The Waiting Door

Close reading an ambiguous literary ending.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.10 "By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 12..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that make the observatory seem alive or human, then number 1, 2, and 3 beside moments when Mara's understanding of the building or her grandfather changes. Use your marks to track how the passage develops uncertainty.

The Lens Room

1 On the evening the town voted to sell the abandoned observatory, Mara climbed its hill with her father's brass key in her pocket. The key had belonged to her grandfather, who had wound the great telescope's clockwork until blindness made the stars a private rumor. Below, storefronts brightened one by one, their electric signs trembling in the rain; above, the dome seemed less a building than a closed eyelid. Mara had come, she told herself, to remove the family papers before contractors arrived. Yet she paused at the door, listening for the mechanism that could no longer run.

2 Inside, dust softened the instruments without concealing their purpose. Charts curled behind glass, and a ledger lay open beneath the telescope, as if its absent keeper had risen only long enough to fetch a lamp. Mara recognized her grandfather's narrow figures, then saw a final entry written in a stranger's impatient hand: "Clear sky. No observation." The sentence irritated her. It sounded like surrender, though the old man had taught her that clouds were not failures but conditions. When her father arrived, wet-haired and breathless, he did not ask why she had opened the dome. He looked at the ledger and said, "He stopped looking before he stopped seeing."

3 Her father crossed to the control panel and pressed one tarnished switch, a gesture so practiced that Mara understood he had performed it in secret. Nothing moved. Still, from the slit in the dome, a blade of cloudless dark appeared, startling after the rain. He began to laugh, quietly at first, then with a severity that made her angry. "They will make it apartments," he said. "People will pay for the view." Mara folded the ledger shut, but did not take it. She wondered whether the observatory had preserved her grandfather's devotion or merely its evidence. Outside, the vote was final, yet the door below seemed to wait for a decision.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does the phrase “the stars a private rumor” suggest about Mara’s grandfather after he became blind?

2. How does the contrast between “Clear sky. No observation.” and the father’s statement develop an idea about seeing?

3. Why is Mara’s decision not to take the ledger meaningful?

4. What does the final image of the door seeming to “wait for a decision” suggest, even though the town’s vote is final?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 100 to 130 word literary interpretation explaining what the observatory represents to Mara by the end of the passage. Use at least two brief quoted details and explain how they support your interpretation of the unresolved ending.

The Waiting Door

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that make the observatory seem alive or human, then number 1, 2, and 3 beside moments when Mara's understanding of the building or her grandfather changes. Use your marks to track how the passage develops uncertainty. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does the phrase "the stars a private rumor" suggest about Mara's grandfather after he became blind?	**It suggests that the stars had become inaccessible to him and known only indirectly, through memory, imagination, or what others might describe.**
2	How does the contrast between "Clear sky. No observation." and the father's statement develop an idea about seeing?	**Both distinguish physical sight or opportunity from active attention. The father suggests that the grandfather withdrew from looking or engaging before blindness fully prevented sight.**
3	Why is Mara's decision not to take the ledger meaningful?	**It shows that she does not want to claim or simplify her grandfather's legacy. She is beginning to see the observatory as evidence of both devotion and possible abandonment.**
4	What does the final image of the door seeming to "wait for a decision" suggest, even though the town's vote is final?	**The sale is settled, but Mara and her father still must decide how to understand, remember, or respond to the observatory and the grandfather's legacy.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

By the end, the observatory represents more than a family property; it is a difficult inheritance, containing both affection and avoidance. At first, Mara treats it as a place from which she can "remove the family papers," a practical mission that keeps grief at a distance. The ledger disrupts that pose because its empty observation makes her consider what her grandfather abandoned. Her father's secret use of "one tarnished switch" further suggests that he has maintained a private attachment to the place. Yet Mara does not carry away the ledger. Leaving it behind shows that she refuses to reduce her grandfather to either heroic devotion or failure. The door that "seemed to wait" makes that uncertainty feel unfinished rather than solved.

Accept defensible interpretations that use accurate details from the passage and account for the ending's ambiguity. For the open response, require 100 to 130 words, at least two brief quotations, and an explanation connecting those details to Mara's evolving understanding.