

The New Fence

Name _____

Date _____

Read the text carefully and answer every question clearly.

By eight o'clock, orange string stretched along the low wall between our garden and the house next door. Mum watched from the kitchen window while the new neighbour checked the position of the wooden posts. I asked what they were building.

'A fence,' Mum said. 'We agreed to share the cost.'

For as long as I could remember, Mr Reed had lived next door. He passed strawberries over the wall and once helped me build a crooked bird table. When he moved, I had expected the new neighbour to inherit our conversations along with his shed.

Outside, Priya introduced herself and showed us the panels. They would block the view across the wall, even when we were standing.

'It's lovely here,' she said. 'At work I'm behind a reception desk all day. Sometimes I want to sit outside without being available for a conversation.'

I nodded, although the phrase sounded unfriendly to me. After she went inside, I asked Mum whether she would miss talking over the wall.

'Sometimes.' She lifted an empty flowerpot off the grass. 'I used to wait until Mr Reed went in before bringing my lunch out. He always wanted a chat, and I didn't always have the energy.'

I had never noticed her waiting. In my memories, she was usually indoors, somewhere behind me and Mr Reed.

By late afternoon, the fence had divided the view into two neat rectangles. Our garden looked smaller. I carried the bird table away from the workers' tools and set it beside the apple tree.

Mum brought out a cup of tea. Instead of settling on the step beside the kitchen, she moved her chair into the sunshine and opened a book. I stayed by the apple tree, one hand resting on the

roof of the bird table.

Behind the new fence, Priya laughed at something I couldn't hear.

Comprehension questions

1. What had Mum and Priya agreed about the cost of the fence?

2. What did Mum sometimes wait for before taking her lunch into the garden?

Reflection questions

1. What does the narrator's expectation that Priya would 'inherit our conversations' reveal about their view of neighbourly relationships? Support your interpretation with the memories of Mr Reed.

2. How does Mum's account of waiting indoors change the reader's understanding of the narrator's memories? Refer to both versions of life beside the low wall.

3. How might Priya's laughter at the end affect the narrator's earlier judgement that she sounded unfriendly? Suggest an interpretation supported by the text.

Opinion questions

1. Would you support building the fence in the circumstances described? Weigh a benefit against something the households would lose.

2. How would you feel about Priya's explanation if you were the narrator? Explain your response using her words.

3. Should Mum have discussed the fence with the narrator before agreeing to share the cost? Explain your view using their different experiences of the garden.

4. Would you keep the bird table after Mr Reed moved away, as the narrator does? Explain what value it could have in the changed garden.

5. Would you prefer the story to end with a conversation between the neighbours or with Priya's unexplained laughter? Explain which ending would suit the situation better.
