The Silent Alarm

Track what a character misses and what readers notice.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.6 "Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details about what Maya believes, circle facts the reader knows but Maya does not, and write 1 beside a moment when this difference could build suspense.

Closing Time at Harbor Museum

1 At closing time, Maya volunteered to return a brass compass to the Harbor Museum's display case. The compass had been found in a sailor's trunk, and its glass lid was secured by a small alarm. Earlier that afternoon, Maya watched the curator test it. A red light flashed, and a bell rang when the lid lifted. Now Maya carried the compass through the dim gallery, certain that the alarm would protect it until morning while she finished her last task.

2 Near the case, a maintenance worker knelt beside an open wall panel. He had removed the alarm's battery after hearing a faint chirp, then hurried away to fetch a replacement. A yellow tag hung from the panel: OUT OF SERVICE. Maya passed it while studying the compass's needle. She did not notice the silent red light or the worker's toolbox beneath a bench. From the doorway, a boy in a raincoat watched her set the compass inside the case and close the lid.

3 Maya turned the tiny key and heard the lid click shut. “There,” she said, smiling at the raincoat boy. “If anyone touches it, the whole museum will know.” The boy nodded politely, although his hand tightened around a flat metal tool. Maya walked toward the staff room to sign out. Behind her, the boy stepped closer to the case. He paused when a guard's radio crackled somewhere in the gallery, then looked again at the compass.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does Maya believe about the display-case alarm, and what does the reader know that Maya does not?

2. Which two details about the boy suggest that he may be a threat to the compass? How do these details affect the reader?

3. How does the difference between Maya's knowledge and the reader's knowledge make Maya's statement, “If anyone touches it, the whole museum will know,” suspenseful?

4. How does the guard's radio crackling change the suspense at the end of the passage?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence scene that creates suspense or humor through a difference between what a character believes and what the reader knows. Include the character's belief, the extra information for the reader, and a final sentence that explains the effect.

ANSWER KEY

The Silent Alarm

GRADE 8 · RL.8.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details about what Maya believes, circle facts the reader knows but Maya does not, and write 1 beside a moment when this difference could build suspense. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does Maya believe about the display-case alarm, and what does the reader know that Maya does not?	**Maya believes the alarm will protect the compass. The reader knows that its battery was removed and that it is out of service.**
2	Which two details about the boy suggest that he may be a threat to the compass? How do these details affect the reader?	**He watches Maya from the doorway, and his hand tightens around a flat metal tool. These details make the reader suspect he may try to open the case.**
3	How does the difference between Maya's knowledge and the reader's knowledge make Maya's statement, “If anyone touches it, the whole museum will know,” suspenseful?	**Maya sounds confident, but the reader knows the alarm cannot work. The reader may worry that the boy could take the compass without the alarm sounding.**
4	How does the guard's radio crackling change the suspense at the end of the passage?	**It creates uncertainty about whether a guard is nearby enough to stop the boy, so the reader wonders what the boy will do next.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Leon's class was preparing a surprise video for the principal, but he believed the tablet was charging in the library. Readers know that the tablet's cord slipped from the outlet when the janitor moved a cart. Leon carried the dark tablet toward the assembly, unaware that it held no power. This difference creates suspense because readers wonder when Leon will discover the problem.

Accept responses that identify Maya's mistaken confidence and the reader's knowledge that the alarm has no battery. For the open task, accept any clear character-reader knowledge gap that produces and explains suspense or humor.