

# Stories for Lipreading

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## **THE E IS SILENT by Alva Holland.**

[This text is read aloud at the beginning of this video:]  
Welcome to Stories for Lipreading. If you haven't used our website before, we suggest you look at our 'How to Use' page before you begin. We hope you enjoy this story, which is called 'The E is Silent' by Alva Holland. Please note that the boy's name, Eoin, is pronounced (more-or-less!) as 'Owen'.

### *The E is Silent by Alva Holland.*

Eoin sits cross-legged on the floor, his five-year-old brain absorbed by his latest Lego challenge. His sandy brown hair is too long and covers his ears. My sister tells me I should have it cut. I tell her he likes it and it doesn't matter.

Eoin's deep concentration ignites a memory flash. As I sit watching him connect the multi-coloured pieces, my recollection is vivid, intense with emotional clout.

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A sea of silent movement had rocked the bus. Twenty flailing bodies with animated expressions, wide smiles and excitement scrambled aboard. Eager pre-teenage faces pressed against the fogged-up windows. Fingers sketched complicated shapes into the condensation. The bus driver turned off the radio, creating an eerie quiet, a silent impatience.

I sat in the front seat with my ten-year-old sister, Orla. Our neighbours, Fiona and Desmond, had asked Mum if we could help with a summer picnic. This was a special trip, with responsibilities. I smiled at Fiona. Desmond gave me a thumbs-up.

The journey was short. When the driver opened the front door, a mouthful of sea air captured my breath, making me gulp.

Fiona and Desmond took charge.

Shoes off, hands linked hands. The wooden boardwalk clattered under their feet as the boys skidded with unbridled delight towards the beach. Soft sand scattered underfoot as their skinny legs leapt and ran. They crowded the beach without a sound.

Sandcastles rose from the sparkling grains as darting eyes danced with approval. Solitary play was forbidden. Fiona and Desmond couldn't be everywhere - the water was strictly out of bounds. The boys understood this, creating a seamless, mutual, silent trust.

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I watched in awe. These boys were vulnerable but possessed a palpable alternative strength. I shivered, feeling like an intruder.

Soon, picnic blankets were covered with juice and sandwiches, fruit and colourful baked treats. The boys swarmed the multi-coloured tartan rugs. The goodies disappeared. Orla negotiated with one of the boys for the last cupcake. The boy won without a word being said.

Two hours later when it was time to leave, plaintive sounds of protest drifted across the sand as the boys, one by one, obeyed Fiona's waving arms. Shoes were yanked onto bare sandy feet. Balled-up socks were stuffed into grainy pockets. Hands entwined hands again. With twinkling eyes, rosy faces and cheeky grins, twenty silent boys scrambled onto the bus.

These boys' eyes were their ears, their hands and expressions their voices. Profoundly deaf, their world was limited to what they could see and touch. They couldn't hear life.

That night, before Orla slept, she whispered goodnight.  
'I'm glad I can hear you,' I said. I was certain I heard my sister smile.

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Eoin's persistent tugging at my trousers jolts me to the present. I smile at the graphic recollection the youngest of my three opinionated, energetic sons inspires - the day of 'The Deaf Boys' Picnic' – Summer 1985.

Eoin grins and points at his Lego masterpiece. Cupping his face, I toss his hair and smile, flooded with love for this beautiful silent boy.

Last week, he drew a picture of himself and his brothers. They're all wearing headphones. Underneath his older brother has written, 'We are all the same.' He secured it to the fridge with a smiley face magnet, grinned and high-fived his two brothers before they all ran outside to play football.

Eoin's deafness will only define him if we allow it to.