

The Extra Chair



Belonging · dinner parties & reunions

A dinner table has one more chair than guests—and everyone has a different idea about who belongs there.

Four reader parts. About 2–4 minutes of reading, or 12–20 minutes with discussion and the closing activity.

Free preview booklet. Read together or pass. Home-print edition; this is not a bound-book order.

READER 1 / PASS THE STORY

When Lila set the table for the building supper, she counted nine bowls and ten chairs. She moved the spare chair into the hallway. Mr. Vale brought it back. “Someone might come,” he said. But everyone who had signed the paper downstairs was already there. The soup was hot. Lila wanted, for once, to begin something on time.

READER 2 / PASS THE STORY

They started anyway. The empty chair stood between a retired bus driver and a boy who had brought a drawing instead of food. Conversation kept stopping beside that gap. “Perhaps it is for someone we miss,” the driver said. The boy put his drawing on the seat: a red bus with every window full. Lila wondered whether an empty chair could make a room feel fuller.

PAUSE TOGETHER

What might make joining this table feel easy—or difficult—for Nuri?

There is no single right answer. Hear each other before continuing.

READER 3 / PASS THE STORY

Then a scraping sound came from the hallway. Their new neighbor, Nuri, was trying to carry a broken bookshelf upstairs alone. Lila opened the door. “We have soup,” she said. Nuri looked past her at the strangers and shook his head. “Could you just hold this end?” So Lila held it. Two others came out. Together they carried the shelf up one flight.

READER 4 / PASS THE STORY

When they returned, Nuri came too, carrying a jar of olives. Nobody asked him to introduce himself to the whole room. The boy showed him the bus. Nuri asked whether it needed a mechanic. Soon they were drawing an engine on the back. Later Lila counted ten bowls. She left the extra chair in the kitchen that night. Next time, she decided, she would set out eleven.

Take a breath. Then turn the page for your conversation.

After the last line

1. Which invitation worked best: the soup, the shared task, or the drawing?
2. What helps you feel welcome without putting you on the spot?
3. What could we change at our next gathering to leave room for someone new?

A SMALL THING TO DO TOGETHER

Together, choose one small welcoming gesture for your next gathering. Let someone volunteer to remember it.

Host notes: Invite four readers, rotate in pairs, or let one person read it all. Listening and passing count.

Suggested for ages 8+ with a facilitator who has previewed the story. Discuss the characters rather than your own life whenever you prefer.

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