NEWS LESSON

The Apology That Did Not Go to Plan



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	**irony**	☐	A	a good thing that makes you want to do something
2	**homophobic**	☐	B	not sure about yourself and lacking confidence
3	**resurface**	☐	C	telling someone that things are fine so they worry less
4	**insecure**	☐	D	without protection, so that others can see your weak points
5	**exposed**	☐	E	unfair and unkind towards gay people
6	**attraction**	☐	F	became friends again after a long time apart
7	**reconnected**	☐	G	come back after being hidden or forgotten
8	**reassuring**	☐	H	a situation that is the opposite of what you expected

3 Read

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

Mike found his old friend at the reunion. The man he had failed to defend ended up reassuring him instead.

1 Mike had been out of school for twenty years, but one memory refused to fade. As a teenager in Melbourne, he had watched a friend experience homophobic bullying. He had never joined in, yet he had not spoken up either. Now, in his forties and working as a firefighter, he was heading to a school reunion with a particular purpose: he wanted to apologise for his silence.

2 Speaking to the Guardian for an October 2026 article, Mike explained that he managed to find his old friend and bring up the past. The apology did not unfold quite as he had imagined. Instead, the man who had been bullied ended up reassuring Mike that he need not feel guilty. Mike came away recognising the uncomfortable irony: in trying to make amends, he had asked someone else to deal with his feelings. Nevertheless, the two reconnected over drinks, giving the story a warmer ending than he might have expected.

3 It is easy to see why reunions make people nervous. Few other social events bring together so many versions of ourselves at once. The confident adult who walks into the room may suddenly remember being an insecure fifteen-year-old. Old nicknames resurface, half-forgotten arguments are mentioned and somebody inevitably asks a question you would rather avoid. Even the simple business of remembering names can leave people feeling awkward and exposed.

4 For other former students, the attraction is obvious. They want to catch up with childhood friends, hear what became of familiar faces or revisit a period that helped shape them. A reunion can also challenge our assumptions. The class clown might have become a serious parent, while the shyest teenager could be the person with the most extraordinary stories. People who scarcely spoke at school sometimes get along brilliantly as adults, once the pressure of popularity disappears.

5 Social media complicates that sense of discovery. You may have followed someone's career or family life for years without exchanging a single message. Yet their online profile reveals only what they choose to show. At a reunion, a casual conversation may uncover experiences that never appeared in a photograph. Equally, comparisons about jobs, relationships and appearance can stir up old insecurities, especially if everybody seems determined to present their life in the best possible light.

6 Perhaps the healthiest way to approach a reunion is with curiosity rather than a scorecard. You do not have to prove that you have become more successful, attractive or interesting than the person sitting opposite you. Nor is it always wise to treat the occasion as a chance to settle every old grievance. Mike's experience suggests that an apology can matter, but it needs to leave room for the other person's wishes. Sometimes the most revealing thing about returning to school is discovering how little the old rankings matter.

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 and his old friend had a drink together after the apology. T F NG
2. Mike plans to attend the next reunion. T F NG
3. The apology went exactly as Mike had planned. T F NG
4. The man who had been bullied tried to ease Mike's guilt. T F NG
5. The article advises people to use a reunion to sort out every old disagreement. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

ambition	assumptions	casual	curiosity	determined	frequently	grievance	scarcely

1. We often make _____ about people from their appearance, and then discover we were wrong.
2. She had held a _____ against her former boss for years, and she still raised it at every meeting.
3. Anna was _____ to win the competition, so she practised every evening.
4. I could _____ believe it when my old classmate recognised me after thirty years.
5. Children show endless _____ , asking "why?" about everything.
6. A _____ chat in the queue is often how new friendships begin.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Before the reunion, Sara _____ her old classmates for ten years. (NOT SEE)
2. Name badges _____ to guests at the door of most reunions. (GIVE)
3. If you want to put something right, you _____ the other person's feelings first. (CONSIDER)
4. Some people avoid reunions because they dislike _____ about their jobs. (TALK)
5. If I _____ you, I would go to the reunion. (BE)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Here the small word is already in the sentence, so choose the verb. Learn each pair as one unit of meaning, such as look back on or deal with.

break	carry	deal	look	pull	speak	turn

1. Teenagers often find it hard to _____ up when they see a friend being bullied.
2. The evening did not _____ out as planned, but it ended well.
3. It is hard to _____ with strong emotions in front of so many people.
4. Many people _____ back on their school years with mixed feelings.
5. If the conversation goes well, you can _____ on chatting over a drink.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 NG · 3 F · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 assumptions · 2 grievance · 3 determined · 4 scarcely · 5 curiosity · 6 casual

6 Verb forms

1 had not seen or hadn't seen · 2 are given · 3 should consider or must consider or ought to consider or need to consider · 4 talking · 5 were or was

7 Language focus

1 speak · 2 turn · 3 deal · 4 look · 5 carry

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