

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.

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