

The hole in the wall

Joanna is the last fruit seller in her family. When she goes to the capital city to sell her fruits, she discovers something worth more than money.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

Definition

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. a trader | a. to have a particular value, especially in money |
| 2. ripe | b. a small vehicle with two or four wheels that a horse or person can pull |
| 3. a cart | c. to start behaving in a silly or strange way |
| 4. a stall | d. (of fruit) ready to eat |
| 5. value | e. a person who buys and sells things |
| 6. to be worth | f. good sense and judgement, learned from your experience of life |
| 7. to lose your mind | g. a table or small shop with an open front for selling things at a market |
| 8. wisdom | h. the amount of money that can be received for something; how useful or important something is |

The hole in the wall —

Joanna Paresi was the last one left – the last living person in a family who had been market traders for hundreds of years. She was born in a village at the bottom of high mountains, and she had lived there all her life. At the top of the mountains, the stone fruit grew. In autumn, the fruit fell down the mountains. Most of the stone fruit got lost and no one could find them again. But some fruit fell into a small valley. Joanna's family were the only people who knew about the valley.

When the stone fruit fell from the trees, they were black and hard. It took four long months for them to become ripe. They turned from black to grey and, finally, to silver. Then people could enjoy the sweet, sun-coloured fruit inside.

When it was ripe, the stone fruit was delicious. It was the most popular food in the region. On market day, people got up early and queued for hours to buy it. Joanna's family always had more fruit to sell than anyone else. Her family had made a lot of money by selling the fruit

over the years. But they were not as rich as the market sellers who sold their products far away in the capital city.

When Joanna was a child, she asked her mother, 'Why don't we go to the capital city to sell the fruit? That's where the most important market in the country is.' Her mother told her that someone had tried once, and they had failed. But she didn't say any more.

As the years passed, Joanna dreamed of selling stone fruit at the market in the capital. The spring after her mother died, she decided to go. It would take four long months to walk to the capital city. It was exactly how long it took the fruit to become ripe. It would be difficult ... *but it was possible*.

When the people in the city tried stone fruit for the first time, they would love it. And, best of all, they would pay a lot. She would earn more money than ever before.

Joanna walked all the way to the capital city. She pushed a wooden cart full of stone fruit. She carried with her a beautiful wooden market stall. The stall had belonged to her mother, and before that to Joanna's grandmother. On this stall, she would sell her fruit. When she finally arrived at the city, she was very tired after months on the road. But the stone fruit were almost ripe. So far, her plan was working.

Of course, there was a tax to enter the city gates. And there were market fees to pay. Plus, it wasn't easy to sell strange, new foods like hers at the market. The fruit had to be tested to prove it was safe to eat. The tests were not cheap and they took days to do.

Joanna spent all her money on the tests. And she also needed a place to sleep while she waited. She really needed money, so she sold her beautiful family stall. She didn't want to do it, but she had no choice. After she sold the fruit, she could buy the stall back.

Finally, the tests were finished and she was allowed to sell her fruit. She used the last of her money to rent a cheap, ordinary stall. But by now the perfect, silver stone fruit had turned white and lost their sweet flavour.

No customers wanted to buy her overripe fruits from her boring stall. They were starting to look and smell bad. In the end, she sold all the stone fruit to a farmer to feed his pigs. He bought her cart too, and paid her much less than its value.

She had lost everything.

Joanna left the market in defeat. She walked through the city streets. There were shops of every kind. In one she saw the beautiful stall that her mother had given her. But she had no money to buy it back

Tears ran down her face, and she walked until she was lost in the city streets. At last, she lay down in a corner and fell asleep.

When Joanna woke again, it was dark. But there was something even darker on the wall opposite her. It was a hole in the wall.

It wasn't a door, because it didn't reach the ground. It wasn't a window either. This was just a hole in the wall. It had ... nothing. Just like her.

Joanna felt so angry – with the market and with herself. She pulled off one of her boots. It was full of holes from her long journey. She threw it across the street at the hole.

It disappeared into the hole, but there was no sound as it landed. The boot was gone. It was just one more thing that she had lost by being stupid. Tired and sad, she closed her eyes on the world. But then she heard a sound.

She opened her eyes again.

There was something shiny on the ground. It was a coin – a single penny. It was enough to buy a meal. It was definitely worth more than her old boot.

It must be a joke, she thought. She waited for someone to come out and start laughing at her. But nothing happened. She pulled off her other boot and threw it after the first. She saw it fly through the hole into nothing. But this time she saw another coin fly back out, then a second and a third.

Joanna picked up the nearest coin. She held it close to her face ... *It was real!*

She picked up the other coins: *three pennies*. She could buy new boots now.

She took off her belt and threw it at the hole. In it went – and more coins flew back out. She picked those up too and counted them: ten pennies. Enough for new boots *and* a simple belt!

Excited, she quickly took off her travelling coat, her jacket and both socks. She threw each one into the hole.

When the sound of metal falling on the ground ended, she had a small pile of coins. She counted them, over and over, through the rest of the night.

When morning came, the hole in the wall had disappeared. Perhaps she had lost her mind as well as her fruit, her cart and her mother's stall.

Fine. She didn't care. She had thirty-eight pennies.

And if you're a good trader, all you need is somewhere to start.

Joanna was now a very unusual trader. She had no shoes, socks or coat. She went from shop to shop. With her pile of pennies, she bought:

a large bag;

a long shirt;

a pair of broken wooden shoes;

all the old, broken or useless things the other traders would sell her.

When she had spent all her money, Joanna returned to the street where she had spent the night. All day she sat there, looking at the empty wall opposite. People walked past her. Some felt sorry for her. Others wondered what she was doing. But most people didn't pay her any attention.

In the middle of the night, the hole in the wall appeared again. Joanna was happy that she hadn't imagined it.

She opened the empty bag in front of the hole. Then, one by one, she threw things into the hole. Even the wooden shoes went in. The only thing she didn't throw in was the bag. When the sun rose in the morning, the bag was full and heavy with coins.

Joanna bought new clothes with the money: a good hat, shirt and trousers, boots to take her home, a thick coat for winter in the mountains, and a new, bigger bag. She had enough money left to do some shopping at the market too. She bought silk carpets, fine wool, bags of spices and more.

After a busy day, she returned to one, special shop. There she bought back her mother's stall. And then she went back to her lucky street with all the beautiful things she had bought at the market.

She sat down for one last night, waiting for the hole.

When the hole appeared again, she started throwing the spices into it. Then she threw the wool and silk and the other things. Silver and gold coins flew out of the hole into the bag. Soon her bag was filled with more money than she had ever known. For a moment, she thought about throwing her family stall into the hole as well. But then she had a better idea.

The hole had always given her more than the value of the things she threw into it. So what about the gold and silver coins? What would the hole give her if she threw all the money in?

What could be worth more than all the money she had?

Maybe she would never have to sell stone fruit again! Joanna lifted the heavy bag of coins. She began to move the bag backwards and forwards, faster and faster ... and then she threw it.

Five coins came out of the bag and fell by Joanna's feet. The others flew into the hole.

Joanna waited and watched the hole. But this time, nothing came back.

There was a tax to leave the city. Joanna's last five coins were just enough to pay it.

She walked out in her good boots and new clothes. On her back, she carried her mother's stall. She walked all day and she slept well at night. She was happy to be going home. As she got further and further away from the capital, she could see the mountains of home. They looked more beautiful than ever.

Her pockets were empty, but her heart was full.

Sometimes she met other travellers on the road. When she saw them coming, she put up her beautiful, family stall. The only thing she had to sell was her story. She only asked people to pay a penny or two to hear her story. If they didn't have any money, she asked for some food or drink. No one believed her story was true, but they believed the lessons her story

contained. Everyone who heard the story learned a different lesson. For some people, the lesson was 'be happy with what you have' or 'if you want more than you need, you will lose everything.' For others, it was 'wisdom has a high price.'

For Joanna, the last trader in her family, the lesson was different. It was the answer to her question: *What could be worth more than all the money she had?* Now she knew the answer was wisdom.

Story written by Andrew Leon Hudson and adapted by Nicola Prentis.

Tasks

Task 1

Write a number (1–8) to put the events in the order they are mentioned.

- _____ Joanna sees something she thinks is not real.
- _____ Joanna learns a valuable lesson.
- _____ Joanna decides to sell the stone fruit at the big market in the capital city.
- _____ Joanna is able to buy expensive things.
- _____ Joanna has no money and sleeps on the streets.
- _____ Joanna has to spend all her money while her fruit goes bad.
- _____ Joanna loses everything again.
- _____ Joanna buys basic new clothes and things that are worth very little.

Task 2

Circle the best answer.

1. How did Joanna's family make their money?
 - a. They were the first market sellers in their town.
 - b. They knew where to find more stone fruit than anyone else.
 - c. They sold stone fruit in the capital city.
2. What was the first thing to go wrong for Joanna?
 - a. She arrived too late to the city.
 - b. She couldn't pay for the tests.
 - c. The tests took too long.
3. Why didn't people buy Joanna's fruit?
 - a. It had gone bad.
 - b. It was too expensive.
 - c. They didn't know what it was.

4. What did she think when the hole gave her the first coins?
 - a. Someone was doing it as a joke.
 - b. The money wasn't real.
 - c. She was imagining things.
5. Which sentence is true about the money that came from the hole?
 - a. It was of a lower value than the things that went into the hole.
 - b. It was the same value as the things that went into the hole.
 - c. It was of a higher value than the things that went into the hole.
6. What did Joanna NOT throw into the hole?
 - a. The things she had bought at the market
 - b. Her mother's stall
 - c. The money
7. Why was her 'heart full' when she left the city?
 - a. Because she had learned that money was less important than she thought.
 - b. Because she had a lot of money.
 - c. Because she was excited to go home.
8. What did the other travellers think of her story?
 - a. They thought it was true.
 - b. They learned something from it.
 - c. They didn't think it was worth paying to hear it.

Discussion

Did you like the story? Do you agree that wisdom is more important than money?

Answers

Preparation task

1. e
2. d
3. b
4. g
5. h
6. a
7. c
8. f

Task 1

- | | |
|---|---|
| 4 | Joanna sees something she thinks is not real. |
| 8 | Joanna learns a valuable lesson. |
| 1 | Joanna decides to sell the stone fruit at the big market in the capital city. |
| 6 | Joanna is able to buy expensive things. |
| 3 | Joanna has no money and sleeps on the streets. |
| 2 | Joanna has to spend all her money while her fruit goes bad. |
| 7 | Joanna loses everything again. |
| 5 | Joanna buys basic new clothes and things that are worth very little. |

Task 2

1. b
2. c
3. a
4. a
5. c
6. b
7. a
8. b