The Stopped Clock

Trace how a story's sequence shapes its meaning.

10.CL.5 "Analyze context and organizational structures to determine theme, tone, and the meaning of the work as a whole."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number the three time periods in order, underline one detail in each paragraph that sets its tone, and circle words that signal a shift in time.

Eight O'Clock

1 Before the last train left Bellwether, the station clock ran seven minutes fast. Mara's grandfather said the clock was trying to keep the town from missing anything. On school mornings, she waited beneath it while commuters traded weather reports and the ticket clerk slid warm rolls across the counter. The platform smelled of wet pine after rain. Mara knew the clock was wrong, but she liked how everyone glanced up together when its hands reached eight. Even people who would board different trains seemed to belong to the same brief minute.

2 Years after the rail company closed the route, Mara returned during a July heat wave. The clock still showed eight, though one hand had fallen loose inside its glass. A chain blocked the platform; behind it, weeds grew between the tracks. The town owned the empty station but could not afford to restore it. Mara had come to collect her grandfather's old bench before the building was sealed. Outside, a delivery driver sat in his van with the engine off, pressing a cold bottle to his neck. Mara unlocked the station door and felt the cool air held by its thick stone walls.

3 By evening, the driver had carried the bench inside, and Mara had opened the doors with the caretaker's permission. Neighbors brought water, folding chairs, and a handwritten sign that read COOL ROOM. Nobody fixed the clock. Its hands stayed at eight as people came in from the heat, some strangers to Mara and to one another. When a child asked when the next train would arrive, Mara said it would not. Then she moved the bench closer to the doorway so the child and her grandmother could sit together. Beyond the windows, the empty tracks flashed in the sun.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the first paragraph's setting create a particular tone? Use one detail in your answer.

2. How does the jump from school mornings to Mara's return change the meaning of the clock showing eight?

3. Why does the story place the cool room after the description of the chained platform and empty station? Explain the effect on the tone.

4. What does the ending suggest about belonging? Connect Mara's action with the child to a detail from the opening.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine the story starts with the child asking about the next train, then flashes back to Mara's school mornings, and ends with the cool room opening. In 5 to 6 sentences, explain how this new order would change the reader's first impression, tone, and sense of the story's meaning, using two details from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

The Stopped Clock

GRADE 10 · 10.CL.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number the three time periods in order, underline one detail in each paragraph that sets its tone, and circle words that signal a shift in time. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the first paragraph's setting create a particular tone? Use one detail in your answer.	**The shared glance at the clock creates a warm, nostalgic tone by showing a moment of connection among commuters.**
2	How does the jump from school mornings to Mara's return change the meaning of the clock showing eight?	**At first, eight marks a shared moment in a busy station. On Mara's return, the stopped clock suggests that the station's former life has ended.**
3	Why does the story place the cool room after the description of the chained platform and empty station? Explain the effect on the tone.	**The empty station establishes a sense of loss, so its new use creates a shift toward cautious hope rather than simple nostalgia.**
4	What does the ending suggest about belonging? Connect Mara's action with the child to a detail from the opening.	**Belonging does not depend on trains returning. Mara moves the bench so two people can sit together, echoing the opening's moment when strangers shared a glance at the clock.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Opening with the child's question would make readers wonder why anyone expects a train at the station. The answer that none will arrive would give the story a sad first impression. A flashback to commuters glancing up at the clock together would then show what the town has lost. Ending with the handwritten COOL ROOM sign would shift the tone toward hope. This order would place more emphasis on the town's decision to create a new gathering place after losing the old one.

Accept interpretations that connect specific details to tone, the movement through time, and the story's meaning as a whole. For Part 3, responses should explain an effect of the proposed new order rather than simply retell events.