



The Battle of Newton Road

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Summary

Sally Robson lives in Newton Road, near the school where she teaches. It is a friendly community and everyone enjoys living there. They are all horrified when they go to a public meeting and find out about plans to demolish their houses and school in order to build a new road. Despite promises of new, modern houses with nice gardens, they prefer to stay with their friends and neighbours in their old houses. Mr Wood, the civil engineer in charge of the plans, manages to win over two of the neighbours (Helen Taylor and Paul Johnson). However, Sally and her students are against the plans and they persuade the neighbours to join them in their protest. Mr Wood is patient for a few months but then he brings bulldozers to knock down the houses. The residents organise a protest, and sit down in the road. Mr Wood has their gas, electricity and water cut off – it is a real battle. Sally contacts the press. The story is headline news and everyone starts discussing it. Opinion is divided. On the one hand, people are sympathetic with the residents of Newton Road, but on the other hand they understand the need for a new road, and think the new houses would be a good solution. Mr Wood and Sally begin to see each other's point of view. Stephen and Catherine, Sally's students, go to talk to Mr Wood, and persuade him to re-connect their services. A second public meeting is called, and Mr Wood offers a compromise – the old houses will still be demolished, but the new houses will be built together, in a new road. They will not lose their community. The residents are delighted. The new Newton Road is duly built and everyone is happy.

Background and themes

Progress: The new houses are nicer than the old ones, and the new road is necessary. On the other hand, a much-loved road has been demolished. Is progress always a good thing?

Protests: People can protest against what they think is unjust. Sally and her neighbours refuse to move out and they obstruct the bulldozers so that their houses can't be demolished. This raises the question of whether or not it is justifiable to defy authority.

The power of the media: In this story, the press raised awareness of the issue and stimulated debate, which eventually led to a satisfactory outcome.

Conflict and compromise: At the beginning of the 'battle', the two sides were unable to see the other side's point of view. However, a reasoned discussion led to a compromise which suited both sides.

Leadership: Sally organised the protest, and two students also showed initiative and leadership.

Discussion activities

Pages 1–8

Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask the students to look at the cover, to describe what they can see and to guess what is happening. Elicit vocabulary (e.g. people, houses, road, angry) and supply new words as required (e.g. sign, group, helmet).
- Guess:** In pairs, students look at the pictures on pages 2–8 and discuss what they think happens in the story. In particular, ask them:
What do the slogans on pages 6 and 7 mean?
Who is the man on page 8?
Ask them to note down their ideas. When they are ready, invite them to share their ideas with the class. Don't tell them if they are right – they will find out when they have read the book.

After reading

- Discuss:** Refer the students back to their notes from activity 2. Were their ideas correct?

Pages 9–15

Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask the students to close their books. Invite the class to guess what is going to happen next, and how the story will end. Then ask them to look at the pictures on pages 9–15. Do they still have the same ideas?

After reading

- Discuss:** Students look again at their notes from Activity 6 to see if their ideas were right.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.