The Key's Return

Track how a flashback and ending shape meaning.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5 "Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline sentences set in the present, circle sentences that look back, and label the opening, flashback, and ending 1, 2, and 3 to analyze how this order shapes your response.

The Reservoir Key

(1) At noon, Mara stood beside the drained reservoir, holding the brass key at the center of her family's argument. Behind the chain-link fence, workers waited to open the old valve and send water back toward the town. Her brother Eli was absent. The previous evening, he had called the key a souvenir of their grandfather's failure and walked away. Now Mara could turn it, forgive him later, and let the valley's orchards drink. Instead, she stared at the dry mud, where fish bones shone like pale needles, and remembered the day their grandfather first gave her the key.

(2) Ten years earlier, a spring flood had cracked the reservoir wall. Grandfather Ivo, then the town's gatekeeper, had shut the valve to keep the break from widening, but the repair took months. Some neighbors blamed him for ruined crops, although engineers later said the closure had prevented a collapse. Ivo kept the key in a kitchen drawer, polishing it whenever storms gathered. On the morning he moved to a care home, he placed it in Mara's hand. "A key is not a verdict," he said. She had not understood until Eli, angry at another dry season, demanded that she throw it into the reservoir.

(3) Mara lifted the key, but she did not put it into the valve. She crossed the gravel road to the reservoir office and called Eli from the wall phone. When he answered, she told him what the engineers had said and asked him to come hear the workers' plan. An hour later, they turned the key together. Water clattered through the pipe, first brown, then clear. Eli watched the current reach the empty canal. "He was trying to save it," he said. Mara nodded. Their argument ended not with the family's past erased, but with the siblings choosing to carry it differently.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does the author begin with Mara at the reservoir just before the valve may be opened, instead of beginning with the flood ten years earlier?

2. How does placing the flood story in the second paragraph change the reader's view of Grandfather Ivo?

3. Compare Mara's relationship to the key in the opening and in the final paragraph. How does this sequence show a change?

4. What kind of resolution does the ending provide, and how do the water images contribute to its effect?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write exactly four sentences about an object with a disputed past. Begin at a decisive present moment, use sentence 2 as a flashback that changes how the object is understood, and end with a resolution whose tone is clearly hopeful, tragic, or ironic.

ANSWER KEY

The Key's Return

HIGH SCHOOL · RL.11-12.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline sentences set in the present, circle sentences that look back, and label the opening, flashback, and ending 1, 2, and 3 to analyze how this order shapes your response. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why does the author begin with Mara at the reservoir just before the valve may be opened, instead of beginning with the flood ten years earlier?	**Beginning at the present decision creates immediate tension about whether Mara will use the key. The later flashback then explains why the key matters.**
2	How does placing the flood story in the second paragraph change the reader's view of Grandfather Ivo?	**The flashback reveals that Ivo shut the valve to prevent a collapse, so readers see that the blamed action may have been protective rather than simply a failure.**
3	Compare Mara's relationship to the key in the opening and in the final paragraph. How does this sequence show a change?	**At first, Mara holds the key alone while the argument remains unresolved. At the end, she and Eli turn it together, showing movement from blame and separation to shared understanding.**
4	What kind of resolution does the ending provide, and how do the water images contribute to its effect?	**The ending is hopeful but not completely happy because the past is not erased. The water changing from brown to clear creates a concrete image of renewal and a restrained sense of reconciliation.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

As the auctioneer raised the hammer, Ren held the cracked compass that had divided his family. Years earlier, his mother had used it to guide rescuers to his grandfather after a winter storm, though his grandfather later blamed it for leading him into danger. Ren withdrew the compass from the sale and placed it in his younger cousin's hand. As the cousin traced its scratched needle, Ren understood that the family could remember both the mistake and the rescue.

Accept answers that identify the present-time opening, the explanatory flashback, and the ending's shift from conflict toward shared understanding. For the writing task, accept varied subjects and outcomes if the response has exactly four sentences and uses the required structural sequence.