiled. "Let her dream, Annemarie. I did the same when I was her age." She turned, leading the way along a tiny, twisting street, heading toward the outskirts of the village. "Things have hardly changed here since I was a girl," she said. "My Aunt Gitte lived there, in that house" — she pointed — "and she's been dead for years. But the house is the same. She always had wonderful flowers in her garden." She peered over the low stone wall and looked at the few flowering bushes as they passed the house. "Maybe they still do, but it's the wrong time of year — there are just those few chrysanthemums left."

"And see, over there?" She pointed again. "My best friend — her name was Helena — lived in that house. Sometimes I used to spend the night with her. But more often she came to my house on weekends. It was more fun to be in the country

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