

READING COMPREHENSION

C2 | Adults / Teens | Reading + Vocabulary | 45-60 minutes

Topic: Life Experiences | Skills: Reading, Vocabulary, Speaking

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

The Drawer She Left Closed

The estate agent called the house remarkably clear. Clara supposed this was praise. There were no towers of newspapers, no rooms made **impassable** by objects awaiting a use. Her mother had been considerate even in her **accumulation**: buttons lived with buttons, receipts with receipts, each small excess contained. It was only when Clara began emptying the drawers that tidiness ceased to resemble simplicity.

In the kitchen she found twelve keys, none labelled. She tried them on doors that were already open, feeling faintly foolish. A key that turned seemed to answer a question she had not meant to ask. The others went into a bowl. By lunchtime, the bowl contained two foreign coins, a bus ticket and a screw she was certain would be needed as soon as it had been thrown away.

Her brother arrived with cardboard boxes and a method. Keep, donate, discard. He said the words kindly, as if the difficulty were a shortage of categories. Clara admired his efficiency, which had carried him through the hospital visits and the telephone calls she had found impossible. She did not think him unfeeling. Nevertheless, she began placing things in the keep box because she could not bear how confidently they fitted the other two.

At the back of her mother's desk lay an envelope marked "For later". It contained no letter, only a photograph of a seaside cafe. Clara recognised neither the place nor the woman standing beside her mother. She turned it over. There was a date, but it supplied less of an answer than dates generally promise. Her brother suggested scanning it. She agreed, then put it back in the envelope before he could take it.

By evening, the shelves were bare. The house looked larger and less available. Clara carried the bowl of **unassigned** objects into the hallway, where her brother was counting boxes. Asked whether everything was finished, she said there was one drawer left. He nodded and did not ask which.

On the drive home, she understood that she had not preserved the room, or recovered an unknown chapter of her mother's life. The drawer contained very little. What she had postponed was not the **disposal** of a photograph so much as the moment at which every object would have been required to explain why it deserved to remain.

Key vocabulary

accumulation - a collection formed by things gradually being added

impassable - impossible to move through

unassigned - not placed in a designated group or given a purpose

disposal - the act of getting rid of something

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

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

1. How does the opening unsettle the estate agent's assessment of the house?

2. What do the keys and the screw suggest about Clara's relationship to uncertainty?

3. How does the narration prevent a simple opposition between a sensitive sister and a cold brother?

4. Why does the date on the photograph fail to provide an answer?

5. What is a plausible implication of the brother not asking which drawer remains?

6. How does the final sentence redefine what Clara preserves?

Discuss with a partner

- Must an object have a known story or practical use to be worth keeping?
- How does the story distinguish closure from simply finishing a task?

ANSWER KEY

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

1. How does the opening unsettle the estate agent's assessment of the house?

The apparently clear, orderly house contains emotional and interpretive complexity that becomes apparent only when Clara examines its drawers.

2. What do the keys and the screw suggest about Clara's relationship to uncertainty?

They suggest that uncertain purpose can make disposal difficult; usefulness might become apparent only after an object is gone.

3. How does the narration prevent a simple opposition between a sensitive sister and a cold brother?

Clara recognises her brother's kindness and values the practical care he provided during tasks she could not manage.

4. Why does the date on the photograph fail to provide an answer?

It places the photograph in time without explaining the unfamiliar person, location or significance of the occasion.

5. What is a plausible implication of the brother not asking which drawer remains?

His silence can be read as tacit acceptance that Clara needs an unresolved space, rather than as a demand to complete his sorting system.

6. How does the final sentence redefine what Clara preserves?

She preserves the possibility of keeping something without a complete justification, rather than claiming to recover her mother's full story.

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: Literary inference; free indirect perspective, symbolism and ambiguity.

Text: Original fiction. Discussion questions have no fixed answers.