Beacon at Dusk

Trace conflict, imagery, and an implied choice in a literary passage.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.10 "By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline details that show Mara's conflict, circle language that makes the harbor seem threatening, and number three moments that move her toward a decision.

The Unlit Signal

1 At dusk, Mara climbed the salt-stiff stairs of the abandoned signal tower, carrying the brass lamp her grandfather had hidden beneath his bed. Below, the harbor lay unusually still. Even the gulls had retreated from the pilings, as if the water had issued an order. Mara had promised herself she would only look at the lamp, not light it. Yet its glass chimney, clouded by years of smoke, seemed to hold the last thin color of the sunset. She remembered Grandfather saying that a beacon was not a command. It was an invitation to return.

2 She set the lamp on the iron rail and struck one match. The flame sprang up, then bent sideways although no wind touched her face. Across the bay, a fishing boat appeared between the black teeth of the breakwater. Its engine coughed once, twice, then fell silent. Mara's hand closed around the lamp's wick. If she lit it, people in town might see and ask why she had entered the forbidden tower. If she did not, the boat would have to choose its way by a shore that offered no mercy.

3 Before Mara could decide, the tower door groaned below her. She pictured Grandfather's shoulders and the way he had refused, even at supper, to explain why the lamp had been hidden. Then the boat's horn sounded, not loudly, but with the patient rhythm of someone knocking on a locked room. Mara trimmed the wick and raised the lamp. Its small fire did not brighten the whole bay. It merely drew a trembling path across the water, enough for the boat to follow. When footsteps began on the stairs, she kept her eyes on that path.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What conflict does Mara face in paragraph 2? Use one detail from the passage to support your answer.

2. What does Grandfather mean when he says that a beacon is “an invitation to return”?

3. How does the comparison of the boat's horn to someone “knocking on a locked room” affect the mood?

4. What does Mara's decision to keep her eyes on the path suggest about her at the end of the passage?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write exactly four sentences explaining a theme of the passage. Include one quoted detail from paragraph 1 and one quoted detail from paragraph 3, and explain how both details develop the theme.

ANSWER KEY

Beacon at Dusk

GRADE 8 · RL.8.10

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline details that show Mara's conflict, circle language that makes the harbor seem threatening, and number three moments that move her toward a decision. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What conflict does Mara face in paragraph 2? Use one detail from the passage to support your answer.	**Mara must choose between lighting the lamp to guide the boat and keeping it unlit to avoid being seen in the forbidden tower.**
2	What does Grandfather mean when he says that a beacon is “an invitation to return”?	**He means that a beacon offers guidance and safety to people trying to come home, rather than forcing them to act.**
3	How does the comparison of the boat's horn to someone “knocking on a locked room” affect the mood?	**It creates a tense, urgent mood by making the boat seem trapped outside safety and asking for help.**
4	What does Mara's decision to keep her eyes on the path suggest about her at the end of the passage?	**It suggests that she is focused on helping the boat and accepts the risk of being discovered.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A theme of the passage is that responsibility can require courage when secrecy feels safer. In paragraph 1, Grandfather calls a beacon “an invitation to return,” which presents light as help rather than control. In paragraph 3, the lamp makes “a trembling path across the water,” showing that Mara acts despite fear and uncertainty. Her choice suggests that even limited help matters when someone is in danger.

Accept supported interpretations of Mara's conflict, the harbor imagery, and her final choice. For the open response, accept a reasonable theme if the student uses one accurate quotation from each required paragraph and explains both connections.