

STORIES THAT STAY WITH US

The Last Hour of Light



A village has enough power for one final hour of celebration. Every use seems like the right one.

About 4–5 minutes of reading; allow 25–40 minutes with discussion.

Six reader parts. Rotate readers, read in pairs, or let one person read. Listen or pass whenever you wish. Suggested for ages 12+ after a host previews the story. Discuss the fictional characters instead of personal experiences if you prefer.

READER 1 / 6

By sunset, the village hall had enough battery power for one more hour. The storm had passed, everyone was safe, and the essential lights had their own supply. But the harvest supper was still dark. On the kitchen table stood three things: a speaker for the dance, a projector for the children's film, and a lamp beside a half-finished quilt. Mara, who had organized the evening, held the single extension lead as if it were a judge's hammer.

READER 2 / 6

The dancers wanted the speaker. They had practiced for six weeks, including two evenings in the rain. The children wanted to show their film about the village's oldest tree, which had fallen that morning. Etta wanted the lamp. People had brought squares for a quilt that would hang in the rebuilt hall, and tonight was the only time all its makers could sit together. 'We could vote,' Mara said. Everyone counted the people standing near their own table.

READER 3 / 6

A vote would give the dancers the hour. There were fourteen of them, nine children, and five quilt makers. 'That's fair,' said Tomas, who had learned every step despite having two left feet. One of the children asked whether the people appearing in the film counted, even if they had gone home. Etta said nothing. She began folding the smallest fabric squares into a tin. Mara noticed that every proposed rule seemed to favor whoever had proposed it, including her own rule that they should finish deciding quickly.

READER 4 / 6

They tried dividing the hour into three equal parts. The film lasted twenty-eight minutes. The dancers needed fifteen. Etta didn't know how long five difficult stitches would take. 'Equal minutes don't do equal things,' Tomas said, surprising himself. Mara asked each table for the smallest thing that would make the evening worthwhile. The children wanted their tree remembered. The dancers wanted to perform once without stopping. Etta wanted to learn whose shirt each patch had come from before the stories were forgotten.

PAUSE BEFORE THE ENDING

Before reading part five, propose a plan. Who gains, who gives something up, and who has not been heard?

READER 5 / 6

They gave the projector twenty-eight minutes, then the speaker fifteen. The dancers performed around the quilt table, and someone counted the remaining battery lights. Seventeen minutes for the sewing. It wasn't enough. Etta left a conspicuous space in the middle of the quilt. Mara offered to find a matching patch later. 'Don't match it yet,' Etta said. 'We haven't heard from everyone.' Across the hall, a child complained that the film had been hard to hear over the washing-up. Their arrangement had worked, but it had not worked perfectly.

READER 6 / 6

The next morning, Mara wrote down what they had decided and what it had cost each table. Beside the schedule, Tomas added: ASK WHAT MATTERS BEFORE COUNTING HANDS. Etta added: SOMETIMES COUNT THE HANDS TOO. The children drew their fallen tree around both sentences. When the hall reopened, the quilt still had an empty square. Visitors sometimes mistook it for damage. Someone from the village would pull up a chair and explain the hour when they had discovered that sharing a room was easier than sharing a decision.

Stay with the question

Choose two or three questions rather than rushing through all six. Give everyone a quiet moment first. Ask what in the story supports an idea, then invite a different reading. No consensus or personal disclosure is required.

1. Which person's claim did you initially find strongest? What detail complicated it?
2. Would majority vote, equal time, or meeting different needs be fairest here? Name one cost of your preferred rule.
3. Was the unfinished quilt a failure, a fair sacrifice, or something else? What might Etta say?
4. Who should have had a voice but wasn't in the room? How could the group include them without delaying forever?
5. Choose an imaginary group decision. What would you ask before suggesting a solution?
6. What sentence would you add to the hall's decision-making rules—and when should it have an exception?

One last turn around the table

"I first thought... Now I am wondering..." Finish the sentence, talk about a character, or pass.

Make something to remember

Write one proposed rule for making decisions together. Add a second line: 'This rule needs rethinking when...' Keep both lines, with everyone's agreement, and revisit them at your next gathering.

Save a moment at yarnfire.com/moments. Ask before keeping another person's words. Free home-print edition, not a commercial press-ready file.

STORIES THAT STAY WITH US

The Cup with the Blue Line



A borrowed cup breaks before its owner returns. An invisible repair seems like the perfect solution—until someone asks whose decision that is.

About 4–5 minutes of reading; allow 25–40 minutes with discussion.

Six reader parts. Rotate readers, read in pairs, or let one person read. Listen or pass whenever you wish. Suggested for ages 12+ after a host previews the story. Discuss the fictional characters instead of personal experiences if you prefer.

READER 1 / 6

Every Friday, the repair café used whatever cups people brought from home. Ivo's was white with one thin blue line around its rim. It was not old or expensive. He liked the way its handle fitted his hand, and he always chose the chair by the window. When he went to collect bread, he left his cup beside the sink. Nell reached for a towel, caught the handle with her sleeve, and watched it fall. The sound was small. Everyone heard it.

READER 2 / 6

The handle had broken into two clean pieces. 'I can mend that,' said Bea, who restored ceramics. She held them together so neatly that Nell could hardly see the join. The adhesive needed a day to cure. They could lend Ivo another cup, repair his before next Friday, and save him an unpleasant surprise. Nell felt relief so quickly that she mistook it for agreement. 'Let's do that,' she said. Arun, drying plates beside her, asked, 'Do what, exactly?'

READER 3 / 6

Nell explained the repair. Arun asked whether they would tell Ivo. 'Of course,' she said, then paused. She had imagined telling him after it looked whole again. Bea put down the adhesive. She could restore the handle, but could not promise it would carry a full hot drink safely. It might become a pencil pot. Nell looked at the cup and realized that her plan had quietly changed from giving something back to deciding what it would become.

READER 4 / 6

When Ivo returned, Nell held out the pieces on a folded towel. She said what had happened and offered to pay for another cup. She did not explain how tired she had been. Ivo set down the bread. He asked whether anyone had tried to glue it. Nell said no. For a moment she waited for him to say it didn't matter. Instead he said, 'It does matter to me. I know you didn't mean it.' Both sentences remained in the room, and neither canceled the other.

PAUSE BEFORE THE ENDING

Before part five: what does Ivo get to decide? What can Nell offer without asking him to make her feel better?

READER 5 / 6

Ivo chose to keep the broken cup for pencils. He wanted the repair visible so nobody would serve tea in it. Bea painted a blue line across the join, perpendicular to the one around the rim. Nell brought a replacement the following week, but the handle was too small. Ivo thanked her and asked whether they could exchange it. She felt the old urge to make the whole incident disappear. Instead they measured the handle together with a strip of paper. It was an awkward five minutes. Then they went back to the bread.

READER 6 / 6

A month later, Nell knocked a spoon from the table and joked that they should put a warning sign above her chair. Ivo didn't laugh. 'You broke one cup,' he said. 'You don't have to become the person who breaks things.' The repaired cup stood by the window, full of blunt pencils. No one called it better than before. It was useful in a different way, and it reminded them to ask before fixing what belonged to someone else. Nell still wished she had caught it. She also knew what she would do next time she didn't.

Stay with the question

Choose two or three questions rather than rushing through all six. Give everyone a quiet moment first. Ask what in the story supports an idea, then invite a different reading. No consensus or personal disclosure is required.

1. At what point did Nell's helpful plan begin serving her own comfort? Can both motives exist at once?
2. What is the difference between explaining an accident and making an excuse?
3. Does accepting a repair require forgiving immediately? Could trust return slowly?
4. Why does the replacement cup not resolve everything? What makes the awkward measuring moment important?
5. How might the story change if Nell had hidden the damage? What would remain possible afterward?
6. What could a group say after an ordinary mistake that allows accountability without turning the mistake into someone's identity?

One last turn around the table

"I first thought... Now I am wondering..." Finish the sentence, talk about a character, or pass.

Make something to remember

Invent a repair-café sign together. One side says what a useful apology offers; the other says what the person affected may choose. Use fictional examples. Keep the sign as a reminder, not a rule anyone must use to forgive.

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STORIES THAT STAY WITH US

The Map That Left Out the Bench



A beautifully drawn neighborhood map is missing the only place one new resident knows well.

About 4–5 minutes of reading; allow 25–40 minutes with discussion.

Six reader parts. Rotate readers, read in pairs, or let one person read. Listen or pass whenever you wish. Suggested for ages 12+ after a host previews the story. Discuss the fictional characters instead of personal experiences if you prefer.

READER 1 / 6

The neighborhood anniversary map was almost finished. Asha had drawn the clock tower, the market, the swimming pool, and every street in careful ink. For the blank corner she had planned a compass rose with gold points. At the final meeting, people crowded around to correct spellings. Then a new resident named Lev pointed to a narrow space behind the market. 'The bench is missing,' he said. Asha explained that they could not include every bench. Lev nodded and stepped back.

READER 2 / 6

For most people, that bench was where deliveries got in the way. For Lev, it was where he waited between the bus that brought him to work and the one that could take him home. A cleaner rested there before her early shift. A teenager practiced difficult words from a library book there because the flat upstairs was noisy. Lev knew none of their surnames. He did know who liked the sunny end. The anniversary committee had invited residents to submit landmarks online. The bench had never appeared on the list.

READER 3 / 6

Asha asked Lev to write a paragraph for the map's reverse. He said he could describe the bench but could not speak for everyone using it. 'We should ask them,' he said. The printer needed the file that evening. A committee member suggested voting. Another said a bench wasn't history. Asha looked at her gold paint. The clock tower had been rebuilt twice and was wrong by seven minutes. Nobody had questioned whether it belonged. 'What makes something a landmark?' she asked. Three people answered at once.

READER 4 / 6

They could miss the print deadline and pay more. They could add an unverified story. Or they could leave an open space and admit the map was unfinished. Asha disliked all three choices, especially the third. She had spent thirty evenings drawing. Lev said he would understand if the bench had to wait. That made the decision harder: they could accept his patience without ever discovering what it had cost him. Asha covered the compass rose with a sheet of tracing paper and tried drawing an empty frame.

PAUSE BEFORE THE ENDING

Before part five: decide what you would send to the printer tonight. What would your map admit it does not know?

READER 5 / 6

The printed map included the frame, labeled PLACES WE HAVEN'T LEARNED YET. Beside it was the bench, drawn without anyone sitting on it. Over the next month, people could add a place on paper at the library or suggest one in person. Some contributions contradicted others. The quiet courtyard was also where a delivery driver said nobody would let him stop. The welcoming café had a step one neighbor couldn't manage. Asha made a second sheet for disagreements instead of choosing the nicest version of each place.

READER 6 / 6

At the anniversary supper, someone asked whether the map would ever be finished. 'This edition is,' Asha said. She had learned to like that answer. Lev showed her a new note about the bench: GOOD SHADE, SPLINTER ON LEFT. Underneath, somebody else had written FIXED TUESDAY. The gold compass rose eventually went on the back cover. It still pointed north. The empty frame on the front asked a different question, one the compass could not answer for them. Who knows something about this place that we haven't thought to ask?

Stay with the question

Choose two or three questions rather than rushing through all six. Give everyone a quiet moment first. Ask what in the story supports an idea, then invite a different reading. No consensus or personal disclosure is required.

1. Why did familiar landmarks need less justification than Lev's bench?
2. Was offering Lev a paragraph enough? Who still lacked a way to contribute?
3. What is the difference between inviting someone to speak and changing a decision because you listened?
4. Can two conflicting descriptions of a place both be useful? When would you need to choose between them?
5. Where might a group mistake silence or politeness for agreement? Discuss an invented example if you prefer.
6. What would belong in the 'places we haven't learned yet' corner of a map of our group?

One last turn around the table

"I first thought... Now I am wondering..." Finish the sentence, talk about a character, or pass.

Make something to remember

Draw an imaginary map of a good gathering. Give each person space to add a place, need, or question. Leave one frame blank for someone who isn't here. Photograph or save it only if everyone agrees.

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STORIES THAT STAY WITH US

The Box for Next September



A group has room for only three objects in its time capsule. The happiest souvenirs aren't the ones everyone wants to save.

About 4–5 minutes of reading; allow 25–40 minutes with discussion.

Six reader parts. Rotate readers, read in pairs, or let one person read. Listen or pass whenever you wish. Suggested for ages 12+ after a host previews the story. Discuss the fictional characters instead of personal experiences if you prefer.

READER 1 / 6

On the last evening of their community workshop, the group brought objects for a time capsule. The box was smaller than promised. Its lid would close over three things, perhaps four if nobody insisted on keeping the enormous painted pinecone. There was a photograph of the finished stage, a ribbon from opening night, a bent screw, a shopping receipt, and a drawing of a roof that had never been built. They would open it next September. 'Let's choose the things that show what we achieved,' said Jo.

READER 2 / 6

Mina wanted the receipt. It was from the night they had ordered too many noodles and stayed to eat after everyone was supposed to leave. 'That's not an achievement,' said Jo, who had balanced the budget. Sam wanted the bent screw from the morning the scenery fell down. Nobody had been hurt, but their opening had been postponed. Jo had spent hours apologizing to visitors. She didn't want next year's group to think they had been careless. 'They might learn something,' Sam said. 'Or they might just laugh at us.'

READER 3 / 6

The unbuilt roof belonged to Anil. He had left the project halfway through when his work schedule changed. He wasn't at the table tonight. His drawing showed a beautiful, impossible arch. Someone suggested including it to honor his contribution. Mina wondered whether he would prefer the photograph of the little entrance he had actually finished. They could ask him tomorrow, but they had promised to seal the box tonight. The painted pinecone rolled onto the floor. For a moment everyone was grateful for something simple to retrieve.

READER 4 / 6

They tried telling one story for each object before choosing. Jo explained how the stage photograph had been taken after three people stayed late to sweep. Sam said the screw reminded him of the friend who had quietly checked every remaining joint. Mina's receipt had a phone number on the back: the noodle shop owner who lent them extra bowls. Each object had been asked to represent one thing and had inconveniently become several. Finally someone asked what the box was for: proof they had succeeded, instructions for the next group, or a way to visit this evening again.

PAUSE BEFORE THE ENDING

Before part five: choose three objects. What does your choice preserve, and what might a future reader misunderstand?

READER 5 / 6

They kept the stage photograph, the screw, and the receipt. Jo wrote a note with the screw: THIS FAILED. WE CHECKED THE REST. NEXT TIME, CHECK FIRST. They asked Anil about the drawing before using it anywhere; he chose to keep it himself and sent a sentence for the outside of the box. 'I still think the arch could work.' The ribbon became a bookmark. The pinecone stayed on the windowsill, where it did not need to compete with anything. The box was sealed a day late.

READER 6 / 6

The following September, two people remembered the noodles as terrible and three remembered them as wonderful. Nobody changed anyone else's account. A new volunteer turned the screw over in her palm and asked what they were building this year. Jo started to describe the plan, then stopped. 'First,' she said, 'what do you hope we'll remember?' They left the box open on the table. Someone put a blank card beside it. It wasn't a promise that the next year would be better. It was room for a story they had not lived yet.

Stay with the question

Choose two or three questions rather than rushing through all six. Give everyone a quiet moment first. Ask what in the story supports an idea, then invite a different reading. No consensus or personal disclosure is required.

1. What did Jo fear the bent screw would say about the group? Was that fear unreasonable?
2. When does remembering a mistake help, and when does it turn into repeatedly blaming someone?
3. Should an absent person's contribution go into a shared story without asking them? What alternatives did this group have?
4. Which matters more in a keepsake: an accurate record, a comforting story, or space for several memories? What would you refuse to sacrifice?
5. Would you have delayed sealing the box? When is keeping a promise less important than changing it openly?
6. What ordinary detail from today might a future version of this group be glad we noticed?

One last turn around the table

"I first thought... Now I am wondering..." Finish the sentence, talk about a character, or pass.

Make something to remember

Choose three words or small drawings to represent tonight: something enjoyed, something learned, and something still open. Let people opt out of being named. Keep the card and choose a future gathering to revisit it; no reminder is scheduled automatically.

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