

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.

More stories: yarnfire.com/gathering-stories

The Map of Small Things



Wonder · trips & family gatherings

A lost travel itinerary leads a family to make a different kind of map.

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

The wind took their itinerary just outside the station. It sailed over a wall before anyone could catch it. Dad looked at his empty hand. He had planned the trip for weeks: the famous tower, the old palace, the best view. “I remember the tower,” said Emi. Her grandmother pointed in two directions at once. Neither direction contained a tower.

READER 2 / PASS THE STORY

They stopped at a bakery to ask. While Dad found the street on his phone, Emi noticed a sparrow drinking from a dented watering can. She drew it on the back of a receipt. Her brother drew the enormous pastry he hoped they would buy. Grandmother added the blue door across the street. “That is not a map,” Dad said. “There are no distances.”

PAUSE TOGETHER

Should they keep chasing the original plan? How could they make room for both kinds of day?

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

READER 3 / PASS THE STORY

By lunchtime the receipt had three companions. There was a staircase where their footsteps made an echo, a shopkeeper who taught them a greeting, and a bench exactly warm enough for a nap. Dad still wanted to reach the tower. They agreed to go after lunch. At the top, he looked out over the city and realized he could recognize none of their favorite places from above.

READER 4 / PASS THE STORY

On the train home, Dad unfolded a proper street map and asked for a pencil. Emi thought he would finally correct their drawings. Instead he marked the bakery with a small bird. Grandmother found the blue door. Her brother drew a pastry so large it covered two streets. They kept the tower too, near the edge. The map was inaccurate in several important ways. It was the only one they wanted to keep.

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

After the last line

1. What makes a trip memorable for you?
2. When has an unexpected detour become the best part?
3. What ordinary place belongs on a map of our time together?

A SMALL THING TO DO TOGETHER

Draw a shared map with one small memory from each person. Accuracy is optional; label why each place matters.

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.

More stories: yarnfire.com/gathering-stories

The Last Lantern Home



Trust • camp cabins & scout circles

A cabin prepares a welcome for another group, and discovers that helping includes listening.

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

Rain canceled the evening trail walk, so Cabin Seven decided to make a welcome path inside the hall. They lined up battery lanterns from the door to the supper tables. Ari wanted a grand entrance, with every light flashing. Bo wanted signs. Tess tested a lantern, then quietly turned its flashing setting off. Nobody noticed; everyone was busy making the hall impressive.

READER 2 / PASS THE STORY

The visiting cabin arrived wet and tired. Their leader stopped just inside the doorway. One child covered their eyes. Another could not tell which way the bright line led because it curled around three chairs and a pile of bags. Ari rushed forward to explain the beautiful route. Tess asked a different question: “Would you like it quieter?” The child nodded.

PAUSE TOGETHER

How could Ari respond to Dev without making a promise he cannot keep?

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

READER 3 / PASS THE STORY

They stopped the flashing lights. Bo made a single arrow, large enough to read from the door. Ari moved the bags and straightened the path. It looked much less spectacular. The visitors walked in easily. One of them, Dev, set down a lantern that had stopped working. “I wanted to help too,” he said. Ari nearly promised to fix it, though he had no idea how.

READER 4 / PASS THE STORY

Instead Ari asked Dev to help choose places for the working lanterns. Dev put one beside the coat hooks and another near the water jug. At supper, no one praised the entrance. They found their coats, poured their drinks, and sat together. Ari watched the room for a while. Then he moved the last lantern to the empty end of the table, where there was space for two more bowls.

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

After the last line

1. When did the welcome become useful rather than impressive?
2. How can we find out what help someone actually wants?
3. Which quiet job makes our own gatherings work?

A SMALL THING TO DO TOGETHER

Name an often-unnoticed helpful job. Offer to share one at the next gathering; no one has to volunteer.

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The Repair Shop for Saturdays



Teamwork · workshops & friend groups

Three neighbors bring broken objects to a repair table, but the hardest repair is a misunderstanding.

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

Mara opened a Saturday repair table with a borrowed toolbox and a sign that read WE CAN TRY. Her friend Sol thought the sign sounded uncertain. He made another: FIXED WHILE YOU WAIT. Before Mara could object, their first customer arrived with a clock that ran backward. Their second brought a chair with three legs. Their third carried a small wooden boat in two pieces.

READER 2 / PASS THE STORY

Sol took the clock apart. Mara measured the chair. The boat belonged to a child named Kit, who watched every movement of their hands. Nobody asked what mattered about it. Sol suggested stronger glue and a new coat of blue paint. “It will look new,” he said. Kit pulled the pieces closer. A long silence settled over the table.

PAUSE TOGETHER

What question could change the way they approach Kit’s boat?

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

READER 3 / PASS THE STORY

Mara put down her ruler. “What would you like us to keep?” she asked. Kit showed them a crooked yellow stripe. His sister had painted it before she moved away. He did not mind the crack so much. He wanted the boat to stand on his shelf with the stripe still visible. Sol looked at his tin of blue paint. Then he shut the lid.

READER 4 / PASS THE STORY

They made a little stand that held both pieces together without covering the stripe. The chair received a solid new leg. The clock remained in a labeled box for someone with more experience. At closing time Sol turned his sign over. On the blank side he wrote ASK FIRST. Mara hung it beside WE CAN TRY. They had repaired two objects, postponed one, and improved the shop.

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

After the last line

1. Why was looking new the wrong goal for this repair?
2. When have you wanted understanding before a solution?
3. How could our group make it easier to say “I don’t know yet”?

A SMALL THING TO DO TOGETHER

In pairs, describe a small practical challenge. The listener asks one clarifying question before suggesting anything. Passing is welcome.

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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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A Recipe with No Measurements



Family memory · reunions & shared meals

An inherited recipe is missing every measurement. Recreating it means accepting more than one good version.

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

In the back of a drawer, the cousins found Aunt Rosa's recipe for Sunday bread. It listed flour, water, salt, and yeast. Beside the instructions she had written "until it feels right." There were no amounts, no temperature, and no time. Jules called it useless. Mira called it a treasure. They agreed to try it before deciding who was right.

READER 2 / PASS THE STORY

Everyone remembered the bread differently. Jules said the crust was dark. Mira said it was soft. Their uncle remembered seeds on top; their mother remembered none. The youngest cousin, Leo, had never tasted it at all. While the others argued about accuracy, he asked whether they could make two small loaves. Nobody could think of a good reason not to.

PAUSE TOGETHER

What would count as success for this group: an exact copy, good bread, or something else?

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

READER 3 / PASS THE STORY

The first loaf was dense. The second spread sideways. Jules wanted to start again and hide the evidence. Mira sliced the dense loaf thinly and toasted it. Leo called the flat one “picnic bread” because it held a surprising amount of jam. When their mother tasted it, she laughed. “Rosa’s first batch always went wrong,” she said. “She gave those loaves names too.”

READER 4 / PASS THE STORY

They wrote measurements on a new card, along with the changes they would try next time. Underneath, Leo added the names of both loaves. Mira tucked the old recipe behind it. They had not recovered a perfect Sunday from the past. They had made a noisy Saturday in the present, and enough toast for everyone. Jules took the last piece and asked whether anyone had written down the oven setting.

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

After the last line

1. Can people remember the same tradition differently and all be sincere?
2. What family or group tradition would you adapt rather than copy?
3. What new tradition could include someone who missed the earlier chapters?

A SMALL THING TO DO TOGETHER

Create a “recipe” for a good gathering: each person contributes one ingredient such as time, a game, a quiet corner, or a favorite snack.

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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The Station Between Plans



Connection · friends & mixed-age groups

A delayed train gives four strangers time to invent a tiny lending library.

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

The departure board changed from TEN MINUTES to PLEASE WAIT. An exhausted musician sat beside a student with a heavy bag. Across from them, a parent tried to entertain a child using three coins and a paper cup. Rain filled the tracks with silver lines. Everyone kept looking at the board, as if attention could persuade a train to arrive.

READER 2 / PASS THE STORY

The student took out a book, then discovered that she had already finished it. “Would anyone like this?” she asked. The musician had a crossword with two empty clues. The parent had a notebook full of shopping lists and several blank pages. Soon the bench between them held a book, a puzzle, and a page labeled THINGS TO DO WHILE WAITING.

PAUSE TOGETHER

How could they invite the nearby traveler without making participation feel compulsory?

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

READER 3 / PASS THE STORY

The child drew a station for snails. The musician added a very slow express service. The student wrote a one-sentence review of the book, carefully avoiding the ending. A traveler nearby watched but did not join in. The parent slid an unused pencil toward the middle of the bench, within reach, and returned to drawing. After a while, the traveler added a tunnel.

READER 4 / PASS THE STORY

When the train finally arrived, they nearly left the little collection behind. The student took a picture of the snail station. The traveler asked to keep the drawing. The musician finished one crossword clue and left the last for later. They boarded different carriages. No one promised to remain friends forever. Still, the delay had become something other than lost time, and the child waved through the glass until the platform disappeared.

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

After the last line

1. What made the invitation low-pressure?
2. Does a brief connection matter even if you never meet again?
3. What could we bring to a waiting room or a rainy afternoon besides a screen?

A SMALL THING TO DO TOGETHER

Make a tiny shared drawing. Each person may add one mark, a word, or nothing. Give the finished piece a title together.

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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The Garden of Late Bloomers



Patience · schools, families & teams

A neighborhood garden contest rewards the fastest growth—until a late-growing patch changes the rules.

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

The neighborhood garden contest began with identical seed packets and very different ambitions. The twins measured their seedlings every morning. Noor painted a sign before anything grew. Ben forgot which end of his plot faced the sun. By the third week, the twins had a small green forest. Ben had three leaves and a suspiciously confident weed.

READER 2 / PASS THE STORY

At the weekly meeting, everyone reported a height. Ben considered reporting the weed. Instead he said his plants were still small. Noor admitted that hers had wilted during a hot afternoon. The twins explained how they had made a little shade screen. Nobody had asked them to share the method before. They seemed pleased to be asked now.

PAUSE TOGETHER

What might Ben miss if he removes his patch as soon as the contest ends?

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

READER 3 / PASS THE STORY

The contest ended in June. The twins won, fairly and by a great distance. Ben congratulated them and nearly pulled up his patch. Then Noor noticed a tight bud among the leaves. They decided to leave it alone for another week. Then another. In July, when the official ribbons had faded, Ben's first flower opened while no judge was there to see it.

READER 4 / PASS THE STORY

He sent a photograph to the garden group. The twins came over with water; Noor brought her repaired sign. They stayed to look for more buds. Next year they kept the height prize, because the twins still liked measuring things. They added a shared notebook for first flowers, useful mistakes, and helpful neighbors. Ben entered his weed on the first page, correctly labeled this time.

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

After the last line

1. When is a deadline useful, and when does it hide progress?
2. How did sharing a method change the competition?
3. What kind of progress deserves noticing in our group?

A SMALL THING TO DO TOGETHER

Each person may name one small thing they are learning. Celebrate effort without comparing speed or asking for a promise.

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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The Museum of Almost



Creativity • creator meetups & workshops

An exhibition of unfinished projects becomes an unexpectedly honest night out.

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

For the community exhibition, Ren promised a finished sculpture. Three days before opening, it was still a bent wire circle on a wooden base. Around the room were other unfinished things: a quilt missing a corner, a song without a final verse, and a model bridge that leaned alarmingly left. Everyone was working late and pretending not to worry.

READER 2 / PASS THE STORY

Ren suggested postponing. The room booking could not move. Imani, who had made the quilt, asked whether finishing was the only story an exhibition could tell. She pinned a note beside her missing corner: “I ran out of the blue fabric. I am deciding whether a different color belongs here.” The bridge maker wrote, “Version four. Better than version three.”

PAUSE TOGETHER

What kind of question would help an unfinished project without taking it over?

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

READER 3 / PASS THE STORY

They called it The Museum of Almost. Visitors were invited to ask questions, not supply automatic advice. Some found this difficult. One person began explaining how to straighten Ren's wire, then stopped and asked what Ren wanted it to become. "A doorway," Ren said. Speaking the word helped more than the previous three hours of bending.

READER 4 / PASS THE STORY

At closing, a visitor said the unfinished song had stayed in her head. The singer offered to send the final version someday, without promising a date. Imani chose a yellow corner for her quilt. The bridge remained crooked. Ren made the circle tall enough to step through. They had not all finished. They had all found a next move, and a few people who wanted to hear how it went.

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

After the last line

1. What changes when people can show work before it is polished?
2. How can we ask whether someone wants advice or encouragement?
3. What unfinished idea would be fun to return to, without pressure?

A SMALL THING TO DO TOGETHER

Offer an optional one-minute “almost” show-and-tell. Listeners ask curious questions; give advice only when invited.

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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The Sound We Could Not Name



Listening · clubs, families & camp groups

A mysterious sound on a homemade recording sends a group comparing what each person noticed.

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

For their town sound project, the club recorded a minute in the square. Back inside, they recognized the fountain, a bicycle bell, and someone dropping a spoon. Then came three soft knocks, a pause, and one more knock. Nobody remembered hearing them outdoors. “A woodpecker,” said Max. “A loose shutter,” said Sal. Lina thought it sounded like a person.

READER 2 / PASS THE STORY

They replayed the minute. Max listened only for wings. Sal listened for wind. Lina watched the window as if the answer might pass outside. Each repetition seemed to strengthen a different theory. Their facilitator asked them to describe the sound without naming its source. Four knocks, they agreed. Hollow. Close. A scrape afterward. Now they had something shared to work with.

PAUSE TOGETHER

How could they compare theories fairly instead of listening only for evidence that supports their own?

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

READER 3 / PASS THE STORY

They drew where everyone had stood. Near the recorder, Sal had been holding a cardboard collection box. Max remembered a gust scattering their permission slips. Lina remembered Sal catching the papers against the box. Sal looked down at her hands. She tapped the empty box three times, paused, then tapped once more. The room went quiet.

READER 4 / PASS THE STORY

The sound was close, though not perfectly identical. They labeled it “probably the collection box” and kept that uncertainty in their final project. Beneath the recording they displayed their three original guesses. At the exhibition, visitors enjoyed making their own. Max still looked for a woodpecker when they returned to the square. This time he heard a shutter too, and the fountain, and the small sounds of his friends beside him.

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

After the last line

1. Why did describing the sound help?
2. What is useful about saying “probably” when you are not certain?
3. When have two people noticed different parts of the same moment?

A SMALL THING TO DO TOGETHER

Sit quietly for twenty seconds, then each name a sound you noticed. No recording is needed; compare observations without ranking them.

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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The Letter for Next Summer



Continuity · reunions, camps & recurring groups

A group writes to its future self, then makes room for someone who may not be there next year.

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

On the final afternoon, the cousins wrote a letter to open next summer. They listed the things that must stay the same: the lake picnic, the terrible card trick, the breakfast pancakes. Then Anya said she might not be able to come. Her family was moving farther away. The pencil stopped. Their list suddenly looked less like a celebration and more like a set of rules.

READER 2 / PASS THE STORY

“We could change the date,” someone offered. Anya did not know her dates yet. “We could video-call the whole picnic.” She smiled, but that did not sound quite right either. They sat with the problem until their grandfather asked what the letter was supposed to keep. The place? The schedule? The feeling of being included?

PAUSE TOGETHER

How could the group include Anya without making her responsible for solving everyone’s disappointment?

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

READER 3 / PASS THE STORY

They crossed out MUST and wrote WE HOPE. They added a page of things someone could join from anywhere: choosing the pancake topping, sending a new card trick, adding a drawing to the letter. Anya wanted to contribute one thing now. She wrote a question for next summer: “What surprised you this year?” Then she folded the page so no one could answer early.

READER 4 / PASS THE STORY

A year later, the cousins gathered around a different table. Rain had canceled the lake picnic. Anya sent a drawing of her new street and joined them for ten minutes. They answered her question, saved a blank space for her reply, and attempted the card trick badly. The letter had not kept the summer unchanged. It had given them a way to recognize each other inside a summer that was new.

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

After the last line

1. Which part of a tradition matters most to you?
2. How can an invitation stay warm without becoming an obligation?
3. What question would we like to answer together next time?

A SMALL THING TO DO TOGETHER

Write one question for your next gathering. Choose a keeper and an optional date to reopen it; let absent people contribute in their own time.

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