

The Library Bus Is Late

PASSAGE · FICTION

SKILLS TRAINED

Working memory

Delayed recall

Inference

HOW TO USE THIS SHEET

About 15 minutes

- 1 Read the passage twice, slowly. Take about four minutes.
- 2 Turn to the next page and cover this one. No looking back.
- 3 Write what you remember, then mark it on the last page.

The library bus came to Siika every second Thursday at four o'clock, and in eleven years it had never once been late. Elsa knew this, because her mother had been borrowing books from it since before Elsa was born.

At twenty past four, Elsa was still standing at the turning circle in the snow with three books in her arms and nothing to look at but the road. Her breath froze on her scarf. The light was already going; in February, in that part of Finland, the afternoon gives up early.

At half past, she started walking.

The bus was green and white, with the number 7 painted on its door. It carried two thousand books, a date stamp, a kettle, and a driver called Veikko who had opinions about every single one of the books. Elsa found it a kilometre down the road, tilted into the ditch, its back wheels spinning uselessly in the slush.

Veikko was outside with a shovel and no hat. "Ice under the snow," he said, before she had even asked. "The bus is perfectly well. The road is not." He had dug out one wheel and had three to go.

Elsa set her books on the step and took the second shovel. They worked for twenty minutes without talking much. Then a tractor came over the hill — her neighbour Mr Rautio, who towed the bus out in less than a minute and refused to be thanked.

Veikko drove back to the turning circle, switched on the inside lights and opened the door. Nobody else came. It was nearly six and fully dark by then. So Elsa borrowed four books instead of her usual three, and Veikko made tea on the kettle at the back, and the two of them sat in the warm yellow light of the bus arguing about whether the ending of the book she had just returned was any good.

"Eleven years," Elsa said as she climbed down. "You were never late before."

"I was not late," said Veikko. "I was in a ditch. Those are different things."

Cover the passage before you start.

Looking back turns this into a copying exercise. Getting it slightly wrong from memory is what makes it work.

PART A Tell it back

Write down everything you can remember about the evening the library bus did not arrive. Order does not matter. Keep writing until you run out.

PART B 5 questions

1 How often did the library bus come to Siika, and at what time?

2 Describe the bus: its colours, its number, and three things it carried.

3 Who pulled the bus out of the ditch, and how?

4 Why did Elsa start walking down the road at half past four?

5 The back wheels were spinning “uselessly in the *slush*”. What is slush, and why would it make the wheels spin?

PART C Mark your own work

Now go back to the passage. Tick every answer you got right. You do not need the same words as the answer below — if you wrote the same idea in your own words, it counts.

- ☐ 1 • Every second Thursday, at four o'clock.
- ☐ 2 • Green and white, with the number 7 on the door. It carried two thousand books, a date stamp, a kettle, and its driver Veikko.
- ☐ 3 • Elsa's neighbour Mr Rautio, with his tractor. It took him less than a minute, and he refused to be thanked.
- ☐ 4 • Because the bus had never been late in eleven years, so a half-hour delay meant something must have gone wrong. She went to find out what.
- ☐ 5 • Slush is half-melted snow mixed with water. It is wet and soft, so the tyres slide through it instead of gripping anything solid.

FACTS RECALLED IN PART A

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QUESTIONS CORRECT

— / 5

DATE

THE STRATEGY Teach it to someone

Once you have read the passage, explain it to somebody — a parent, a younger brother, or an empty chair if nobody is free. Teaching forces you to put the facts in order and say them out loud, and the moment you stumble you have found exactly the bit you do not know yet. Then go back for that bit only.

WHERE YOU ALREADY DO THIS

Who in your house would you choose to explain today's passage to, and what would you tell them first?

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER • This sheet trains recall, not reading speed. Resist prompting during Part A — the effort of retrieving a half-remembered fact is exactly what builds the memory, and a child who is rescued too early never does that work. Compare the Part A count across several sets rather than chasing a score on any single one.