

Outside the Frame

Name _____

Date _____

Read the text carefully and answer every question clearly.

The photograph showed my grandmother standing beside a bicycle, one hand raised towards someone outside the frame. I chose it for the college exhibition because, unlike our formal family portraits, it seemed to catch her by surprise. On the entry form, I wrote: A young woman leaving home.

My grandmother studied the enlarged print across her kitchen table. Then she laughed.

'I wasn't leaving. That bicycle had a puncture. I was asking my brother to fetch the pump.'

I reached for the form, embarrassed, but she kept looking at the picture. The coat had belonged to her sister, she said. The factory gate behind her had been painted green, although the photograph made it almost black. She could remember all that, yet she couldn't remember what she and her brother had talked about while he repaired the tyre.

'Perhaps we argued,' she said. 'We often did.'

At college, my tutor admired the original caption. It suggested independence, she thought, and gave the photograph a clear story. I explained about the puncture. She tapped the empty space beside the bicycle.

'You still have to decide what you want the viewer to notice.'

That evening, I tried three new captions. One listed the details my grandmother remembered; another explained my mistake. Both seemed to push her raised hand into the background. Eventually, I left the photograph untitled and placed a short account of our conversation beneath it, including the part neither of us could recover.

At the opening, my grandmother stood beside me while a visitor examined the print.

'She looks as though she's waving goodbye,' he said.

My grandmother glanced at me before answering.

'I can see why you'd think that.'

Comprehension questions

1. What was the narrator's grandmother asking her brother to fetch?

2. What did the narrator finally display beneath the untitled photograph?

Reflection questions

1. How does the conversation at the kitchen table change the meaning of the narrator's first caption? Support your interpretation with details from the story.

2. What might the grandmother's precise memories and one missing memory suggest about reconstructing the past? Use both kinds of detail in your answer.

3. How do you interpret the grandmother's final reply to the visitor? Support your reading with her response and an earlier moment in the story.

Opinion questions

1. Would you have kept the caption 'A young woman leaving home' after hearing the grandmother's explanation? Give a reason based on the story.

2. Would you prefer to see the photograph alone or with the account of the kitchen conversation? Explain your preference.

3. Should the grandmother have been offered the final choice of caption for this exhibition? Explain your view using her involvement in the story.

4. Would you include the forgotten conversation about repairing the tyre in the exhibition account? Explain what that detail would add or take away.

5. If you were the visitor, would you want the grandmother to explain the puncture after your comment about waving goodbye? Give a reason.
