

# Open House

By W.M. Akers



“We’re not moving!” shouted Kathryn.

Her mom pursed her lips. She did this when she was trying to look concerned. It wouldn’t work today. “I know you’re upset, sweetheart, but—”

“No! No. No. No,” said Kathryn. “We are absolutely, positively, super-factually *not moving.*”

Kathryn and her mother sat in the kitchen, where the four o’clock sunlight streamed in golden through the windows and made shadows on their hands. It did this every day when Kathryn got home from school, and had done so her entire life. She did not want to lose it.

“We know how much you love this house,” said her mother. “Your dad and I love it too. We loved it when we bought it, we loved it when you were born, and we still love it now. But we’ve been here since before we were married, and it’s starting to feel a little cramped.”

Kathryn saw that her mother was trying to be reasonable. To spare her feelings. To make her understand. She didn't care. This was no time to be reasonable.

"Why don't you admit what you're trying to do?!" said Kathryn.

"What do you mean?"

"You're trying to, to, to..." Kathryn searched for the right words. "To take away the sun!" She was down the hallway, slamming the door before her mother even had time to look confused.

That was part of what made the house so great. It was just a few steps from bedroom to kitchen, from kitchen to living room, from living room to the front yard. Her friends who lived in bigger houses were always shouting to find each other, but in Kathryn's house, there was never a need to shout at all. The house wasn't cramped. It was cozy, and Kathryn liked being cozy above all else. Why couldn't her parents understand?

She picked up her phone and dialed Rosie, her best friend. Rosie picked up on the first ring, like she always did. That's what best friends are for.

Kathryn screwed up her face and asked: "Why can't my parents understand?!"

"I don't know," said Rosie. "That's just not what parents do."

"They want to make me go to something called an open house. And after that we're moving. It's over. My life is over."

"I know about open houses. They're fun."

“What are they?”

“When somebody wants to sell their house, they open the doors up and let anybody who wants a house come look around. You get to see other people’s bedrooms. Sometimes there are cookies.”

“Cookies?”

“There were when we looked at our house.”

Kathryn was puzzled. “Wait—I thought you guys had lived there forever?”

“Nope. Just since fifth grade.”

“So you...moved?”

“Obviously. It’s not like we lived in the woods.”

“What was your old house like?”

“It was nice! There was linoleum in the kitchen, which was good to slide around on, and the backyard was nice. But I didn’t have a window seat before, and now I do.”

“Huh,” said Kathryn. She had to admit: a window seat would be a nice thing to have.

There were too many people at the open house. Kathryn saw them when they parked the car, before they even walked inside. There must have been a dozen people on the front lawn, milling around, talking to each other, and taking notes. It looked like the arena before a concert. One man was kneeling in front of the windows, inspecting the soil in the flowerbed. When they approached the front door, Kathryn stayed far away from him.

“Mom!” she said. “I think this is a house for weirdos.”

“It’s just a house,” said her mom. “The same as any other.”

“It’s not the same as ours.”

It certainly wasn’t. For one thing, this new house was much too brown. All the floors were stained dark brown, and the furniture was either leather or beat-up old wood. It was like being in her grandfather’s library, except that it was a whole house!

“It smells like grandpa,” said Kathryn.

“It does not,” said Mom.

The hallways were too wide. The staircase was too tall. There were too many bookshelves, and none of the books looked very fun. Kathryn knew that none of the books would stay when the owners moved out, but she didn’t like the idea of her parents buying a house from people who didn’t even own a copy of *Stuart Little*.

The bookshelves were about all Kathryn could see, because there were so many people everywhere. Weren’t there any other houses for sale in this town? Why couldn’t some of them go there? She tried to walk across the living room, but an agitated-looking woman with frizzy blonde hair kept getting in her way, saying “Oh no, oh no, oh no. This won’t do at all.” Kathryn couldn’t tell what she was so upset about, and decided not to ask. She went back out the way she came in.

Kathryn walked around to the back yard, staying far away from the flowerbed man, who by now was wrist-deep in the dirt. It was quieter back here, but still not very fun. There was no rope swing, no swing set, no monkey bars—nothing to swing on at all. Kathryn didn't have anything like that at her current house, but what was the point of moving if you didn't get some fun new stuff out of it?

"This house stinks," she said, and kicked it. "It stinks! It's not even good for kicking!"

"You think so?" said a voice from the back porch.

"I do!" She kicked the house one more time. It didn't make her feel better at all.

"Come up here and tell me about it," said the woman, holding open the door to the screen porch. She had big eyes, slightly gray hair, and was holding a glass of something that looked cold and delicious. "Want some iced tea?"

"Thanks," said Kathryn, as she sipped the frigid tea. It was strong, and not too sweet, just the way she liked it. "This is really good."

"But the house is lousy?"

"Have you seen it in there?! Gosh. I don't even know where to start." And so Kathryn went into the brown floors, the wide hallways, the abundance of bookshelves and the critical lack of backyard play equipment. "And, worst of all, it's way too big!"

"Some people like big houses."

“Not me. I want everything nearby, just where it’s supposed to be, so I know how to find it when I need it. Plus, there were supposed to be cookies here, and I haven’t seen so much as a single crumb.”

“There are cookies,” said the woman.

“Yeah?”

“Come inside. I’ll show you.”

The back porch led to the kitchen, which was just as crowded as the rest of the house, but had big windows, which let in enough light that it didn’t seem very brown. More importantly, the cookies were delicious: ooey-gooey chocolate chip, and hearty, filling oatmeal raisin.

“These are great,” said Kathryn, putting her palm under her chin to catch falling crumbs.

“Who made them?”

“I did.”

“You just bring cookies to open houses?”

“I didn’t bring the cookies,” said the woman. “I made them. This is my house. My name is Gloria.”

Kathryn’s face turned tomato-red. This woman was so nice, and she’d said such horrible things about her house! “Oh gosh,” she spluttered. “I didn’t know it was your house, I—”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Gloria. “Everyone’s entitled to her own opinion. Besides, you’re not the one who’s buying the house, are you?”

“No,” said Kathryn. “But my parents might be.”

“Ah, well. In that case, you’d better see the upstairs bedroom.”

Gloria led Kathryn through the crowd and up the stairways. With her leading, the big group of people parted easily. Even the “Oh no, oh no, oh no” woman didn’t mind stepping aside. Suddenly, Kathryn saw the advantages of wide hallways.

Upstairs it was quieter, and not so brown. The walls were pale green, and the floor was nicely carpeted.

“This is much better,” said Kathryn.

“Wait until you see the bedroom. It will take your breath away.”

It did. The upstairs bedroom was bigger than Kathryn’s old one, but plush red carpet and heavy orange curtains made it, somehow, much more cozy. There was a big, comfy looking bed, plenty of closets, and two gigantic windows. But Kathryn didn’t even notice all that at first, because she was too excited about the window seat.

“Oh my goodness!” she said. As she flopped down on it, she saw that the sunlight came in golden through the trees, making shadows on her legs. “It’s so comfortable! And you can see all the way to the park!”

“That’s my favorite spot in the house,” said Gloria.

Kathryn smiled. “This might not be such a bad place to move after all.”

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How does Kathryn feel about moving to a new house at the beginning of the story?

- A Kathryn does not want to move.
- B Kathryn wants to move very much.
- C Kathryn does not care much about moving one way or the other.
- D Kathryn does not know that her parents want to move.

2. What is one cause of the change in Kathryn's attitude about moving to a new house?

- A noticing the books on the bookshelves at the open house
- B running down the hallway and slamming the door
- C seeing a man inspect the soil in front of the open house
- D seeing the upstairs of Gloria's home

3. Read the following sentences from the passage: "The upstairs bedroom was bigger than Kathryn's old one, but plush red carpet and heavy orange curtains made it, somehow, much more cozy. There was a big, comfy looking bed, plenty of closets, and two gigantic windows. But Kathryn didn't even notice all that at first, because she was too excited about the window seat."

What can be concluded from these sentences?

- A Kathryn likes sitting in the kitchen with her mother.
- B Kathryn does not like sitting in the kitchen with her mother.
- C Kathryn likes the upstairs bedroom.
- D Kathryn does not like the upstairs bedroom.

4. How does Kathryn feel after learning that Gloria owns the home she has been complaining about?

- A pleased
- B furious
- C proud
- D embarrassed

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A Something that seems good may not be so good after all.
- B Something that seems bad may not be so bad after all.
- C Vacations can be a lot of fun and a great way to learn.
- D Some people like living in the country more than living in a city.



6. Read the following sentence: “**This house stinks,**” she said, and kicked it.”

What does Kathryn mean when she says, “**This house stinks**”?

- A She means that the house smells like rotten eggs.
- B She means that the house does not have a window seat.
- C She means that the house is something she likes a lot.
- D She means that the house is something she dislikes.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

At first Kathryn dislikes the house she visits; \_\_\_\_\_, she starts to like it.

- A obviously
- B namely
- C earlier
- D later on

8. What is Kathryn’s opinion of the upstairs area of the open house compared to the downstairs area?

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9. What does Kathryn say after flopping down on the window seat and smiling?

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10. How does Kathryn feel about moving to a new home at the end of the story?  
Support your answer with evidence from the passage.

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 560

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- A obviously
- B namely
- C earlier
- D **later on**

8. What is Kathryn’s opinion of the upstairs area of the open house compared to the downstairs area?

**Suggested answer:** Kathryn thinks the upstairs area is “much better” than downstairs.

9. What does Kathryn say after flopping down on the window seat and smiling?

**Suggested answer:** Kathryn says, “This might not be such a bad place to move after all.”

10. How does Kathryn feel about moving to a new home at the end of the story? Support your answer with evidence from the passage.

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by the passage. For example, students may respond that Kathryn has mixed feelings about moving. She likes the coziness of her current home but also likes the idea of moving to a home with a window seat.