

READING COMPREHENSION

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

Topic: Discussion | Skills: Reading, Vocabulary, Speaking

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

Keeping the Harbour Still

The preservation committee's most popular image showed the harbour at low tide: three wooden boats, a row of warehouses and no visible advertising. It appeared on the campaign leaflet beneath the phrase "Keep what makes us who we are". Less often reproduced was another photograph, taken the same afternoon, in which a delivery van obscured the boats and a warehouse tenant was carrying a broken heater to the pavement. The second image was not less **authentic**. It was simply harder to turn into an instruction.

Developers proposed converting two warehouses into flats and a restaurant. Campaigners feared the loss of affordable workshops, although the developers' illustrations carefully retained the buildings' **weathered** surfaces. Heritage, in that version, survived as texture: the marks of work remained attractive after the workers themselves had become inconvenient. The committee was right to distrust this distinction between preserving an appearance and sustaining a use.

Its own preferred alternative, however, also required selection. Members wanted the harbour to remain a working place but objected to the noise and vehicle access requested by a boat repair business. The business would have replaced a quiet studio whose owner was retiring. Several campaigners remembered boat repairs from childhood with affection; the contemporary equipment needed to continue them was described as out of character.

A public meeting did not reveal these contradictions to be merely hypocritical. Noise would have affected nearby residents, and the business had supplied little information about its plans. Yet the dispute exposed how easily **continuity** becomes a demand that other people reproduce the visible results of an earlier economy without the conditions that made it possible.

The eventual agreement retained workshop rents for a fixed period, permitted limited vehicle access and required a review of noise after six months. Nobody could promise that the harbour would remain unchanged. The arrangement protected some possibilities for work rather than **prescribing** the exact picture that work must produce. Its temporary safeguards also left a difficult question about what would happen when they expired.

The old photograph stayed on the committee's website. Beside it appeared a new caption identifying the businesses operating beyond the frame. It was a small correction, inadequate as policy but useful as a reminder: a place can resemble its history most convincingly at the moment it ceases to accommodate the lives that gave it one.

Key vocabulary

authentic - genuine or faithful to the reality it claims to represent

weathered - marked or changed by exposure over time

continuity - the persistence of an activity or condition through time

prescribing - specifying what must be done or what form something must take

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

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

1. Why is the second photograph harder to turn into an instruction?

2. What does the phrase 'heritage survived as texture' criticise?

3. How does the boat repair proposal expose tension in the campaigners' position?

4. Why does the writer resist describing the objections as merely hypocritical?

5. How does the agreement differ from preserving a fixed image?

6. Explain the paradox in the final sentence.

Discuss with a partner

- What should take priority when preserving a place: appearance, activities or access?
- How can a temporary agreement avoid simply postponing displacement?

ANSWER KEY

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

1. Why is the second photograph harder to turn into an instruction?

Its ordinary disruption and practical difficulties resist a simple, attractive picture of what preservation should demand.

2. What does the phrase 'heritage survived as texture' criticise?

It criticises preserving visually appealing signs of labour while displacing the activities and workers that produced them.

3. How does the boat repair proposal expose tension in the campaigners' position?

They value the memory of boat repairs but resist the contemporary noise and access needed to continue that work.

4. Why does the writer resist describing the objections as merely hypocritical?

The objections include legitimate concerns about noise and incomplete information, even though they also reveal selective ideas of continuity.

5. How does the agreement differ from preserving a fixed image?

It protects practical opportunities for work through rents and access arrangements while accepting change and leaving future risks unresolved.

6. Explain the paradox in the final sentence.

A place may look historically authentic precisely because present-day life has been removed to preserve its appearance, undermining the living continuity it seems to represent.

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: Extended metaphor, paradox and competing notions of authenticity.

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