Rhythm After Ruin

Study how sentence patterns shape a historical account.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3a "Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte's Artful Sentences) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline every independent clause. Circle each word or phrase that introduces a dependent clause or a contrast, then number the shortest sentence in each paragraph 1, 2, and 3 to notice how syntax controls pace and emphasis.

San Francisco, 1906

(1) At 5:12 a.m. on April 18, 1906, the ground near San Francisco began to move. Chimneys fell, streets split, and people rushed from homes before they understood what had happened. The earthquake, linked to movement along the San Andreas Fault, damaged buildings across the city and nearby communities. For less than a minute, the shaking rearranged daily life. Then came silence, broken by shouts, cracking walls, and the clatter of dishes on pavement. Residents looked outward, toward smoke, dust, and neighbors. In doorways and open squares, families gathered.

(2) Fires followed the earthquake, but the quake did not ignite every blaze. Some fires began when overturned stoves or damaged gas lines released flames and fuel; wind then carried sparks from block to block. Meanwhile, broken water mains did not feed the fires. They limited the water available to firefighters, whose hoses often ran dry or could not reach damaged streets. The city faced a second disaster, one that spread while many people were still searching for relatives. By April 21, officials had largely contained the major fires, yet whole neighborhoods had been destroyed.

(3) Afterward, San Franciscans built temporary camps in parks and lots. Aid arrived by train and ship, and thousands of displaced residents received food, tents, or medical care. Reconstruction took years. Architects, business owners, laborers, and city leaders argued over where to build, how to finance projects, and which safety rules to adopt. The new city rose unevenly, however: some families returned quickly, while others left permanently. Its recovery was not a single triumphal moment. It was a sequence of choices, conflicts, and work, made visible in new streets and buildings.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. In paragraph 1, how do the short clauses in “Chimneys fell, streets split, and people rushed” shape the pace and mood of the account?

2. What contrast does the short sentence beginning with “Meanwhile” create in paragraph 2?

3. Which sentence in paragraph 3 is the shortest, and what idea does its brevity emphasize?

4. How does the final sentence’s list, “choices, conflicts, and work,” affect the portrayal of San Francisco’s recovery?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence account of a real or imagined community response to a disruption. Include one sentence of five words or fewer, one sentence with a three-item list, and one sentence that begins with a dependent clause; arrange the sentences to create a deliberate effect.

ANSWER KEY

Rhythm After Ruin

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline every independent clause. Circle each word or phrase that introduces a dependent clause or a contrast, then number the shortest sentence in each paragraph 1, 2, and 3 to notice how syntax controls pace and emphasis. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In paragraph 1, how do the short clauses in "Chimneys fell, streets split, and people rushed" shape the pace and mood of the account?	**They create a rapid, fragmented pace that conveys confusion and urgency.**
2	What contrast does the short sentence beginning with "Meanwhile" create in paragraph 2?	**It distinguishes damaged gas lines, which could provide fuel for fires, from broken water mains, which reduced firefighters' water supply.**
3	Which sentence in paragraph 3 is the shortest, and what idea does its brevity emphasize?	**"Reconstruction took years." Its brevity emphasizes the long duration of recovery.**
4	How does the final sentence's list, "choices, conflicts, and work," affect the portrayal of San Francisco's recovery?	**The list presents recovery as a complicated process rather than one simple, triumphant event.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Sirens stopped at dawn. After the bridge closed, volunteers carried water, blankets, and batteries along the river road. The town waited, then organized.

Accept reasonable explanations that connect a specific sentence pattern to pace, emphasis, contrast, or tone. For the writing task, verify all three required structures and accept any deliberate, coherent arrangement.