

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.

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