

DISCONNECTED



a short story for English
reading and speaking

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Introduction

What do you think about the use of smartphones and social media apps?

Do you think they can be harmful to our health?

Or are they a useful part of our lives?

Disconnected

Sonia blinked and raised her head.

She took a breath and looked down again.

That same nagging question in her mind at times like this.

How long had she been sitting here?

She pulled her phone up to her line of vision and stared at the screen. Some messages about a girl at school.

One girl trying to round up a feeling of suspicion about her. To raise some resentment.

Hatred.

Sonia barely knew this girl. She had spoken to her at school maybe once or twice in real life.

But nothing important. Just vague, meaningless stuff.

She squinted at the screen.

And then this vague thought that sent whispers through her mind; *Why was she involved in this chat? Why was she adding any comments?*

What had this girl done to her?

Or to anyone?

Sonia went to type these thoughts out on the screen.

But then stopped herself.

If she went against the flow. Held her hand out against the mob, she would become the target.

Another group chat would be set up very quickly and within minutes, she would become the object of derision.

Those were the rules.

So she stopped herself.

A feeling inside her head of confusion. A constant nagging exhaustion.

Like she had to be on guard 24 hours a day.

The whispering from inside her mind; *Do you like this feeling? Does anyone like this feeling?*

Sonia felt overcome with a sensation she could not describe. That she could not understand.

All she knew was that it didn't feel good. There was nothing remotely pleasant about this feeling at all.

The whispering; *Put the phone down.*

She placed it on the floor in her room. She looked at it like it had just suddenly become an object of shame. Something she should not own. Something to be avoided.

Sonia pulled her knees closer to her body and wrapped her arms around her legs in a comforting gesture.

This feeling again. She recognised it. Yes, shame. Or guilt. Tinged with anger.

Another whisper; *Let's get rid of it. Throw it away.*

Sonia turned to her phone. The screen had flickered off to black. She rarely let it go dark. It was usually bright and flashing. She liked to flick from one app to another. To maintain contact. To make sure that she was not missing out.

That she didn't miss one comment. One jibe.

One snide remark.

The whispering. This time, more of a growl. ***Get rid of it.***

Sonia jumped to her feet and picked her phone up. She picked it up between her thumb and finger. Like it was a piece of trash.

Or something the dog had been chewing on.

On her desk was an old plastic bag, a wrapper for

something she had eaten earlier.

She dropped her phone inside it and clutched it tight.

The whispering; *Let's go outside. Let's touch green.*

Sonia ran downstairs. Her mother was in the living room, bent over her own phone.

'Hey love, going somewhere?'

'I just need to — ' Sonia went to complete the sentence, but her mother was already focused back on the screen on her phone. She wasn't listening.

Sonia pulled her sandals on and ran out the door.

Outside, the sky was overcast and unwelcoming.

A sharp breeze that blew coldly against her face.

She stopped in her tracks, thought about going back inside, back into the safety of her room, back to her bed and the screen on her phone.

But she snapped herself to attention and marched on towards the end of the road.

Coming towards her, a young guy who also lived on her street. She could see him, could recognise his face from the videos he had posted online.

His head was bent down, gazing at his phone. His feet stumbled along at a plodding pace below him.

As she passed him, Sonia went to call out and say hello. But she stopped herself. Just to check how much he was aware of the world around him.

He shuffled by, completely ignoring her. Totally unaware that she was even there.

At the end of the road, was a park.

Sonia used to go to the park all the time. Years ago, when she was just a little kid. Before she owned a phone.

Before she joined all the apps.

The gate to the park was wide open. A welcoming gesture to the community. To all the people.

Inviting everyone to step into the green.

A sign read: **Feel Free To Walk On The Grass.**

And Sonia did.

She slipped off her sandals and stepped onto the lawn that lay in front of her.

The soft blades of grass beneath her feet felt more comfortable than any carpet inside her home.

Cool and gently massaging against the soles of her feet.

The whispering; *This is better. Better than being in your room.*

Then, in a deeper tone; *Now look ahead.*

The lawn came to the edge of a lake. Sonia remembered coming here with her parents. To feed the ducks.

To look at the fish slithering around inside the inky depths of the water.

It was just a lake inside a park in her town.

But it was nature.

It felt like heaven.

Sonia came to the edge of the lake and stopped.

The water lapped at the edge. Gently licking rhythms between water and land.

The whispering ushered into her inner ear; *Take out your phone. You know what to do.*

She pulled out her phone.

The screen remained jet-black. And Sonia dared not to touch it, she did not want to bring it to life.

Then she pulled her hand back as far behind her as she

could, and with one deft movement, she hurled her phone into the lake.

It landed with a quiet splash in the middle of the water. And was gone.

Right on cue, a fish jumped from the lake and plunged back into the water below.

A bird called out from a tree.

And the wind blew through the trees, creating a flurry of voices in the branches and the leaves.

And Sonia smiled.

For the first time in ages, she smiled.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Who is the main character in the story?

Where is she?

What is she doing?

What question was on her mind at the beginning of the story?

How did Sonia feel about the messages being exchanged on her phone?

What was the group chat about?

Why did Sonia hesitate to go against the flow of the group chat?

Describe Sonia's feelings as she decided not to type her thoughts.

Does Sonia know the girl in the group chat very well?

How does Sonia know the girl?

What does the whispering ask Sonia the first time?

Can Sonia explain the feelings she has at this moment?

What is the second question from the whispering?

Does Sonia comply with this request?

How does Sonia regard her phone at this moment in the story?

What position does Sonia get into her body?

What three words does Sonia think of that describe her feelings at this moment?

What does the whispering suggest doing with the phone the third time?

When Sonia looks at her phone, is the screen open or closed?

Does she allow this to happen very often?

Why/why not?

The fourth time the whispering speaks to her, what does it say?

How does Sonia react? What does she do?

Where does she place her phone? Why does she do this?

What is the fifth order from the whispering?

When Sonia goes downstairs, who does she see?

Does her mother speak to her?

Does Sonia reply?

How does her mother react?

How is their communication? Good or not?

Why/why not?

What kind of shoes does Sonia put on her feet?

What was the weather like when Sonia went outside?

Does Sonia go back inside the house?

Who does she meet when she is walking down the road?

Does she know this person?

How?

What is the young guy doing?

Does Sonia speak to him?

Why/why not?

What does the young guy do?

Does he see her?

What is at the end of the road?

What memories does Sonia have of this place?

What did the sign at the park entrance say?

How did the grass feel under Sonia's feet?

What is inside the park?

What memories does Sonia have of this place inside the

park?

Did she like this place when she was younger?

What did the whispering suggest to Sonia to do when she reached the lake?

What happened to the phone after Sonia threw it into the lake?

How did the fish and bird contribute to the scene at the lake?

What elements of nature did Sonia experience standing by the lake?

What did she do after throwing her phone in the lake?

Essential Vocabulary

blinked	guilt	community
nagging	anger	gently
suspicion	flickered	massaging
resentment	maintain	comfortable
hatred	attention	parents
vague	wrapper	lake
whispered	whispered	ducks
target	sandals	nature
confusion	overcast	ushered
exhaustion	unwelcoming	dared
guard	breeze	deft
sensation	attention	movement
ashamed	shuffled	splash
avoided	plodding	plunged
comforting	aware	branches

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:

Blinked — *the action of shutting and opening one's eyes quickly.*

Nagging — *something or someone that is persistently annoying or creating a sense of worry.*

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

When John realised who he was looking at, he blinked in total surprise.

I got on the train, but still had this nagging thought that I had left something at home.

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 the correct synonym on the right.

A synonym is a word of similar meaning.

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

Guilt	Loathing
Community	Softly
Nagging	Unclear
Anger	Pestering
Gently	Focus
Flickered	Rage
Resentment	Remorse
Comfortable	Murmured
Hatred	Twinkled
Attention	Bitterness
Vague	Society

Whispered	Cosy
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What Is The Correct Antonym?

Look at the table below.

Match the words on the left with the correct antonym on the right.

An antonym is a word of opposite meaning.

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

Aware	Confronted
Comforting	Clarity
Avoided	Disregard
Plodding	Love
Ashamed	Clear
Attention	Agile
Deft	Proud
Exhaustion	Oblivious
Confusion	Yelled
Whispered	Clumsy
Vague	Upsetting

Hatred	Vitality
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True or False?

Look at all the statements below.

Say which ones are true. And which ones are false.

If a statement is false, correct it and make it true according to the story.

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

The park sign read: “Feel Free To Walk On The Grass.”

Sonia felt a sense of shame and guilt about participating in the group chat.

The sky was clear and sunny when Sonia went outside.

Sonia’s mother was deeply engaged in a conversation with her when Sonia left the house.

Sonia threw her phone into the lake.

Sonia's sandals were uncomfortable and hurt her feet.

Sonia has a very close friendship with the girl mentioned in the group chat.

Sonia was excited to see the boy from her street and immediately greeted him.

The story ends with Sonia feeling regretful about throwing her phone into the lake.

Sonia felt relieved and happy after she got rid of her phone.

Sonia often went to the park as a kid before she owned a phone.

Sonia's mother was reading a book when Sonia left the house.

A fish jumped from the lake right after Sonia threw her phone into the water.

Sonia felt a constant nagging exhaustion and confusion in her mind.

Sonia's phone was constantly buzzing with notifications.

Words and Meanings

Look at the table of words below.

Now match one word with one of the meanings below the table.

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

Guilt	Lake	Sensation
Flickered	Whispered	Shuffled
Comfortable	Confusion	Plunged
Sandals	Breeze	Branches

When talking about light, to shine unsteadily. Make small, quick movements of light.

To speak very softly using only our breath and not using our vocal cords, often done when we wish to say something in secret.

A physical feeling that we get from something that comes into contact with our body.

To walk by dragging our feet along or not lifting them fully from the ground.

To fall or jump into something, usually water, like a river or lake.

Light shoes that are often open on the upper part and worn with a strap over the foot. Usually worn in warm weather.

The feeling of being physically relaxed and free from constraint; a place that provides physical ease and relaxation.

A lack of understanding; uncertainty. A state of being bewildered or unclear in our mind about something or a situation.

A gentle wind, often very comfortable.

A large body of water surrounded by land.

The parts of a tree which grow out from the trunk.

The feeling of doing something wrong or failing in an obligation.

What Is The Missing Word?

Look at the table of words below.

Now fill in the gaps of all the sentences below the table.
ONE word for ONE sentence.

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

Whispered	Resentment	Exhausted
Suspicion	Attention	Ashamed
Community	Nature	Breeze
Flickered	Sensation	Movement

Rose could not hide her _____ when she found out she did not get the promotion.

Simon's _____ grew as he noticed the strange behaviour of his colleagues.

The candlelight _____ in the wind, casting long shadows on the walls.

Martin felt _____ for insulting his best friend at the party.

A strange _____ ran down his spine as Philip walked down the dark alley.

The _____ gathered in the town square to celebrate the New Year.

The teacher's stern voice immediately grabbed the students' _____.

Hiking through the forest, Craig and his brother marvelled at the _____ that surrounded them.

A gentle _____ blew through the open window, cooling the room.

She _____ a secret to her friend, ensuring no one else could hear.

After running the marathon, Jane felt completely _____ but also happy that she had done it.

The sudden _____ in the bushes made us jump with fright.

Discussion Questions

What is this story about? Try to sum up in two or three sentences what you think this story's message is.

Why do you think Sonia feels confused and exhausted at the beginning of the story?

Sonia is participating in a group chat on her phone. What do you think the members of the chat are talking about?

What do you talk about in group chats?

Can group chats be negative sometimes?

Why do you think Sonia is chatting in this group? What encourages her to do this?

How does Sonia feel about the girl mentioned in the messages? Is she a good friend of hers?

Why do you think Sonia stopped typing out more messages on her phone?

What stopped her?

In the story, there are the lines; 'If she went against the flow. Held her hand out against the mob, she would become

the target.'

What does this mean?

Is this common in social media?

If so, why?

Can you describe the feelings that Sonia is experiencing at the beginning of the story?

Sonia places her phone on the floor beside her. What do you think this action symbolises?

What does it say about Sonia and her regard for the group chat?

What do think 'the whispering' is?

A voice inside Sonia's subconscious?

From her phone?

From a higher power?

What could it be?

The story describes Sonia's emotional state at the beginning of the story.

Why do you think she is experiencing so many emotions?

What is causing it?

Sonia's phone turns to a black screen. She rarely allows

this to happen.

What does this say about Sonia's phone use?

How many hours do you think she is using it every day?

How many hours do you use your phone every day?

Is this too much? Or acceptable?

When Sonia stands up and leaves her room, she puts her phone in a discarded plastic bag.

Why does she do this, do you think?

How does she regard her phone at this moment?

How does Sonia's interaction with her mother highlight the theme of disconnection?

Why do you think Sonia decides to go outside, and what does she hope to achieve?

Sonia meets a boy she knows on her street. What does this moment symbolise about the theme of the story?

Have you ever encountered someone like this? Someone who never stops looking at their phone?

Are you like this?

If you are, why do you do this?

Describe Sonia's feelings as she walks through the park.

How do they differ from her feelings indoors?

What memories does Sonia recall when she reaches the park?

In the story, there is a sign that reads: Feel Free To Walk On The Grass.

Do you think the park really has a sign like this?

Or does the sign just have a special meaning for the story?

What does this message mean?

How does the park environment contrast with Sonia's room and her usual routine?

Sonia takes off her shoes and walks on the grass barefoot.

What does this symbolise?

Why does Sonia throw her phone into the lake? What does this action symbolize for her?

What is the significance of the fish jumping and the bird calling out after Sonia throws her phone into the lake?

How does the story address the impact of social media on mental health?

What message do you think the story is trying to convey through Sonia's experience?

How does the ending of the story reflect a change in Sonia's state of mind?

What do you think will happen to Sonia after the story ends? How will her life change?

Discuss the importance of nature in the story. How does it affect Sonia?

What lessons can we learn from Sonia's experience about the use of technology and social media?

Role Play

This is a role play activity.

There are two characters in the role play.

- **Person 1**
- **Person 2**

The Situation

Person 1 has decided to get rid of their smartphone.

They have also deleted all their social media apps.

They no longer wish to participate in group chats or online conversations.

Person 1 meets Person 2 (they are friends) and Person 2 asks Person 1 where they have been.

Person 2 asks questions like;

- Where have you been?
- I tried to send you messages but I can't find you.
- What happened?

Person 1 then explains that they have had enough of living their life via their smartphone. And via social media.

They want to have real-life conversations with people. So they deleted all the apps and got rid of their phone.

What follows is a conversation between the two characters, where Person 1 explains how their life is better and happier without a phone and social media.

But Person 2 can't understand how anyone can live without a phone or access to the apps.

The Procedure

Get into pairs for the role play.

Read through the situation and make sure you understand what the role play is about.

Take some time to prepare your role play.

Think about the following questions to help you:

- What outcome does your role play have?
- What message are you trying to convey?
- Are smartphones acceptable for all people to use?
- Or should we limit their use?

Performing The Role Play

Now take turns in the classroom to perform your role play to the other students.

After each pair of students shows their role play, the other students should ask questions and give a critique.

Conclusion

After all the students have shown their role plays, the whole class discusses the different themes of the role play performances.

- ***What is your opinion of smartphones and social media now?***
- ***Is it the same, or have your views changed at all?***

Debate

This is a debate activity.

Ban All Smartphones In The Schools!

Introduction

This is a debate activity between two groups that discuss the idea of banning smartphones in schools.

The Teams

Team A

You believe that smartphones and social media apps are a great hindrance in the classroom.

So you call for smartphones to be banned in the

classroom.

You think that once smartphones are banned in schools, the students will improve in all classes and there will be much better focus and attention.

There is no need for anyone to have a smartphone in the classroom.

If there is an emergency, the parent can call the school. Or the student can communicate with their teacher.

Team B

You believe that smartphones can be used in school as part of studying.

There are many useful apps that students can use to assist with their learning. It is not all social media apps.

In terms of focus, it is the responsibility of the teacher to encourage the students. Banning phones will not help with this.

Also, if there is an emergency, the student can call home immediately. Or the parent can call their son or daughter.

The Procedure

Choose two team captains to lead the teams.

The team captains take turns choosing team members for their teams.

Each team should have an equal number of people in each team.

Choose a chairperson to chair the debate.

The chairperson should ensure there is order during the debate.

No heckling or shouting during the debate!

And the chairperson ensures that each and every person has the opportunity to speak.

In your teams, prepare carefully what you wish to say during the debate.

Make sure that you cover all the main points you wish to talk about in the debate.

Also, try to think of what the other team might talk about, so you have suitable counterarguments.

The Debate

The chairperson will call time after the teams have finished preparing.

Now begin the debate!

Team A presents one of their lines of argument.

When they have finished, Team B presents a counterargument.

Continue like this until the lines of argument are

exhausted.

Now it is Team B's turn to present a line of argument.

Each team presents all their arguments one by one until done.

Conclusion

At the end of the debate, all the students sit in a circle.

Discuss all the lines of arguments that were presented during the debate.

- How do you feel about smartphones in the classroom now?
- Have your opinions changed at all?
- Do you think it is a good idea to ban smartphones in schools?
- Why/why not?

Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

A Life Without A Smartphone

You are going to continue the next part of the story about Sonia from the story at the beginning.

Sonia has thrown her phone into the lake.
She feels happy and alive.

But what happens next in her life?

Think about the following questions to help you write your story;

- How does her mother react when she tells her?
- How do her friends react?
- Does Sonia continue to feel happy? Or does she start to feel disconnected from her friends and from life?
- Does Sonia feel more connected to nature? If so, how does it change her life?

Write your story.

When you have finished your writing, read it out loud in front of the class.

Ask your classmates for review and feedback.

Or you can hand the story in to your teacher. Your teacher can give you a full critique of your writing.

What Is The Correct Synonym — Answers

Here are the correct answers.

How many did you get right?

Guilt	Remorse
Community	Society
Nagging	Pestering
Anger	Rage
Gently	Softly
Flickered	Twinkled
Resentment	Bitterness
Comfortable	Cosy
Hatred	Loathing
Attention	Focus
Vague	Unclear
Whispered	Murmured

What Is The Correct Antonym — Answers

And below you can find the correct answers.

How successful were you?

Aware	Oblivious
Comforting	Upsetting
Avoided	Confronted
Plodding	Agile
Ashamed	Proud
Attention	Disregard
Deft	Clumsy
Exhaustion	Vitality
Confusion	Clarity
Whispered	Yelled
Vague	Clear
Hatred	Love

True or False — Answers

The correct answers are below.

Did you do well?

Sonia has a very close friendship with the girl mentioned in the group chat.

(False) *They don't know each other very well.*

Sonia felt a constant nagging exhaustion and confusion in her mind.

(True)

Sonia's mother was deeply engaged in a conversation with her when Sonia left the house.

(False) *Her mother was preoccupied with her own phone.*

The park sign read: "Feel Free To Walk On The Grass."

(True)

Sonia often went to the park as a kid before she owned a phone.

(True)

Sonia was excited to see the boy from her street and

immediately greeted him.

(False) *She didn't talk to him to test if he would see her or not.*

Sonia threw her phone into the lake.

(True)

Sonia's phone was constantly buzzing with notifications.

(False) *Her phone had no notifications.*

Sonia felt a sense of shame and guilt about participating in the group chat.

(True)

The story ends with Sonia feeling regretful about throwing her phone into the lake.

(False) *She was smiling, so maybe she was feeling happy.*

Sonia's mother was reading a book when Sonia left the house.

(False) *Her mother was staring at her phone.*

Sonia felt relieved and happy after she got rid of her phone.

(True)

The sky was clear and sunny when Sonia went outside.

(False) *The weather was cold and overcast.*

Sonia's sandals were uncomfortable and hurt her feet.

(False) *The story doesn't mention if her sandals were uncomfortable or not.*

A fish jumped from the lake right after Sonia threw her phone into the water.

(True)

Words and Meanings — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

Are you a winner?

Guilt

noun: The feeling of doing something wrong or failing in an obligation.

Flickered

Verb: When talking about light, to shine unsteadily. Make small, quick movements of light.

Comfortable

Adjective: The feeling of being physically relaxed and free from constraint; a place that provides physical ease and relaxation.

Sandals

Noun: Light shoes that are often open on the upper part and worn with a strap over the foot. Usually worn in warm weather.

Lake

Noun: A large body of water surrounded by land.

Whispered

Verb: To speak very softly using only our breath and not using our vocal cords, often done when we wish to say something in secret.

Confusion

Noun: A lack of understanding; uncertainty. A state of being bewildered or unclear in our mind about something or a situation.

Breeze

Noun: A gentle wind, often very comfortable.

Sensation

Noun: A physical feeling that we get from something that comes into contact with our body.

Shuffled

Verb: To walk by dragging our feet along or not lifting them fully from the ground.

Plunged

Verb: To fall or jump into something, usually water, like a river or lake.

Branches

Noun: The parts of a tree which grow out from the trunk.

What Is The Missing Word — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

What was your score?

Whispered: She **whispered** a secret to her friend, ensuring no one else could hear.

Suspicion: Simon's **suspicion** grew as he noticed the strange behaviour of his colleagues.

Community: The **community** gathered in the town square to celebrate the New Year.

Flickered: The candlelight **flickered** in the wind, casting long shadows on the walls.

Resentment: Rose could not hide her **resentment** when she found out she did not get the promotion.

Attention: The teacher's stern voice immediately grabbed the students' **attention**.

Nature: Hiking through the forest, Craig and his brother marvelled at the **nature** that surrounded them.

Sensation: A strange **sensation** ran down his spine as Philip walked down the dark alley.

Exhausted: After running the marathon, Jane felt completely **exhausted** but also happy that she had done it.

Ashamed: Martin felt **ashamed** for insulting his best friend at the party.

Breeze: A gentle **breeze** blew through the open window, cooling the room.

Movement: The sudden **movement** in the bushes made us jump with fright.

Credits

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