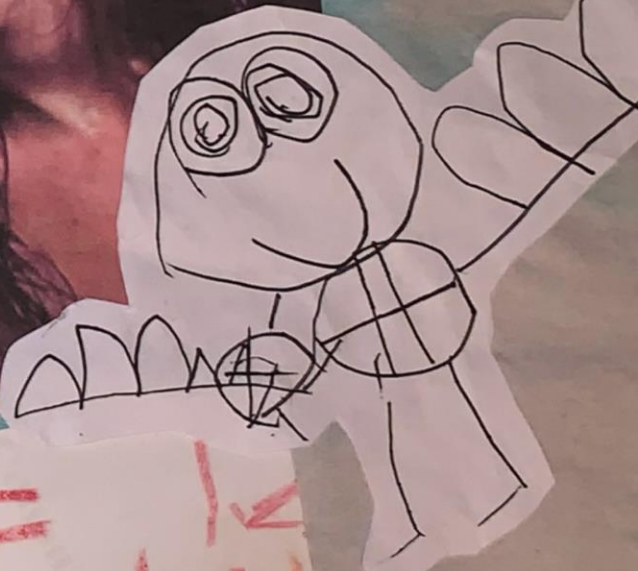
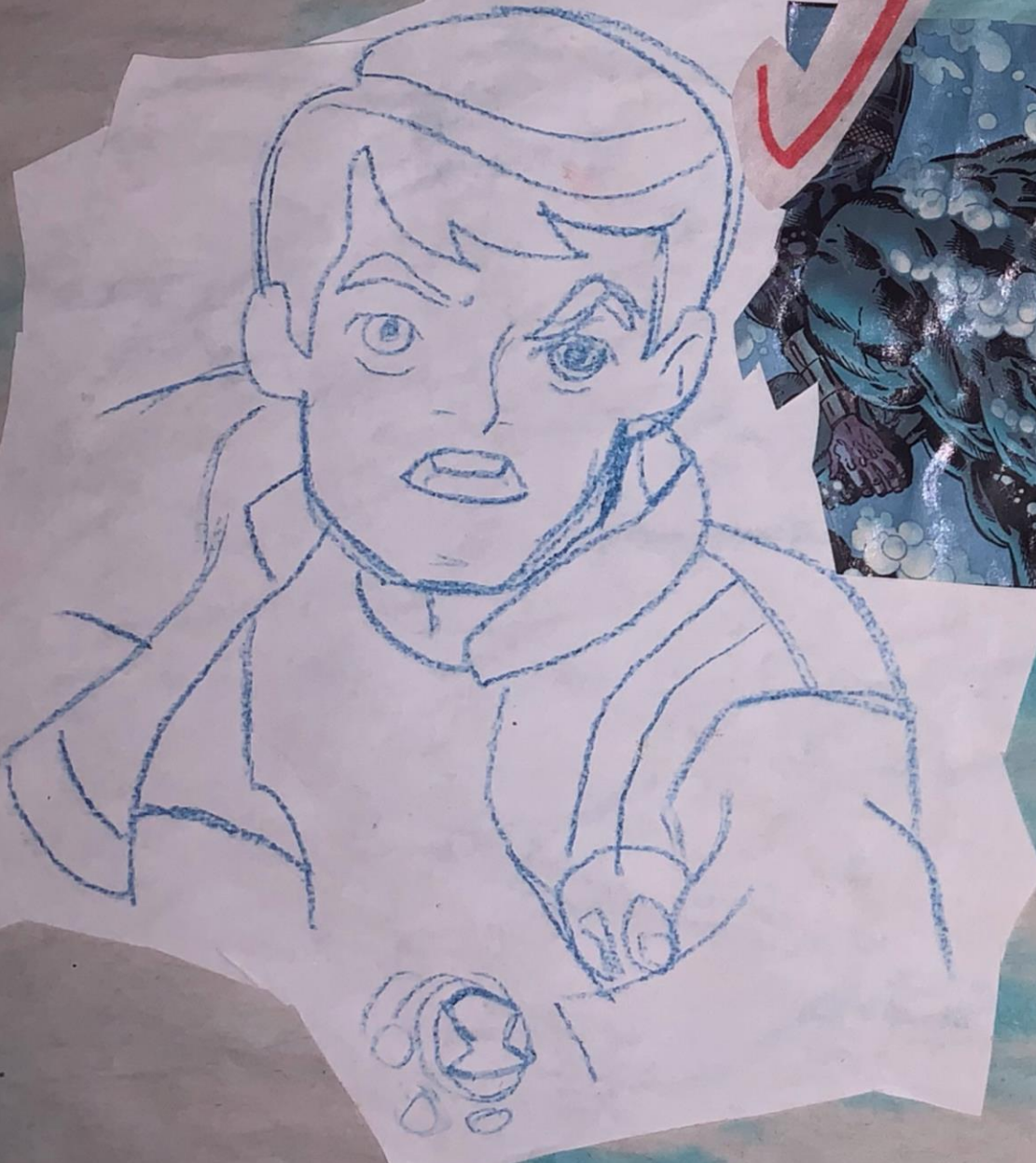


EVERYTHING
BEN



BEN OF
THE DA
A-LIEN





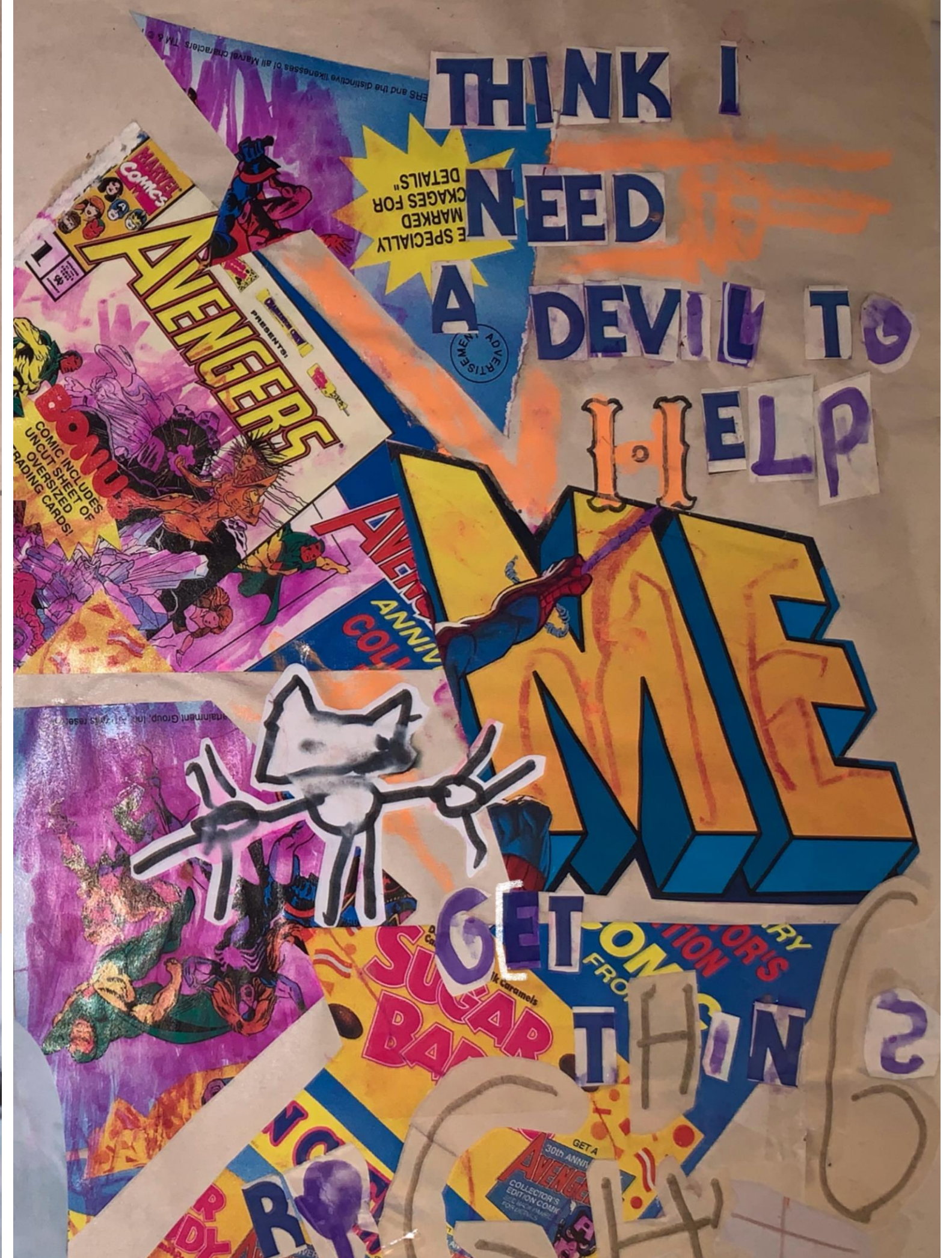
I don't know when my son first saw Ben-10 or who showed it to him. It could have been me. In the hazy afternoon chaos, my effort to curate our family's media exposure has often fallen by the wayside in favor of keeping the peace and letting the baby nap. Yet after having a babysitter over I'd often check our watch history and groan. Baby Shark? BLIPPY? Cheap, dumbed-down kiddo click bait has always felt more reprehensible than something slightly scary or age-inappropriate. I didn't find Ben too problematic, and no more violent or aggressive than other characters we've accepted into the fold. (Looking at you, Batman.) But as Cartoon Network's longest running franchise, there's a lot more Ben to obsess over than I realized. As a member of several fandoms myself, though, I was trying not to judge. After all, I'd just read FIVE Nirvana-related biographies, back-to-back. I understand the thirst to immerse oneself in the thing we love, especially when life outside seems to be falling apart. So after finishing my official "quarantine zine" and submitting it to a local art show, I invited my four year old to make a zine with me about something we both loved. I asked what we should write about and this Dave Grohl/Ben 10 fanzine was born.

We squeaked in my daughter's birthday celebration right before the COVID-19 pandemic began in earnest. She turned two on March 5 and we spent the weekend in Disney World, knowing that some people in the US had contracted the virus but none yet in our state, so, no big deal, right? The day after we got back, our local university systems closed down, and then the library. My son's preschool shut their doors. Next was the tattoo shop where my husband and I work. One by one, our plans were waylaid and the Pokémon themed party I was planning for Angelo's 4th birthday - complete with Pokeball bowling, art stations, Poke bowls and Pikachu pops - turned into our family singing Happy Birthday via Zoom and an admittedly epic vegan Ben-10 cake. But I'm a teacher, we're all artists, we have an incredible backyard, and my sister lives two doors down with her family so we had a built-in quarantine buddy. Things didn't look so bad, we could just hunker down and look forward to a huge 4th of July extravaganza.



Handwritten text in the top right corner, possibly a signature or name, written in black ink.

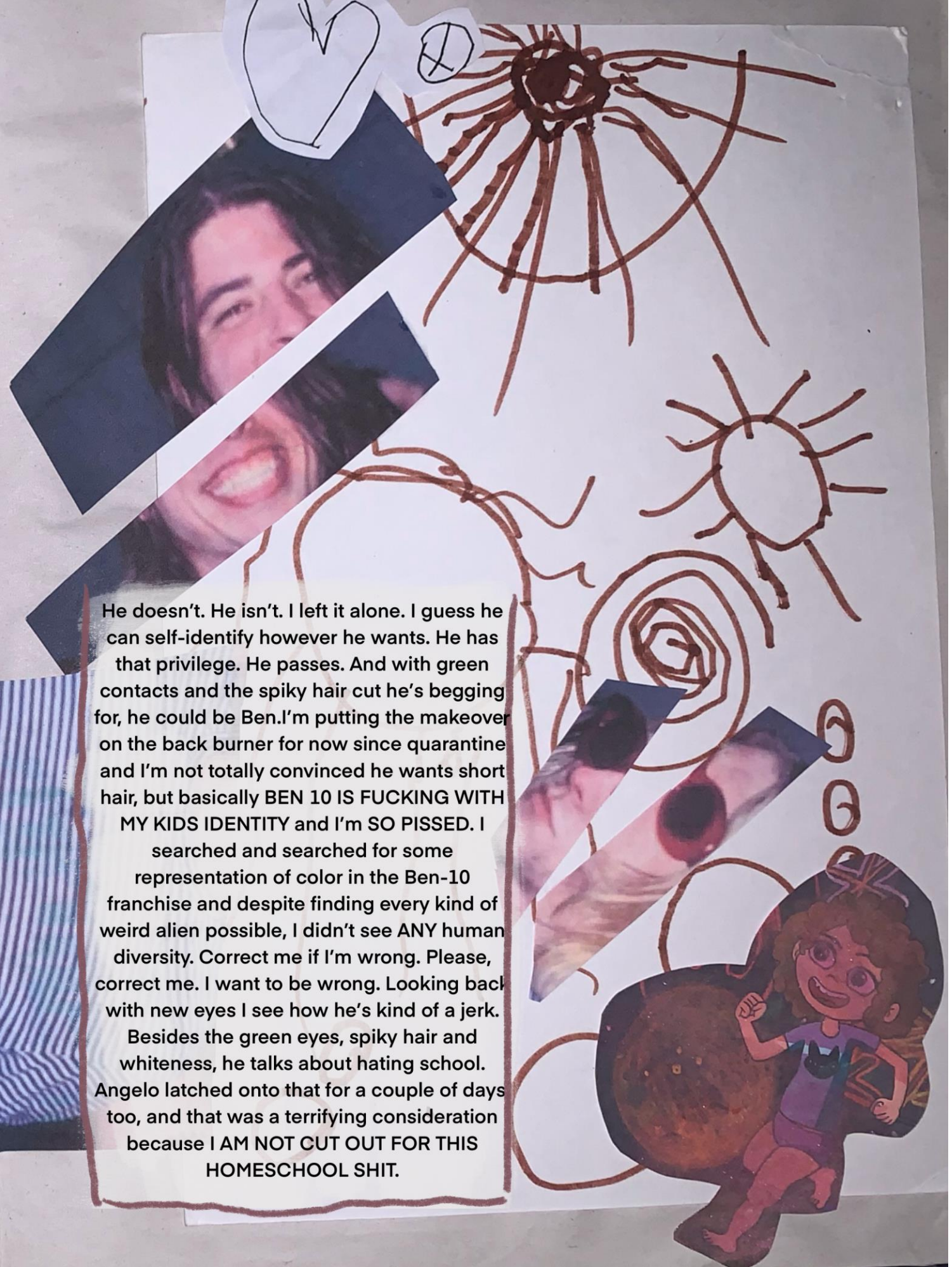
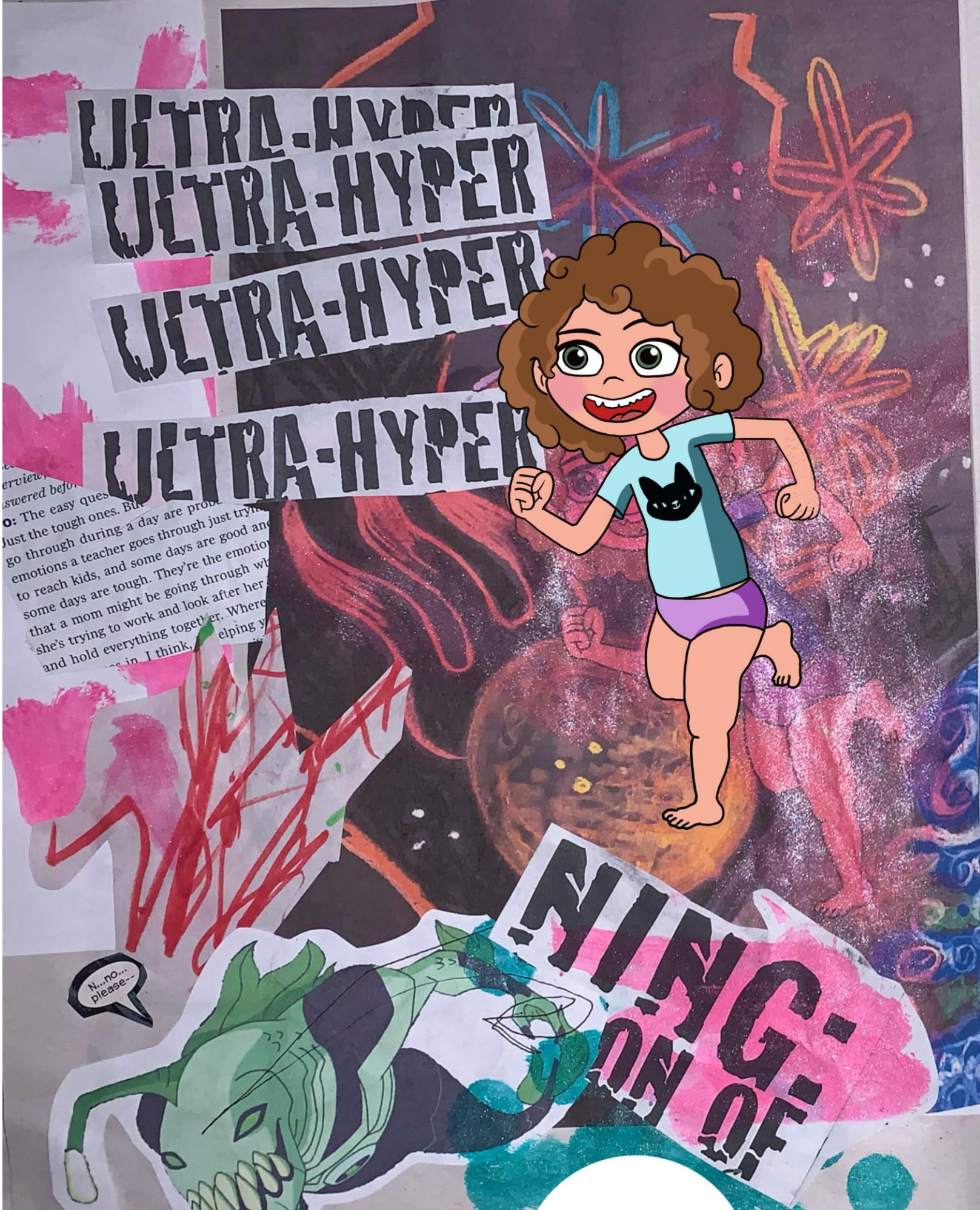
Things got tough, though. Financially, and medically, we were all fine. Comfortable. But slowly my kids are turning into wolves. Someone in our neighborhood instituted an "8 o' clock howl," whereby various families would just go into their yards before sunset and... howl. It was a highlight. A lot of aggression and anger started popping up. Obsession with TV time became a daily battle. Toys, games, books, distractions flowed in. Resentment. Feelings of guilt. When George Floyd was killed, it felt like the emotional floodgates opened for everyone, but I struggled with being able to channel my personal struggles amid the bigger picture coming into focus. Projects were put on hold and scaled back, and community and justice based work came into the forefront for the arts organization I run. There's a little sense of purpose there, and joy/relief at finding a voice and a place in the movement, but things at home were still REALLY hard at and I found it uncomfortable to voice that truth amid such more imminent trauma.



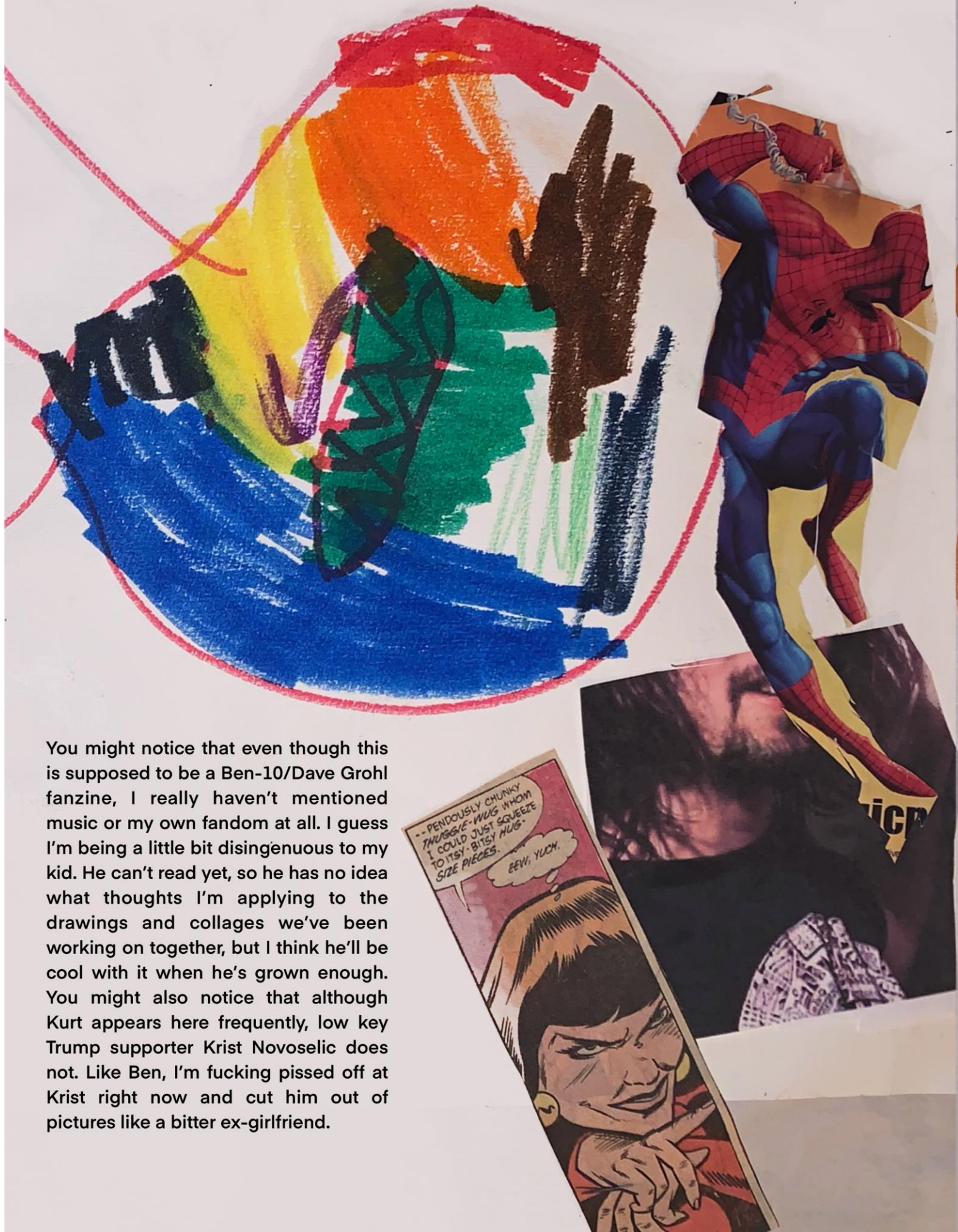


I am beyond blessed to have an incredibly progressive and compassionate family, so conflicts about current events have been nonexistent. But I didn't really know how to address these issues with my kids. We saw some protesters holding signs, and Angelo asked what they said, so I explained. We talked about a man named George Floyd who was killed by police. We talk a lot already about how sometimes police can make mistakes and be bad guys. We live in a neighborhood and a world where that is relevant. We talked about how sometimes people treat you differently because of your race, and what race is. My kids are bi-racial, multi-ethnic and white passing. I'd never brought up the fact that their grandfather was black. I was unintentionally feeding into the "colorblindness" that is a pervasive aspect of racial injustice. I just didn't consider that my kids are taking in the messages and images presented to them in society whether I talk about it or not, but it's up to me to make them aware of our reality before someone else paints a different picture. So we ironed out all of the details of who is who and why, and it was tricky. I turned to cartoons to explain. How silly would it be, I posited, if someone thought that Peter Parker was a better Spider Man than Miles Morales because of his skin color? I explained that Miles is black and Latino, just like Papa, and therefore like Angelo & Rosemary too. We looked at a lineup of Disney princesses and compared their skin tones and features to friends we know. Who looks like who? Then we came to Ben, and Angelo asked what race he is, so we took a look.

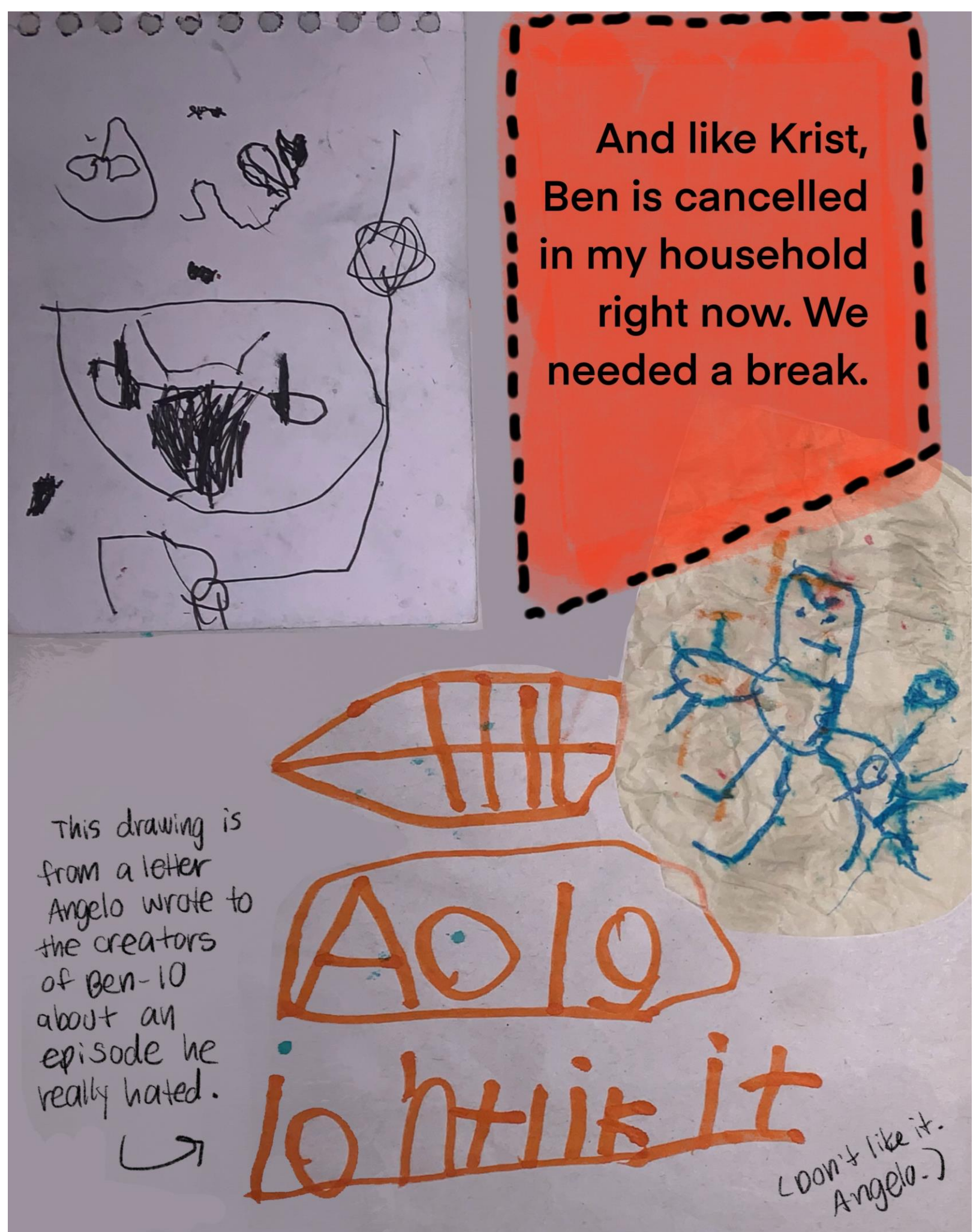




He doesn't. He isn't. I left it alone. I guess he can self-identify however he wants. He has that privilege. He passes. And with green contacts and the spiky hair cut he's begging for, he could be Ben. I'm putting the makeover on the back burner for now since quarantine and I'm not totally convinced he wants short hair, but basically BEN 10 IS FUCKING WITH MY KIDS IDENTITY and I'm SO PISSED. I searched and searched for some representation of color in the Ben-10 franchise and despite finding every kind of weird alien possible, I didn't see ANY human diversity. Correct me if I'm wrong. Please, correct me. I want to be wrong. Looking back with new eyes I see how he's kind of a jerk. Besides the green eyes, spiky hair and whiteness, he talks about hating school. Angelo latched onto that for a couple of days too, and that was a terrifying consideration because I AM NOT CUT OUT FOR THIS HOMESCHOOL SHIT.



You might notice that even though this is supposed to be a Ben-10/Dave Grohl fanzine, I really haven't mentioned music or my own fandom at all. I guess I'm being a little bit disingenuous to my kid. He can't read yet, so he has no idea what thoughts I'm applying to the drawings and collages we've been working on together, but I think he'll be cool with it when he's grown enough. You might also notice that although Kurt appears here frequently, low key Trump supporter Krist Novoselic does not. Like Ben, I'm fucking pissed off at Krist right now and cut him out of pictures like a bitter ex-girlfriend.



And like Krist, Ben is cancelled in my household right now. We needed a break.

This drawing is from a letter Angelo wrote to the creators of Ben-10 about an episode he really hated.

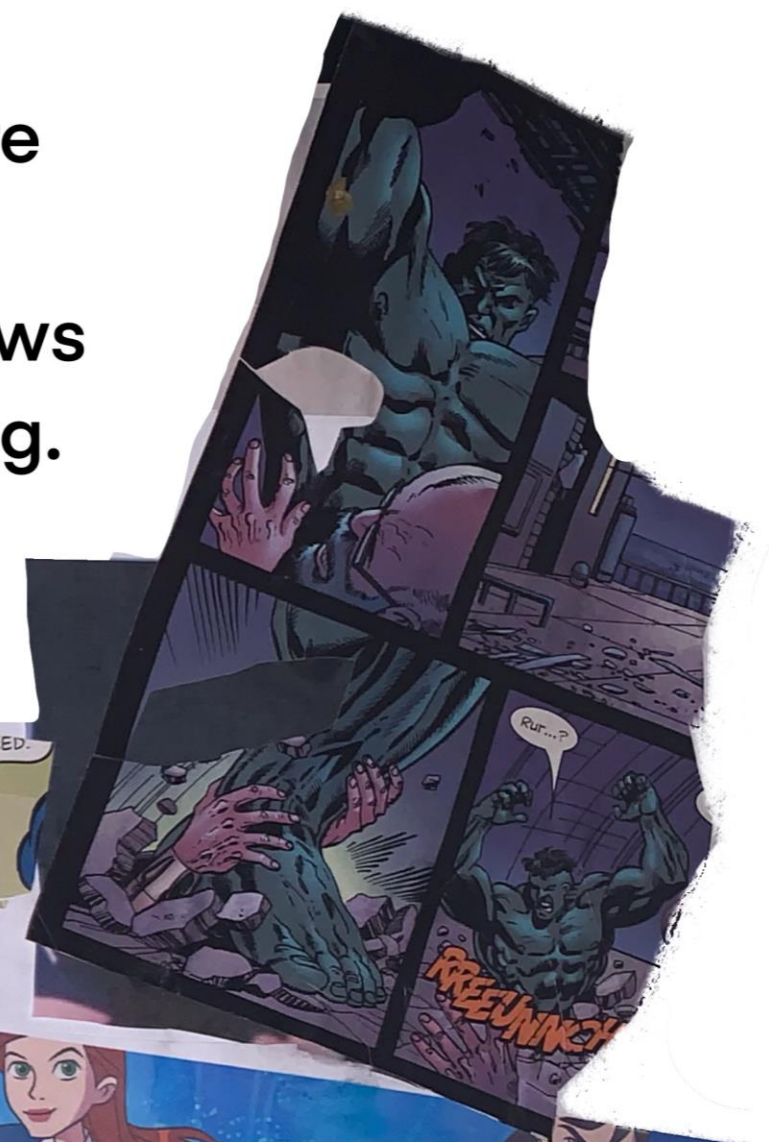
LO HATE IT

(Don't like it. Angelo.)



We stopped working on this zine for a long time and recently picked it back up. It immediately caused a flare-up of tension and necessitated a temporary removal of all Ben-10 toys in our collection. Despite what you can obviously see is a kid who loves to draw and actually excels at it, trying to render Ben-10 causes him a very specific stress, that leaves me feeling suspicious and annoyed. We can't actually draw Ben. We can't be Ben. Ben is a cartoon. Aliens are (maybe) not real. Cartoons don't look like real life, we can't hide. We can't hide.

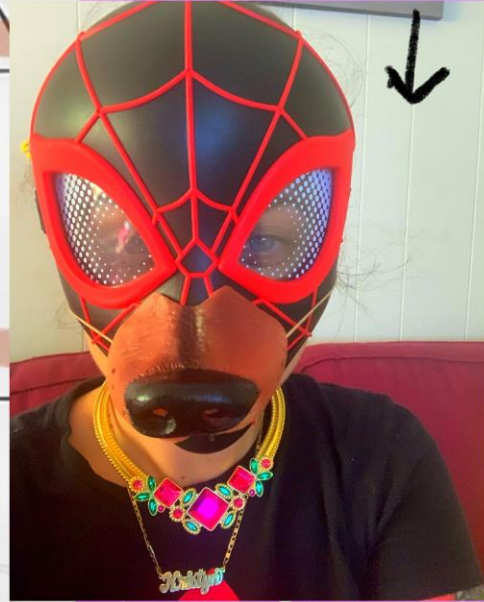
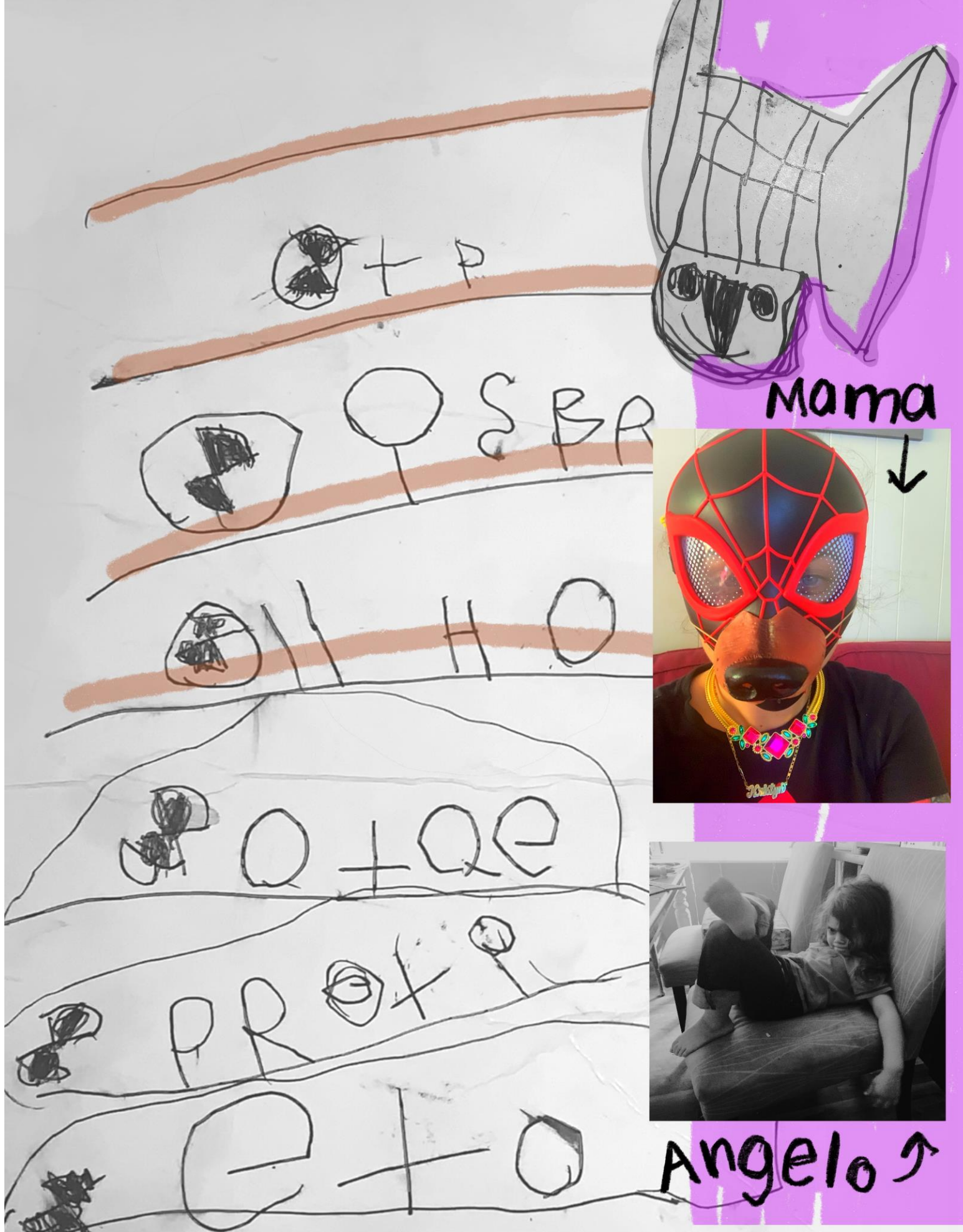
Instead of Ben, here are some more inclusive action shows we've been enjoying.



• SHE-RA, *** Princesses of Power

- Steven Universe
- Odd Squad
- Hero Elementary
- Into the Spiderverse (obviously)





Angelo ↗

Thank you so much for reading our zine. Follow @wayfaringpainter for art teacher stuff, @kristynbat for tattoo, and if you look like not a creep I will accept your follow on @la.reina.de.fructs which is basically like a werewolf zoo livestream.

