Behind the Locked Door

How setting and story order shape meaning

9.CL.5 "Analyze the impact of context and organizational structures on theme, tone, and the meaning of the work as a whole."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle two details that show why the heat is dangerous, number the paragraphs in the order their events happen, and underline one detail in the ending that shapes the story's meaning.

A Place to Go

1 By noon, the metal handle of the public library was hot enough to make Nia pull back her hand. A paper sign on the door read, CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. Across the street, a bus stop offered a strip of shade too narrow for the six people waiting there. Nia's grandfather, who had planned to spend the afternoon inside, sat on the curb and fanned himself with a grocery receipt. When a neighbor said the town had forgotten them, Nia looked at the silent windows and almost agreed. The thermometer outside the pharmacy showed 99 degrees Fahrenheit.

2 That morning, before the doors were locked, a custodian had found water dripping through the library ceiling onto a ceiling light. A storm the night before had damaged the roof. The librarian called the town office, and an inspector ordered the building closed until an electrician could check the wiring. Nia learned this from the librarian, who came out carrying a box of bottled water. The librarian offered a bottle to each person at the bus stop, but the box was nearly empty. Nia's anger softened, then returned as she watched her grandfather struggle to stand.

3 At the council meeting that evening, the librarian explained why she had closed the building. Nia spoke next. “Keeping us out of danger matters,” she said, “but where are we supposed to go now?” The council voted to open the school gym as a temporary cooling center the next morning. Until then, volunteers brought chairs and jugs of water to the shaded porch of the town office. As Nia helped her grandfather into a chair, she noticed that the library's dark windows were still visible across the square. The problem had changed shape, but it had not vanished.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the heat and the bus stop setting shape the tone of the first paragraph?

2. The story shows the locked door before explaining the damaged roof. How does that order affect your view of the closure?

3. Why does Nia's anger return after the librarian offers water? Explain how that moment connects the setting to the story's theme.

4. How does the final view of the dark library windows affect the meaning of the council's decision?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a new two-sentence ending that uses only events and details already in the passage but leaves readers with a more hopeful tone. Then write three sentences explaining how your choice of final image changes the tone and emphasizes a theme, while the heat remains a problem.

ANSWER KEY

Behind the Locked Door

GRADE 9 · 9.CL.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle two details that show why the heat is dangerous, number the paragraphs in the order their events happen, and underline one detail in the ending that shapes the story's meaning. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the heat and the bus stop setting shape the tone of the first paragraph?	**The 99-degree heat and shade too narrow for everyone make the opening feel tense and urgent.**
2	The story shows the locked door before explaining the damaged roof. How does that order affect your view of the closure?	**At first, the closure can seem like neglect. Learning about the water near a ceiling light shows that keeping people out was a safety decision.**
3	Why does Nia's anger return after the librarian offers water? Explain how that moment connects the setting to the story's theme.	**The nearly empty box and her grandfather's struggle show that water alone cannot meet people's needs in the heat. A safe closure still requires another place for people to go.**
4	How does the final view of the dark library windows affect the meaning of the council's decision?	**The windows keep attention on the lost library even after the council plans to open the gym. The decision helps, but it does not solve the immediate problem completely.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

As Nia helped her grandfather into a chair, the library's dark windows remained visible across the square. Volunteers had brought chairs and jugs of water, and the school gym would open as a cooling center the next morning. This ending shifts the final image from the closed library to the town's response, making the tone more hopeful. The heat and the closed library still matter, so the response is temporary rather than a complete solution. Ending with the gym plan emphasizes the theme that a community must act when a safe public space becomes unavailable.

Accept supported interpretations that explain how the heat, delayed explanation, or final image affects tone or theme. For the marking job, the event order is paragraph 2, paragraph 1, then paragraph 3.