

Dear Life

A childhood visitation

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/09/19/110919fa_fact_munro

Reading Comprehension

Read the comprehension questions, and then read the whole story through. The text is quite long, and it will take you a while, besides, the answers to a couple of questions can be found at two different paragraphs in the text. Finally, answer the questions.

- 1.- How different were the two schools she went to?
- 2.- Who was her friend Diane? How did they become friends? How did the relationship end?
- 3.- What were her father's and her mother's jobs?
- 4.- Name 3 jobs she did on the farm and/or in the house.
- 5.- When her father fixed up their house at the end of the war, what change did she like most?
- 6.- Tell Mrs. Netterfield's first story in 2 lines.
- 7.- Tell Mrs Netterfield's incident with her mother in 6-8 lines.
- 8.- Discuss the ending of the story in relation to the title and the subtitle of the short story.

ANSWER KEY

1.- How different were the two schools she went to?

The first school was very poor and neglected with filthy toilets, and Alice was bullied. The town school was cleaner; she learnt more, but many students left school early to get jobs or to get married.

2.- Who was her friend Diane? How did they become friends? How did the relationship end?

Diane asked Alice if she could do the “Highland fling” and took her to her house to teach her. Alice’s mother picked her up and wasn’t pleased with the fact that Alice had been invited to play in that house.

Diane stopped appearing at school a few days later. Eventually, Diane became a prostitute like her own mother.

3.- What were her father's and her mother's jobs?

Her mother was a schoolteacher in Alberta, but she left her job.

Her father was a silver fox and mink farmer. Later he found a job as a night watch at a foundry.

4.- Name 3 jobs she did on the farm and/or in the house.

She pumped water for the animals, she cleaned out the animals’ drinking tins and refilled them.

At first, she resented helping her mother in the house, she “talked back” and got beaten by her father. Later on in the text, she says she made her father’s lunch, supper and she did the dishes.

5.- When her father fixed up their house at the end of the war, what change did she like most?

The changes in the dining room, where her father beat her up. She felt as if all her misery and shame were gone.

6.- Tell Mrs. Netterfield's first story in 2 lines.

She chased after the grocery delivery boy with a hatchet up in her hand, when she realized that the butter hadn’t been brought to her.

7.- Tell Mrs Netterfield's incident with her mother in 6-8 lines.

One afternoon, Alice's mother was washing clothes while baby Alice was asleep in her baby carriage on the lawn, and she saw Mrs Netterfield walking on the property. Her mother ran out of the kitchen, grabbed the baby, ran back into the house, locked the door and hid inside. She saw Mrs Netterfield walking around the house and looking into the windows for a while until she went away. Alice's mother only unlocked the house when her husband came back home. That was the visitation.

8.- Discuss the ending of the story in relation to the title and the subtitle of the short story.

She read a poem in the local newspaper about the childhood house of a woman whose maiden name was Netterfield, and had lived in Alice's house before her father bought the farm. Perhaps the old woman was looking in the windows of what had been her own house, and perhaps she was looking for her own daughter in the "visitation".

When Alice's mother was dying, she got out of the hospital and wandered around the town until someone spotted her and took her in. The memoir ends "If this were fiction, as I said, it would be too much, but it is true".