

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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