

Lonely

By ReadWorks

When the bell rang for lunch, instead of going to the outdoor cafeteria to meet Morgan

like she usually did, Jessica took her lunchbox and retreated to the library. The rest of the

school was rushing past her, relieved for a 50-minute break after the first day back from winter

vacation—like she didn't exist. And today, Jessica really felt like maybe she *didn't* exist.

She pushed open the swinging door to the library and sat at one of the tables in the

corner. Nobody—not even Mrs. Garcia, the librarian—was around. The windows to the library

looked out onto the cafeteria space. Jessica could hear kids laughing and screaming and

chatting, eating lunch at the plastic picnic tables and enjoying each other's company. Jessica

hunched down until her chin hit the hard, wood table and groaned. She pulled her lumpy cheese

sandwich out of her lunchbox and chewed awkwardly against the table, staring off into space.

Suddenly, Jessica heard a rustling in the corner. She turned around and saw that the pink

and orange, four-foot-tall, stuffed dragon that had lived in that exact corner of the library ever

since she had started at the school (almost six years ago) was stretching its wings and yawning.

Jessica turned back to the table, eyes wide. "Oh my gosh," she whispered. "Oh my gosh,

oh my gosh, oh my gosh." She peeked over her shoulder again and saw the dragon was

walking toward her. She shook her head and closed her eyes tightly. "This can't be happening," she said to herself. "I must be going insane."

"Hi there!" a voice said from behind Jessica's left elbow.

Jessica turned around slowly. The dragon was standing in front of her, one claw on the

scaly area near what would be its waist, smiling and blinking. The dragon looked confused.

“Do you speak English?” the dragon said.

“Um...yes?” Jessica said. “I think I’m just hallucinating.”

The dragon shrugged and pulled out the chair next to Jessica and sat down heavily, its wings spreading out majestically.

“Probably. Why are you eating in here by yourself?”

“Uh...” Jessica looked around the library. It was still lunchtime; she could still hear her peers playing outside in the courtyard; and the library was still empty.

“Look, I know this is unusual, but why don’t you just try to go with it?” the dragon said.

It looked at Jessica’s half-eaten sandwich. “Finish your lunch. I’ll sit with you.”

Jessica picked up her sandwich and took a bite, then looked over. The dragon was still

sitting there watching her steadily. It seemed a little concerned about her. It had the same

look in its eye as her mother did when Jessica was quiet during the car ride home, or when she

was doing her homework on Saturday nights at the kitchen table.

She knew her mother thought she was a loner, but it wasn’t that Jessica didn’t have any

friends. They all just happened to live really far away. Jessica knew she had a very rich social

life online, and stayed up chatting with her friends in Australia until midnight sometimes. She

had met them in chat rooms or on blogs about favorite bands they had in common, or their

favorite book characters. She felt comfortable chatting with her friends through the blue light

of her computer screen. Talking face-to-face was the not-so-comfortable part.

The first days

back at school after vacations were the hardest. Jessica had spent the last two weeks talking to

people all day, and today she had barely said two words to her homeroom teacher.

“I know how you feel,” the dragon said, as if it could read her mind. “I get lonely here, too, sometimes.”

“I’m not lonely,” Jessica said. “And don’t read my mind.”

“You *are* lonely,” the dragon said, leaning forward on the table to look at Jessica close in the eye. “I can see it in your face. You haven’t smiled all day.”

Jessica felt a wave of sadness settle over her limbs. If a stuffed *dragon* could even sense

her loneliness, she didn’t even want to think about what the other kids in school thought of her.

“Just say hi to someone today,” the dragon said softly. “I promise they’ll say hi back.”

The five-minute bell indicating lunch was almost over rang. Jessica sniffed and felt her

eyes well up with tears. The dragon obviously didn’t understand how difficult that was going

to be. When she looked up to say something, it was gone. Jessica looked around the room. The

dragon was back in its corner, wings stiff and at the ready behind it.

Jessica packed up the rest of her uneaten lunch. Clearly the dragon was trying to help just

her. It probably didn’t come alive for everyone who ate alone in the library (but then again, how

many people actually ate lunch alone in the library?). Maybe she should take its advice.

In the hallway outside the library, a girl from Jessica’s homeroom class was crouched on

the floor, picking up pens, pencils, and highlighters that had clearly just dropped out of her

empty pencil case, open beside her. Jessica, fighting the urge to just walk away, leaned down

and picked up a few pens.

“Let me help you,” she said.

The girl, Molly, looked up at her and smiled gratefully. “Thank you!” she said.

Jessica

smiled back.

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. When the bell rings for lunch, where does Jessica take her lunchbox?

- A** to the library
- B** to the cafeteria
- C** to the gym
- D** to a classroom

2. When do the events of the story take place?

- A** on Jessica's very first day of school
- B** on the day before Jessica leaves school for winter vacation
- C** on the day after Jessica returns to school from winter vacation
- D** during the two weeks that make up Jessica's winter vacation

3. Jessica feels lonely at school.

What evidence from the story supports this conclusion?

A "She turned around and saw that the pink and orange, four-foot-tall, stuffed

dragon that had lived in that exact corner of the library ever since she had started at the school (almost six years ago) was stretching its wings and yawning."

B "Jessica turned around slowly. The dragon was standing in front of her, one

claw on the scaly area near what would be its waist, smiling and blinking.

The dragon looked confused."

C "The first days back at school after vacations were the hardest. Jessica had

spent the last two weeks talking to people all day, and today she had barely said two words to her homeroom teacher."

D "In the hallway outside the library, a girl from Jessica's homeroom class was

crouched on the floor, picking up pens, pencils, and highlighters that had clearly just dropped out of her empty pencil case, open beside her."

4. Why might Jessica have told the dragon that she is not lonely?

- A** Jessica does not feel lonely
- B** Jessica does not want to admit that she is lonely.
- C** Jessica does not like the dragon very much.
- D** Jessica does not have time to talk to the dragon.

5. What is the theme of the story?

- A** Being honest is more important than being kind.
- B** Friendships with people far away are more valuable than friendships with

people nearby.

C Young people should spend more time by themselves than with others.

D A small effort at being friendly is all it takes to overcome loneliness.

6. Read the following sentences from the story: “‘You *are* lonely,’ the dragon said,

leaning forward on the table to look at Jessica close in the eye. ‘I can see it in your face.

You haven’t smiled all day.’

Jessica felt **a wave of sadness** settle over her limbs. If a stuffed *dragon* could even

sense her loneliness, she didn’t even want to think about what the other kids in school

thought of her.”

What does the phrase “**a wave of sadness**” mean above?

A a wave of water that splashes Jessica and makes her sad

B a heat wave that comes out of the dragon’s mouth

C a sound wave that hurts Jessica’s ears

D a strong feeling of sadness

7. Select the word that best completes the sentence.

Jessica has a lot of friends; _____, they all live far away.

A however

B for example

C primarily

D consequently

8. When Jessica sees Molly picking up her pens, pencils, and highlighters, what urge does Jessica fight?

9. What does Jessica do instead of walking away when she sees Molly picking up her pens, pencils, and highlighters?

10. Why does Jessica lean down and pick up Molly's pens instead of walking away?
Support your answer with evidence from the story.
