

The Neighbour



a short story for English
reading and speaking

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Introduction

Do you have any elderly neighbours?

Do you talk to them?

If so, what do you talk about?

The Neighbour

I had lived in my new house for about a month when I finally had the chance to meet my neighbour, Mr. Jones.

Until that moment, our interactions had been limited to glimpses of him here and there. I might be in the kitchen, washing dishes, and catch sight of him tending to his flowers in his garden or moving something in the back. Another time, I saw a fleeting image of him through the window as I left for work in the morning, a glimpse of his face as he moved around his house.

I knew he was there, but we had never spoken.

Then, one Saturday, as I stood in my overgrown garden contemplating the need to mow the lawn, a sense of shame washed over me. All the other neighbours in our tidy little cul-de-sac had beautifully manicured lawns, while mine had grown unruly.

The problem was my old lawnmower. It had been a hand-me-down from my brother-in-law and had already been on its last legs when it was passed to me. Now, it was completely defunct. I had tried to revive it, but it refused to cooperate. Just as I had

resolved to tackle the overgrown grass and restore some order to my garden, my lawnmower had given up the ghost.

"Having some engine trouble there?" a friendly voice called out. I looked around and saw a face peering over the fence.

It was my neighbour.

He had a kind, friendly expression and a shock of white hair on his head. A big smile beaming down at me.

"Hello there," I said. I waved my hand at the broken lawnmower. "Yes, this old thing has seen better days. I think it's time to get a new one."

"I think we all reach that point eventually," said my neighbour and laughed. "Would you like to borrow mine?"

I'd seen his shiny green lawnmower before, as he diligently tended to his immaculate garden. I hesitated for a moment before shaking my head. "Thank you, that's very kind, but I don't want to be any trouble."

"No trouble at all," he said. "I'll bring it over."

Before I could protest further, Mr. Jones disappeared behind the fence. Within a minute or so, he reappeared in my driveway, dragging his state-of-the-art lawnmower behind him. He plugged it into the extension cable I had running from my kitchen window

and gave me a quick demonstration on how to use it. Soon enough, I was skilfully manoeuvring the mower across my lawn, leaving it perfectly trimmed.

My neighbour introduced himself as George. I told him my name, and we found ourselves chatting about all kinds of things.

George was living alone in his house.

“My wife died a few years ago,” he explained. “And I have a daughter. But she lives far away. She has her own life and her own family now.”

We also found that we shared a passion for cricket, a sport that set me apart from most of my other friends, who were either football or rugby fans.

I often found myself down the pub with one or two friends who wanted to watch an important football match playing live on the TV.

I just didn't understand football. So it was nice to meet someone that liked cricket.

We finished doing the garden, and I invited him in for a cup of tea.

After that day, it was like we became firm friends.

George and I spent many times at each other's homes, enjoying tea and listening to the cricket on the radio.

One day, George came to my house, looking slightly embarrassed.

"I've run into some trouble with my kitchen water heater," he confessed. "Could you take a look?"

I explained my background in electrics and offered to help. It turned out to be a simple issue, requiring no replacement parts, and I had a solution readily available in my garage.

Our friendship was an unexpected and unique one. Despite the age difference, I felt a strong bond with George. It was refreshing to engage in meaningful conversations about life's various topics.

Then, one morning, as I was leaving for work, I noticed a car pulling up outside George's house. A woman stepped out of the car, and it was evident that she was his daughter. Her striking resemblance to George was unmistakable.

Thinking it was a good opportunity to introduce myself, I approached her. "Hello," I called out. "You must be George's daughter."

She looked over with a faint smile. "Yes, I am. Just here to sort through some of my father's belongings."

Unable to contain my admiration for George, I couldn't help but share my thoughts. "Your dad is a fantastic neighbour," I began. "He's helped me so much with my garden, and we share a deep love for cricket."

The woman's face twisted in confusion. "I'm sorry... what? What do you mean?"

I went on, describing how George had assisted me in the garden and how we'd enjoyed listening to cricket on the radio together.

"We chat all the time," I concluded.

I had walked down my path and was now standing a little closer to the woman.

"You saw someone in my father's house?" she asked. "That's impossible."

"No, not someone," I said. "Your dad. George. I see him all the time. I saw him only yesterday."

The woman shook her head and was now stepping away from me.

"That's not possible."

Puzzled, I asked, "What do you mean?"

She leaned against her car for support and uttered words that

left me chilled.

"My father passed away last year."

Reading Comprehension Questions

How long had the narrator lived in their new house before meeting Mr. Jones?

How did the narrator initially perceive Mr. Jones before they met?

What problem did the narrator have with their lawnmower?

How did Mr. Jones offer to help the narrator with their lawnmower?

What sport did the narrator and Mr. Jones both have an interest in?

Describe George's family situation.

What did George and the narrator often do together after they became friends?

What kind of help did George ask the narrator for one day?

How did the narrator feel about their friendship with George?

Who did the narrator meet outside George's house one morning?

How did the narrator describe their friendship with George to his daughter?

How did George's daughter react when the narrator mentioned George's help in the garden?

What did the narrator insist about seeing George recently?

What was the woman's response when the narrator mentioned seeing George the previous day?

What information did the woman reveal about George?

How did the narrator feel after learning about George's passing?

True or False

Look at all the true or false statements below.

State whether they are true or false according to the story.

You can find all the answers at the end of the lesson plan!

The narrator had lived in their new house for several years.

The narrator and Mr. Jones had frequent interactions before their first meeting.

The narrator's lawnmower was in perfect working condition.

Mr. Jones offered to lend the narrator his lawnmower.

The narrator initially declined Mr. Jones's offer.

Mr. Jones was hesitant to help the narrator with the lawnmower.

The narrator and Mr. Jones bonded over their shared love for football.

The narrator and Mr. Jones enjoyed listening to cricket on the radio together.

George, the narrator's neighbour, had a daughter who lived nearby.

The narrator fixed George's kitchen water heater easily.

George's daughter was surprised to hear about her father's friendship with the narrator.

The narrator saw George's daughter outside her father's house.

George's daughter confirmed that her father had passed away the previous year.

The narrator had never met George's daughter before that day.

Essential Vocabulary

trouble	impossible	tending
support	house	extension cable
garden	meaningful	interaction
yesterday	cup of tea	cricket
skilfully	bond	stepped
unique	lawnmower	glimpses
admire	introduction	borrowed
limited	path	leaned
kitchen	background	passed away

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Lawnmower — *Noun. A mechanical device equipped with rotating blades, used for cutting and maintaining the grass in gardens, lawns, or outdoor areas.*

Impossible — *Adjective. Incapable of occurring, being achieved, or existing within the bounds of known laws, rules, or possibilities; beyond the realm of feasibility or practicality.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

The noisy lawnmower woke up the entire neighbourhood early on Sunday morning.

Sarah thought it was impossible to finish the marathon, but she pushed through and crossed the finish line.

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help improve all your English skills — reading, writing, speaking and listening.

What is the Correct Synonym?

Look at the table below.

Match the words on the left with their matching synonym on the right.

A synonym is a word of similar meaning.

You can find the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan!

Neighbour	Disconcerted
Interactions	Cleansing
Washing	Yard
Dishes	Comprehend
Garden	Passed away
Trouble	Lady
Friendly	Sunrise
Engine	Resident
Embarrassed	Predicament
Friendship	Dealings
Conversation	Amicable
Died	Plates
Understand	Camaraderie
Morning	Exchanges
Woman	Motor

What is the Correct Antonym?

Look at the table below.

Match the words on the left with their matching antonym on the right.

An antonym is a word of opposite meaning.

You can find the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan!

Friendly	Terrible
Tidy	Cruel
Skilful	Superficial
Unique	Hindering
Meaningful	Hostile
Fantastic	Stale
Admirable	Clumsy
Deep	Complicated
Immaculate	Clear
Kind	Despicable
Confused	Dirty
Firm	Common
Refreshing	Messy
Simple	Weak
Helpful	Shallow

Missing Words

Look at the table of words below.

Now put each of these words in the correct place in all the gaps in the sentences.

You can check all your answers at the end of the lesson plan!

month	demonstration	daughter
kitchen	cricket	background
lawnmower	rugby	electrics
trouble	garage	belongings
friendly	friendship	puzzled

She's a very _____ neighbour who always says hello with a smile.

I need to find a place in the _____ to store my bicycle.

The _____ in the old building needed to be completely rewired for safety.

My favourite _____ is December because of the festive holiday season.

I'm going to the _____ to prepare dinner for my family.

Their _____ has lasted for years because they always support each other.

_____ is a popular sport in many countries, especially in England and India.

It's time to cut the grass, so I'll need to start the _____.

Don't forget to pack your _____ before we leave for the trip.

His _____ in finance helped him excel in his career as a financial analyst.

I hope there won't be any _____ during our trip.

My _____ is excited about her upcoming school play.

_____ can be quite a physically demanding sport due to the tackling and the scrums.

The students organized a peaceful _____ to protest against climate change.

She looked _____ when she couldn't find her keys, but then she remembered she left them in the car.

Words and Meanings

Look at the table of words below.

Now match each word with the correct meaning below the table.

You can check all your answers at the end of the lesson plan!

neighbour	demonstration	approaching
interactions	manoeuvring	immaculate
glimpses	shared	passionately
tending	background	embarrassed
overgrown	electrics	resemblance
lawnmower	solution	admiration
resolve	garage	confused
trouble	friendship	puzzled
hesitation	meaningful	chilled

A momentary pause or reluctance before taking action or making a decision.

Covered with excessive growth, such as plants

or weeds.

A feeling of respect, approval, or positive regard for someone or something.

The ways in which people or things communicate, engage, or act upon each other.

Confused or perplexed, typically due to a problem or mystery.

Participated in or possessed by multiple individuals in common.

With intense and strong emotions or enthusiasm.

A person who lives near or next to you, typically in a nearby residence.

Significant or having importance, often in an emotional or personal context.

Referring to electrical systems, devices, or components.

Problems, difficulties, or issues that cause distress or concern.

A way to resolve or solve a problem or challenge.

Cooled or made cold; also, a slang term for relaxed or calm.

A machine used for cutting and maintaining grass on lawns.

Feeling self-conscious or ashamed due to a social or personal situation.

Skilfully navigating or controlling something, often a vehicle or situation.

The quality of being similar or having a likeness to something or someone.

A building or space used for parking vehicles or storing equipment.

Having existed or experienced life.

The context or environment in which something exists or occurs.

Perfectly clean, spotless, or without flaws.

An act or display that illustrates or explains something, often in a public setting.

Moving closer to or nearing a particular point or goal.

Caring for or looking after something, often to help it grow or improve.

A close and mutually supportive relationship between individuals.

Brief and fleeting views or moments of something.

To make a firm decision or determination to accomplish something.

Feeling uncertain or unclear about something, often leading to a lack of understanding.

Discussion Questions

What is the significance of the title, "The Neighbour," in this story?

How does the narrator initially perceive Mr. Jones, their neighbour?

What does the narrator notice about Mr. Jones through their limited interactions before they meet in person?

How does the broken lawnmower lead to the narrator's first real interaction with Mr. Jones?

Why does Mr. Jones offer to lend the narrator his lawnmower, and how does this act impact their relationship?

Describe the similarities and differences between the narrator and Mr. Jones in terms of their lives and interests.

How does the shared passion for cricket strengthen the bond between the narrator and Mr. Jones?

What is the significance of George's wife's death and his daughter living far away in the story?

How does the narrator's willingness to help with George's kitchen water heater issue further solidify their friendship?

Discuss the role of unexpected friendships in our lives. How can they enrich our experiences?

Why do you think the narrator didn't realize the truth about George's situation earlier?

How does the introduction of George's daughter change the narrator's perspective on their friendship with George?

What is the impact of the daughter's revelation that her father passed away last year on the narrator?

How do you think the narrator will cope with the shock of realizing they had been interacting with a ghost?

Reflect on the idea of human connections and the way they transcend time and even death in this story.

Do you believe in the possibility of supernatural encounters or connections with the deceased? Why or why not?

If you were in the narrator's position, how would you feel about the interactions with the ghost of George?

How might the narrator's perception of their own life and the meaning of friendship change after this experience?

What do you think the author is trying to convey about the nature of human relationships through this story?

Can you share a personal experience of a surprising or unexpected encounter with a neighbour or stranger that had a significant impact on your life?

Role Play

This is a role play activity.

There are two characters in the role play.

The Narrator from the story above.

A Police Officer who wishes to talk to the narrator.

The Situation

After the narrator told George the neighbour's daughter that he had met her father several times, she became very alarmed.

Maybe a man broke into the house and claimed to be her deceased father.

Or maybe the narrator is trying to play some very unkind trick on her.

Either way, she wants to get to the end of it.

So she called the police.

Now, a police officer is talking to the narrator about what he saw and to describe the man he saw.

The Police Officer

You just want to understand what is going on here.

All you know is that a person living next door to an empty house, claims to have seen the previous owner and spoken to him. But this man died a year ago.

So what exactly did the narrator see?

And who did he talk to?

The Narrator

You are very confused.

You now doubt what and who you spoke to.

You realise now that George is no longer alive. So who exactly did you speak to?

Now you have to present all your story and what happened to the police.

And you don't want them to think you are crazy.

What can you say?

What story can you tell them?

In pairs, take some time to prepare your role play.

When you are ready, stand in front of the class and perform your role play.

In the class, all the students should give feedback on every role play they see.

Your teacher can also give some feedback too.

Have fun!

Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

You are going to write a short story. It is a continuation of the story you read at the beginning of the lesson.

The title of the story is:

The Old Man Next Door

In this exercise, you are going to take on the role of the narrator in the story at the beginning of the lesson.

You have spoken to George's daughter. And she notified the police and you spoke to them too.

Now you are alone in your house.

You feel strange about the events that you experienced. And the fact that you are sure you were speaking to a living, breathing human being!

As you sit alone in your house with your thoughts, you hear a noise from the house next door.

You go to your kitchen and look out the window.

And you see George in his own garden.

What do you do?

***Do you go outside and talk to him?
Or do you stay inside your house?***

***Maybe you call the police...
But what could you possibly tell them?***

***Or maybe George decides to pay you a visit.
Did you lock the back door?***

Think about all the possible events that could take place.

Now write your story.

When you have finished writing your story, stand in front of the class and read it out loud to all your classmates.
They can give you some feedback on your writing.

Or you can hand it in to your teacher for a review.

True or False — Answers

Below are all the correct answers.

Did you get them all right?

The narrator had lived in their new house for several years. False

The narrator and Mr. Jones had frequent interactions before their first meeting. False

The narrator's lawnmower was in perfect working condition. False

Mr. Jones offered to lend the narrator his lawnmower. True

The narrator initially declined Mr. Jones's offer. True

Mr. Jones was hesitant to help the narrator with the lawnmower. False

The narrator and Mr. Jones bonded over their shared love for football. False

The narrator and Mr. Jones enjoyed listening to cricket on the radio together. True

George, the narrator's neighbour, had a daughter who lived nearby. False

The narrator fixed George's kitchen water heater easily. True

George's daughter was surprised to hear about her father's friendship with the narrator. False

The narrator saw George's daughter outside her father's house. True

George's daughter confirmed that her father had passed away the previous year. True

The narrator had never met George's daughter before that day. True

What is the Correct Synonym — Answers

These are the answers below.

How many did you get right?

Neighbour	Resident
Interactions	Dealings
Washing	Cleansing
Dishes	Plates
Garden	Yard
Trouble	Predicament
Friendly	Amicable
Engine	Motor
Embarrassed	Disconcerted
Friendship	Camaraderie
Conversation	Exchanges
Died	Passed away
Understand	Comprehend
Morning	Sunrise
Woman	Lady

What is the Correct Antonym — Answers

These are the answers below.

Did you get them all correct?

Friendly	Hostile
Tidy	Messy
Skilful	Clumsy
Unique	Common
Meaningful	Superficial
Fantastic	Terrible
Admirable	Despicable
Deep	Shallow
Immaculate	Dirty
Kind	Cruel
Confused	Clear
Firm	Weak
Refreshing	Stale
Simple	Complicated
Helpful	Hindering

Missing Words — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

How did you do?

Month: My favourite month is December because of the festive holiday season.

Kitchen: I'm going to the kitchen to prepare dinner for my family.

Lawnmower: It's time to cut the grass, so I'll need to start the lawnmower.

Trouble: I hope there won't be any trouble during our trip.

Friendly: She's a very friendly neighbour who always says hello with a smile.

Demonstration: The students organized a peaceful demonstration to protest against climate change.

Cricket: Cricket is a popular sport in many countries, especially in England and India.

Rugby: Rugby can be quite a physically demanding sport due to the tackling and the scrums.

Garage: I need to find a place in the garage to store my bicycle.

Friendship: Their friendship has lasted for years because they

always support each other.

Daughter: My daughter is excited about her upcoming school play.

Background: His background in finance helped him excel in his career as a financial analyst.

Electrics: The electrics in the old building needed to be completely rewired for safety.

Belongings: Don't forget to pack your belongings before we leave for the trip.

Puzzled: She looked puzzled when she couldn't find her keys, but then she remembered she left them in the car.

Words and Meanings — Answers

These are all the correct answers.

How many did you get right?

Lived: Having existed or experienced life.

Neighbour: A person who lives near or next to you, typically in a nearby residence.

Interactions: The ways in which people or things communicate, engage, or act upon each other.

Glimpses: Brief and fleeting views or moments of something.

Tending: Caring for or looking after something, often to help it grow or improve.

Overgrown: Covered with excessive growth, such as plants or weeds.

Lawnmower: A machine used for cutting and maintaining grass on lawns.

Resolve: To make a firm decision or determination to accomplish something.

Trouble: Problems, difficulties, or issues that cause distress or concern.

Hesitation: A momentary pause or reluctance before taking action or making a decision.

Demonstration: An act or display that illustrates or explains something, often in a public setting.

Manoeuvring: Skilfully navigating or controlling something, often a vehicle or situation.

Shared: Participated in or possessed by multiple individuals in common.

Background: The context or environment in which something exists or occurs.

Electrics: Referring to electrical systems, devices, or components.

Solution: A way to resolve or solve a problem or challenge.

Garage: A building or space used for parking vehicles or storing equipment.

Friendship: A close and mutually supportive relationship between individuals.

Meaningful: Significant or having importance, often in an emotional or personal context.

Approaching: Moving closer to or nearing a particular point or goal.

Immaculate: Perfectly clean, spotless, or without flaws.

Passionately: With intense and strong emotions or enthusiasm.

Embarrassed: Feeling self-conscious or ashamed due to a social or personal situation.

Resemblance: The quality of being similar or having a likeness to something or someone.

Admiration: A feeling of respect, approval, or positive regard for someone or something.

Confused: Feeling uncertain or unclear about something, often leading to a lack of understanding.

Puzzled: Confused or perplexed, typically due to a problem or mystery.

Chilled: Cooled or made cold; also, a slang term for relaxed or calm.

Credits

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