

The Bridge at Kicking Horse

Name: _____

Read the passage all the way through before you start.

The old railway bridge had been closed for as long as Priya had been alive. A chain link fence sealed each end, and a sign wired to it had faded until only the word DANGER was still readable.

Her grandfather had worked on that line. He talked about it the way other people talk about a person they miss — the sound the rails made in cold weather, the way the canyon threw an engine's whistle back at you four or five times.

In August the town announced it was tearing the bridge down. Priya's grandfather read the notice twice, folded the paper into quarters, and said nothing at all for the rest of dinner.

So Priya did something she had never done before: she went to a council meeting. She had written half a page and her hands shook the whole time she read it. She said the bridge was the only thing left that proved the railway had been there. She said a town that pulls down everything old ends up looking like nowhere in particular.

The council voted to tear it down anyway. Seven to two.

But a reporter had been in the room, and the article ran that Saturday with a photograph of the bridge in low sun. Within a month there was a committee, and by the following spring there was a plan to turn the span into a walking trail.

Her grandfather walked across it the first week it opened. He stopped in the middle, where the canyon drops away, and stood there a long time without saying anything. Priya had learned by then not to fill that kind of silence.

Fiction • 277 words

Before you turn over

1. Underline any word you are not sure of. Work out what you can from the sentence around it.

2. In one sentence, what is this passage about?

3. Write down one question you still have.

The questions are on the next page. →

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Answer in complete sentences. Look back at the passage as often as you need to.

1. Why had the bridge been closed?

2. How does the writer show that the grandfather cared about the railway, without ever saying so directly?

3. Priya lost the vote. Explain why the story does not end there.

4. What does the last sentence tell you about Priya?

5. What is the theme of this story?

The Bridge at Kicking Horse — Answer Key

1. It was an old railway bridge that had been shut and fenced off, judged unsafe — the remaining sign says DANGER. (*Recall*)
2. He talks about it the way people talk about a missed person, he remembers small sensory details, and he goes silent for the whole meal when he reads the notice. (*Author's craft*)
3. A reporter was in the room, so her argument reached far more people than the council. That coverage led to the committee and then the trail. (*Cause and effect*)
4. Answers will vary. She has learned to let her grandfather have the moment rather than talk over it — she has grown more understanding of him. (*Inference*)
5. Answers will vary. Accept: one person speaking up can matter even when they lose; or what a place keeps says who it is. (*Theme*)