

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.

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