

NEWS LESSON

He Went Back to Say Sorry

BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you go to a school reunion if none of your friends were going?
2. What would surprise your old classmates most about you now?
3. Is it easier to say sorry in person or in a message?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**reunion**	☐	A	a party where people who knew each other long ago meet again
2	**classmates**	☐	B	gave you hope and confidence
3	**reconnected**	☐	C	became friends again after a long time
4	**responsibility**	☐	D	make people think well of you
5	**encouraged**	☐	E	having a hard time
6	**impress**	☐	F	a duty, something that you must take care of
7	**former**	☐	G	from an earlier time, not now
8	**struggling**	☐	H	people who are in the same class at school

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Mike had watched a classmate being bullied and said nothing. Twenty years later, he wanted to apologise.

1 When Mike walked into his school reunion in Melbourne, Australia, he was not just hoping to see old friends. He had something important to say. Twenty years had passed since he left school, but one memory had stayed with him. A boy he knew had been bullied because he was gay. Mike had not joined in, but he had not stood up for him either. Now he wanted to apologise.

2 Mike, a firefighter in his forties, told his story to the Guardian in October 2026. At the reunion, he found the old friend and brought up what had happened at school. The conversation was awkward. The other man ended up trying to make Mike feel better about his guilt. Mike realised that his apology had placed an unfair responsibility on the person who had suffered. Still, the two men reconnected.

3 School reunions often bring back powerful memories. You may remember the friendly teacher who encouraged you, the embarrassing haircut you had or the people you tried hard to impress. Some former students look forward to meeting everyone again. Others would rather stay at home than return to a room full of people who knew them as teenagers.

4 Part of the problem is that people change. The quiet student may become a confident adult. The most popular person in the class may have an ordinary job and an ordinary life. Yet when old classmates get together, they sometimes fall back into the same roles. It can feel as if somebody has turned the clock back twenty years, even though everyone looks different.

5 Social media has changed reunions too. In the past, you might have had no idea where your classmates had ended up. Today, you may already know about their weddings, children and holidays. But online photographs rarely tell the full story. A person who appears successful may be struggling, while somebody with a simple life may be perfectly happy.

6 So is going to a reunion a good idea? It depends on what you expect. You might catch up with someone special, or you might simply have a strange evening and laugh about it later. If you want to put something right, as Mike did, think about the other person's feelings first.

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Mike has been to several reunions before. T F NG
2. Mike had joined in with the bullying at school. T F NG
3. Mike is in his forties and works in the fire service. T F NG
4. The two men were back in contact after the awkward talk. T F NG
5. Mike thought his apology was completely perfect. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

apologise	confident	embarrassing	forgive	guilt	ordinary	unfair

1. I was rude to my neighbour yesterday, so I want to _____ to her.
2. Hiding the truth gave her a feeling of _____ for weeks.
3. He wore a bright pink hat to the party, which was a little _____ .
4. She used to be very shy, but now she feels _____ when she speaks in front of large groups.
5. It was an _____ day, with nothing special happening.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. When Mike arrived at the reunion, twenty years _____ since he left school. (PASS)
2. A boy he knew _____ because he was gay. (BULLY)
3. Mike _____ his story to the Guardian in October 2026. (TELL)
4. Some former students look forward to _____ everyone again. (MEET)
5. A person who _____ successful may be struggling. (APPEAR)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. A phrasal verb is a verb plus a small word. The small word changes the meaning, so learn the whole phrase together, such as look forward to.

across	back	forward	out	through	together	up

1. I'm really looking _____ to meeting my old classmates.
2. A reunion is a chance to get _____ with old friends and share news.
3. I'd like to find _____ what happened to my old classmates.
4. Mike wished he could turn the clock _____ to the day when he was a teenager.
5. Many guests ended _____ talking about their jobs all evening.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What makes an apology feel sincere?
2. Would you rather catch up with an old friend or meet someone new?
3. Should people be allowed to leave their school reputation behind?

9 Role-play: should I go to the reunion?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the person who wants to go

A reunion for your old school class is next month. You want to go and say sorry to a classmate you did not help at school. Explain why it matters to you. Listen to your friend and decide what to do.

Student B · the friend

You think it may be a bad idea. The other person might not want to talk about the past, and a party is not the right place. Ask questions and suggest another way to say sorry.

Useful phrases

I've been thinking about it for years.

I'd like to say sorry to him in person.

What if he doesn't want to talk about it?

That's a fair point, but I can't stay silent.

Maybe a message would be easier for him.

Let's agree that I'll ask him first.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you decide to apologise at the reunion, and how?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 H · 3 C · 4 F · 5 B · 6 D · 7 G · 8 E

4 True, false or not given

1 NG · 2 F · 3 T · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 apologise · 2 guilt · 3 embarrassing · 4 confident · 5 ordinary

6 Verb forms

1 had passed · 2 had been bullied or was bullied · 3 told · 4 meeting · 5 appears

7 Language focus

1 forward · 2 together · 3 out · 4 back · 5 up

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**