

# The Promise

A story about a single sentence that changed the course of a life,  
and the teacher who never knew she said it.

**B2 Level**

**Adults (17+)**

**Story**

**14 Pages**

**45 min**

Margaret Holloway, a retired English teacher, receives an unexpected letter from a former student in Portugal. Daniel Oliveira was a struggling fourteen-year-old in her class in 1993. He writes to tell her that a single sentence she said to him — about his drawings showing he understood stories better than he realised — changed the entire course of his life. A moving exploration of the impact of kindness, the power of words, and the extraordinary ripple effects of ordinary moments.

## Learning Objectives

- ✓ Read and comprehend a literary short story at B2 level
- ✓ Learn 20 advanced vocabulary words in context
- ✓ Practise listening with text-to-speech
- ✓ Analyse character development and thematic depth
- ✓ Discuss themes of education, kindness, and the power of words

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# 1 Read the Story

## Chapter 1: The Envelope

Margaret Holloway was seventy-one years old, and she had been retired from teaching for exactly six years. The envelope arrived on a Tuesday morning in March, tucked between an electricity bill and a catalogue. It was a thick, cream-coloured envelope with her full name written in careful black ink. The stamp was from Portugal.

Margaret did not know anyone in Portugal. Inside were three sheets of paper covered in neat handwriting. Dear Mrs. Holloway, the letter began. You will almost certainly not remember me. My name is Daniel Oliveira, and I was a student in your Year 9 English class at Westfield Comprehensive School in 1993. I was fourteen years old, and I was, by most objective measures, the worst student you ever had.

## Chapter 2: The Boy in Row Five

Margaret did not remember Daniel Oliveira. She had taught thousands of students — their faces blurred together like watercolour paintings left out in the rain.

Daniel described himself in 1993: a skinny boy with dark hair who sat in the fifth row near the window. His father had recently left the family. His mother worked double shifts at a textile factory. Daniel was angry, lonely, and failing every subject except art. He had been on the verge of dropping out entirely. "I was invisible," he wrote, "and I preferred it that way. Invisible people don't get asked questions they can't answer."

## Chapter 3: The Sentence

Then Daniel described the moment that changed his life. It was a Wednesday afternoon in November 1993. The class had been reading *Of Mice and Men*. Mrs. Holloway had asked the class what they thought the book was really about. Then, without warning, she had looked directly at Daniel.

He had frozen. The entire class turned to look at him. No words came out. And then Margaret had said something he never forgot: "It's all right, Daniel. You don't have to know the answer right now. But I've seen your drawings, and someone who can draw like that understands more about stories than they realise. The answer is already inside you — you just haven't found the right words for it yet."

The class moved on. Margaret almost certainly forgot about it by the end of the day. But Daniel carried that sentence with him for thirty years.

## Chapter 4: The Journey

Daniel did not drop out. He scraped through his GCSEs with mediocre grades in everything except art, where he received the highest mark in the year. He enrolled at the local college to study graphic design, working evenings at a supermarket to pay for materials.

After college, he moved to London and found work at a small design agency. Over twenty years, he built a career in graphic design and illustration. In 2010, he moved to Lisbon. He was married with two daughters. "I am not writing to say that you made me successful," Daniel wrote. "I am writing to say that you made me possible."

## Chapter 5: The Drawings

Enclosed with the letter were three items: a photograph of Daniel on a sunlit balcony in Lisbon, a business card, and a pencil drawing. The drawing showed a classroom: rows of desks, a blackboard, a window with rain on the glass. At the front stood a woman Margaret recognised immediately — herself, as she had been in 1993.

At the bottom, in small letters, Daniel had written: The teacher who told me the answer was already inside me. November 1993. Margaret thought about all the lessons she had taught, all the essays she had marked. She had often wondered whether any of it had mattered. Now she knew that at least one sentence had survived.

## Chapter 6: The Reply

Margaret wrote back with her best fountain pen. Dear Daniel, You are wrong about one thing. I do remember you. I remember a boy who drew beautiful things in his notebook when he thought nobody was looking.

She continued: You say that I made you possible. But teachers rarely know which of their words will land. We scatter them like seeds, hoping that some will take root, knowing that most will not. Your letter tells me that one of those seeds found fertile ground. And that is the greatest gift a retired teacher can receive.

## Epilogue

Margaret continued to teach, in her own way. She volunteered at the local library, running a weekly reading group for teenagers who reminded her of Daniel — quiet, uncertain, full of potential they could not yet see.

Daniel visited her the following summer. They sat in her garden and talked for three hours. When he left, he hugged her and said, "Thank you, Mrs. Holloway. For seeing me

when I was invisible." Margaret smiled and said what she had always said to her students: "The answer was already inside you, Daniel. It always was."

## 2 Key Vocabulary

These words from the story will help you expand your English vocabulary.

Word	Type	Definition	Example
<b>methodically</b>	<i>adv.</i>	in a systematic and orderly way	<i>She methodically organised her files.</i>
<b>legible</b>	<i>adj.</i>	clear enough to read	<i>Please write in legible handwriting.</i>
<b>objective</b>	<i>adj.</i>	not influenced by personal feelings; fair	<i>We need an objective assessment.</i>
<b>blurred</b>	<i>verb</i>	became unclear or indistinct	<i>The rain blurred the writing on the sign.</i>
<b>textile</b>	<i>noun</i>	relating to cloth or fabric	<i>The textile industry employed thousands.</i>
<b>smooth</b>	<i>adj.</i>	having an even surface; without problems	<i>The stone had been worn smooth by the river.</i>
<b>mediocre</b>	<i>adj.</i>	of only average quality; not very good	<i>The restaurant received mediocre reviews.</i>
<b>practical</b>	<i>adj.</i>	concerned with actual use rather than theory	<i>She chose a practical career in engineering.</i>
<b>persistent</b>	<i>adj.</i>	continuing firmly despite difficulty	<i>Her persistent efforts finally paid off.</i>
<b>hardship</b>	<i>noun</i>	severe suffering or difficulty	<i>They endured years of financial hardship.</i>
<b>unexpectedly</b>	<i>adv.</i>	in a way that was not predicted	<i>The project finished unexpectedly early.</i>
<b>accompanied</b>	<i>verb</i>	went with someone; provided as a supplement	<i>The report was accompanied by charts.</i>
<b>likeness</b>	<i>noun</i>	the quality of being alike; a portrait	<i>The painting was a remarkable likeness.</i>
<b>evaporated</b>	<i>verb</i>	disappeared gradually	<i>His enthusiasm evaporated after a week.</i>
<b>sensitivity</b>	<i>noun</i>	the ability to understand feelings	<i>He handled it with great sensitivity.</i>
<b>fertile</b>	<i>adj.</i>	able to produce plants or ideas; productive	<i>The valley had rich, fertile soil.</i>
<b>invisible</b>	<i>adj.</i>	unable to be seen; not noticed	<i>She felt invisible in the crowded room.</i>
<b>transaction</b>	<i>noun</i>	an exchange of goods, services, or money	<i>The bank processed thousands of transactions.</i>
<b>potential</b>	<i>noun</i>	qualities that may develop in the future	<i>The coach saw great potential in the player.</i>
<b>latter</b>	<i>noun</i>	the second of two things mentioned	<i>Given tea or coffee, I prefer the latter.</i>

## 3

**Comprehension Quiz**

Choose the best answer for each question.

**1. How long had Margaret been retired when she received the letter?**

- A) Two years.
- B) Six years.
- C) Ten years.
- D) She was still working.

**2. Where was the letter sent from?**

- A) London.
- B) New York.
- C) Portugal.
- D) Australia.

**3. Why was Daniel struggling at school in 1993?**

- A) He had a learning disability.
- B) His father had left and his mother worked long hours.
- C) He had recently moved from another country.
- D) He was being bullied.

**4. What subject did Daniel excel at?**

- A) English literature.
- B) Mathematics.
- C) Art.
- D) Music.

**5. What did Margaret say that changed Daniel's life?**

- A) She told him he was the smartest student.
- B) She said the answer was already inside him.
- C) She offered to pay for his education.
- D) She recommended him for a scholarship.

**6. What career did Daniel eventually pursue?**

- A) He became a teacher.
- B) He became a graphic designer and illustrator.
- C) He became a gallery artist.
- D) He became an architect.

**7. What did Daniel send with his letter?**

- A) A book he had written.
- B) A photograph, business card, and pencil drawing.
- C) A painting of Lisbon.
- D) A cheque for the school.

**8. What does 'mediocre' mean in this story?**

- A) Outstanding and impressive.
- B) Of only average quality; not very good.
- C) Completely failing.
- D) Surprisingly excellent.

**9. What did Margaret say teachers do with their words?**

- A) They memorise every sentence.
- B) They scatter them like seeds, hoping some take root.
- C) They write them all in a journal.
- D) They repeat the same lessons.

**10. What is the main message of the story?**

- A) Teachers should be paid more.
- B) Art is more important than academics.
- C) A single kind sentence can change a life.
- D) Students should always do homework.

## 4

**Answer Key**

1. B) Six years.
2. C) Portugal.
3. B) His father had left and his mother worked long hours.
4. C) Art.
5. B) She said the answer was already inside him.
6. B) He became a graphic designer and illustrator.
7. B) A photograph, business card, and pencil drawing.
8. B) Of only average quality; not very good.
9. B) They scatter them like seeds, hoping some take root.
10. C) A single kind sentence can change a life.

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