

Rumor at Deadline

Interpret how figurative language shapes a newsroom decision.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5a "Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each phrase that is not meant literally, including hyperbole, paradox, comparison, or personification. Number the phrases, then write a brief meaning in the margin for two of them.

The Verification Pause

- ① At 6:10 on election night, Maya's phone lit up with messages claiming that the student council vote had been hacked. In the newsroom, the printers rattled, laptops glowed, and every screen seemed to shout a different rumor. "If we wait another minute, the story will be ancient history," Leo said, refreshing the district website until his thumb went numb. Maya watched the headlines multiply like weeds after rain. The staff had promised readers an update before the final bell, but no official statement had appeared. Outside, students pressed against the newsroom window, hungry for an answer.
- ② Maya opened a shared document and typed a headline, then deleted it. "The fastest way to publish is to stop," she said. Leo stared at her as if she had announced that fire could freeze. Instead of posting, Maya called the district technology office, compared screenshots, and asked the election adviser to check the paper ballots. The room grew quieter with each unanswered call. Even the clock, which had been racing all afternoon, seemed to drag its feet. At 6:42, the adviser reported a software display error, not altered votes. Maya wrote the update only after two sources confirmed the explanation.
- ③ The final article appeared after sunset. It did not roar across the internet or rescue the newsroom from embarrassment. It simply stated that a display problem had caused the alarming screen messages and that the ballots remained secure. By morning, students who had expected a scandal were arguing about cafeteria prices instead. The rumor, so loud the night before, now looked smaller than the empty coffee cups on the newsroom table. Maya saved a screenshot of the first false claim beside the finished article. She wanted next year's staff to see that certainty can be a costume, especially when a crowd is waiting.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What does Leo mean when he says the story will be “ancient history”? How does this hyperbole reveal his state of mind?

2 Interpret Maya’s statement, “The fastest way to publish is to stop.” Which actions in the paragraph support your interpretation?

3 What does the description of the clock, first “racing” and then seeming to “drag its feet,” suggest about the newsroom’s experience of time?

4 What does Maya mean by “certainty can be a costume”? Explain how this metaphor contributes to the ending of the passage.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a four- to six-sentence scene about people making a careful decision under pressure. Include one hyperbole and one paradox, label each one, and add one sentence explaining how the figures shape the scene’s tone or message.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each phrase that is not meant literally, including hyperbole, paradox, comparison, or personification. Number the phrases, then write a brief meaning in the margin for two of them. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does Leo mean when he says the story will be “ancient history”? How does this hyperbole reveal his state of mind?	He means the story will soon seem outdated or no longer newsworthy. The hyperbole shows that Leo feels intense pressure to publish immediately.
2	Interpret Maya’s statement, “The fastest way to publish is to stop.” Which actions in the paragraph support your interpretation?	The paradox means that pausing to investigate can lead to a reliable story rather than a rushed, false one. Maya calls the technology office, compares screenshots, asks for a ballot check, and waits for two sources to confirm the explanation.
3	What does the description of the clock, first “racing” and then seeming to “drag its feet,” suggest about the newsroom’s experience of time?	Time feels fast during the rush to report and painfully slow while the staff waits for evidence. The personification builds tension and anxiety.
4	What does Maya mean by “certainty can be a costume”? Explain how this metaphor contributes to the ending of the passage.	She means that confident claims can hide weak or false evidence. The metaphor ends the passage with a warning about accepting rumors because a crowd wants an answer.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

During the chemistry lab spill, alarms chewed through the hallway’s silence. “This room is a volcano,” Amir said [hyperbole], though only a small beaker had cracked. Ms. Chen raised her hand and said, “To leave fastest, we must first stand still” [paradox]. The class stopped talking, listened for directions, and then filed out safely. The hyperbole captures the students’ panic, while the paradox shows that calm attention, not rushing, makes safe action possible; together, they shift the scene from fear to control.

Accept equivalent interpretations that connect each figure of speech to a specific idea, emotion, or effect in the passage. For Question 2, students should explain the apparent contradiction and cite at least two verification actions.