

READING COMPREHENSION

B2 | Adults / Teens | Reading + Vocabulary | 45-60 minutes

Topic: Education | Skills: Reading, Vocabulary, Speaking

Read the text carefully. Then answer the questions on Page 2.

A Museum of Ordinary Things

The object that caused the longest discussion at the new neighbourhood museum was a cracked plastic lunchbox. The selection committee had quickly agreed to display old photographs, a factory clock and a wedding dress. The lunchbox, donated by a retired cleaner, seemed less obviously significant. One committee member pointed out that similar boxes could still be bought in any supermarket.

Its owner, Mara, had carried it to work for twenty-three years. She had written her name underneath because lunchboxes often disappeared from the staff kitchen. Inside the lid, her daughter had once drawn a small sun. The drawing had almost faded, but Mara said she still noticed it during difficult shifts.

The **curator** wanted the museum to include everyday working lives, not just remarkable achievements. However, she was uneasy about turning every ordinary object into a **sentimental** story. A moving explanation could make almost anything seem essential, while objects whose owners were less confident speakers might be overlooked.

The committee eventually displayed the lunchbox beside two others. One came with a detailed account of factory work; the owner of the third had supplied only a name and a date. Visitors were invited to consider what could be learned from the objects themselves and what depended on the **accompanying** stories. The label also acknowledged that the collection represented people who had chosen, and been able, to contribute.

The display did not settle which lunchbox mattered most. Instead, it made the selection process visible. Several visitors said it reminded them of relatives whose possessions had been **discarded** without a record. Others thought the museum was giving too much space to familiar items. Both responses served the curator's purpose: to make visitors question how an ordinary life becomes part of a public history, and whose ordinary life is most likely to remain absent.

Key vocabulary

curator - a person who manages and interprets a museum collection

sentimental - appealing strongly to tender emotions, sometimes excessively

accompanying - provided together with something else

discarded - thrown away or no longer kept

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

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Answer in complete sentences. Support interpretations with evidence from the text.

1. Why did one committee member doubt the lunchbox's importance?

2. What made Mara's lunchbox personally meaningful?

3. What concern did the curator have about moving personal stories?

4. Why were three lunchboxes displayed together?

5. What limitation did the label acknowledge?

6. Why could both positive and negative reactions serve the curator's purpose?

Discuss with a partner

- What ordinary object would you choose for a museum?
- How can museums include people who leave few written records?

ANSWER KEY

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Suggested full-sentence answers. Accept other supported interpretations where appropriate.

1. Why did one committee member doubt the lunchbox's importance?

The member doubted its importance because similar lunchboxes were ordinary items still available in shops.

2. What made Mara's lunchbox personally meaningful?

She had used it for twenty-three years, and her daughter's drawing comforted her during difficult shifts.

3. What concern did the curator have about moving personal stories?

She worried that persuasive stories would attract attention while quieter owners' objects were overlooked.

4. Why were three lunchboxes displayed together?

They allowed visitors to compare physical objects with the different amounts of information available about them.

5. What limitation did the label acknowledge?

It acknowledged that the collection represented only people who had chosen and been able to contribute.

6. Why could both positive and negative reactions serve the curator's purpose?

Both reactions encouraged visitors to question how ordinary lives are selected for public history.

Teaching notes

Read once for the main idea, then reread for evidence. Compare answers before discussing the two open questions. Interpretive answers may vary; ask learners to justify their reading.

Language and reading focus: Reported viewpoints; inference and representation.

Text: Original commentary using a fictional scenario. Discussion questions have no fixed answers.