Signs That Speak

How cultural perspective shapes style and meaning

11.CL.3 "Analyze how an author explicitly exhibits his/her cultural perspective in developing style and meaning."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two statements that reveal the narrator's cultural perspective, circle repeated or contrasting words, and number two details that show what the market means to the narrator.

Room for a Question

1 At our neighborhood night market, my mother tapes a paper sign beside her pot of soup: "Ask me how to say it." In my Vietnamese American family, names are invitations, not obstacles. My mother writes the soup's Vietnamese name above that question. Customers try the sounds, and she smiles when they ask to try again. The organizer wants to replace handwritten stall signs with matching signs that list dishes only in English. She says uniform signs will help visitors find their way. I understand the wish for order. Still, my mother's sign offers a reason to stop and speak.

2 At the planning meeting, I hear the phrase "clean visual identity" three times. Here, by the soup pot, a teenager repeats a name until my mother nods. Here, a man asks what herb makes the broth smell bright, and my mother holds out a leaf for him to smell. Here, my brother slides a chair toward someone eating alone. I keep saying "here" because the market is not an abstract collection of stalls. It is a place where attention passes from person to person, even when the conversation begins with a single uncertain syllable.

3 I do not think a printed menu is an enemy. People need to find prices, and translations can help. But when the organizer calls the new signs "neutral," I wonder whose comfort gets to define that word. My family has learned to explain our names without apologizing for them. If the market replaces every invitation with a polished label, it may look more orderly while offering less room to meet. I would keep the clear prices and the English translations. I would also leave space for my mother's question, printed in her own handwriting, where a passerby can answer it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the narrator's statement about names in a Vietnamese American family shape the meaning of the mother's sign?

2. Why does the narrator repeat "Here" in the second paragraph? Explain how this choice expresses the narrator's perspective on the market.

3. What contrast does the narrator create between "clean visual identity" and the scenes beside the soup pot? How does that contrast affect the passage's meaning?

4. When the narrator questions the word "neutral," whose perspective is being challenged? Use another detail from the final paragraph to explain why.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write one paragraph of 80 to 100 words about a proposed change to a shared place other than a food market. Write from your own cultural perspective or that of a fictional narrator, name that perspective explicitly, and repeat a word or phrase to show what the change would mean to the people who use the place.

ANSWER KEY

Signs That Speak

GRADE 11 · 11.CL.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two statements that reveal the narrator's cultural perspective, circle repeated or contrasting words, and number two details that show what the market means to the narrator. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the narrator's statement about names in a Vietnamese American family shape the meaning of the mother's sign?	**The narrator sees names as invitations to connect. The sign invites customers to ask about the Vietnamese name rather than pass over it.**
2	Why does the narrator repeat "Here" in the second paragraph? Explain how this choice expresses the narrator's perspective on the market.	**The repetition draws attention to specific acts of conversation and care. It presents the market as a place where people connect, not just a collection of stalls.**
3	What contrast does the narrator create between "clean visual identity" and the scenes beside the soup pot? How does that contrast affect the passage's meaning?	**The organizer's phrase emphasizes a uniform appearance, while the scenes show people learning, sharing, and welcoming others. The contrast suggests that uniform signs could hide what makes the market meaningful.**
4	When the narrator questions the word "neutral," whose perspective is being challenged? Use another detail from the final paragraph to explain why.	**The narrator challenges the organizer's assumption that English-only signs serve everyone equally. The narrator wants translations and prices but also wants space for the mother's handwritten question.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In my Puerto Rican family, Saturday domino games at the community center have always made room for neighbors who come just to watch. Now the center wants to replace the big tables with small desks for private study. Listen: the tiles click, and my uncle asks a newcomer to join. Listen: someone explains a move without making anyone feel foolish. I understand the need for quiet rooms, but removing every game table would turn a place for shared stories into a place where we sit together without speaking.

Accept other supported interpretations of the narrator's stylistic choices. For Part 3, look for an explicitly named personal cultural perspective, purposeful repetition, and a clear connection between the proposed change and the place's meaning.