The Blue Verdict

Read how a narrator's fear changes the meaning of a small detail.

11.CL.4 "Analyze how an author uses characterization, figurative language, literary elements, and point of view to create and convey meaning."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show how the narrator judges Ms. Vale, circle one comparison that shapes the mood, and number the two places where blue tape takes on a different meaning.

What the Tape Meant

1 By the time I reached the library, rain had found its way through the ceiling and into the local history room. Ms. Vale stood beside three carts, pulling blue tape from a roll with her teeth. My grandfather's recipe notebook lay on the lowest shelf, where he had donated it last spring. I had promised him the library would keep it safe. Now water tapped the metal carts like impatient fingers. Ms. Vale looked at the shelves, not at me, and said, "We can't save everything." I pressed the notebook against my coat before she could tell me which pile it belonged in.

2 She pushed one cart toward the back door. I followed, certain she was making a quick path to the dumpster. Each strip of blue tape she stuck to a book's spine looked like a small verdict. When I asked where the marked books were going, she said, "Somewhere dry," and kept working. I wanted a better answer, but I remembered how Granddad had written each recipe in the margin of a town photograph. The notebook held more than instructions for soup. It held the names of neighbors who had come to our table when money was scarce.

3 At the back door, Ms. Vale lifted the cart over the threshold to the waiting bookmobile. Its engine hummed, and sheets of clean paper covered the seats. She laid my grandfather's notebook open on a sheet, then slipped dry paper between its wet pages. "Blue means we try to save it first," she said. Only then did I notice that her own sleeves were soaked to the elbows. I had mistaken her brisk hands for carelessness because I was afraid of losing the one thing Granddad had trusted me to protect. Outside, rain kept falling, but inside the bookmobile, pages began to breathe.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the narrator's promise to Granddad shape their judgment of Ms. Vale?

2. What does the comparison of each strip of tape to a “small verdict” suggest about the narrator's feelings at that moment?

3. How does the meaning of blue tape change, and what does that change reveal about Ms. Vale?

4. How does the first-person point of view affect when you learn why Ms. Vale marks the books?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 90 word first-person scene set somewhere other than the library. Show a mistaken judgment of another person, include one comparison and a repeated object that changes meaning, and end with a detail that corrects the judgment.

ANSWER KEY

The Blue Verdict

GRADE 11 · 11.CL.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show how the narrator judges Ms. Vale, circle one comparison that shapes the mood, and number the two places where blue tape takes on a different meaning. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the narrator's promise to Granddad shape their judgment of Ms. Vale?	**The promise makes the narrator afraid of losing the notebook, so they mistake Ms. Vale's hurried work for carelessness.**
2	What does the comparison of each strip of tape to a “small verdict” suggest about the narrator's feelings at that moment?	**The narrator fears that Ms. Vale is deciding which books to throw away.**
3	How does the meaning of blue tape change, and what does that change reveal about Ms. Vale?	**The tape first seems to mark books for disposal, but it actually marks books Ms. Vale will try to save. Her brisk work shows care, not indifference.**
4	How does the first-person point of view affect when you learn why Ms. Vale marks the books?	**The reader knows only what the narrator sees and assumes, so the tape's purpose remains unclear until Ms. Vale explains it.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the bus stop, a man set an orange cone in front of the only bench. I had been standing all day, and the cone looked like a tiny guard posted against me. When I moved toward the seat, he shook his head. Then a woman with a walker arrived. He lifted the cone and pointed to a loose board beneath the bench. He guided her to a clear spot under the shelter, then turned the cone so its warning faced the next person approaching.

Accept interpretations supported by details from the passage, particularly the narrator's fear of losing the notebook and the later explanation of the tape. For the writing task, look for a comparison and an object whose changed meaning helps reveal the narrator's mistaken judgment.