

Signals in Silence

Trace how details and changes build meaning in a literary text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.10 “By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 10...”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that create uncertainty or loss, and circle details that show Mara making a choice. Number 1, 2, and 3 beside three moments when her understanding shifts, so you can trace how the story develops.

The Last Signal

- ① At 5:40, Mara crossed the empty train platform with her grandfather's brass compass closed in her fist. The evening commuter had left ten minutes earlier, carrying the other students toward the city. Above the tracks, a storm pressed low and purple. Mara had promised her mother she would come straight home after the memorial service, yet she stood beneath the departure board, watching its blank squares flicker. Her grandfather had repaired railroad signals for forty years, and he had always said that a light meant nothing unless someone knew where it pointed.
- ② From the far end of the platform, a single green lamp blinked beside Track 4. Mara knew the line had been closed since spring, when a landslide buried the tunnel beyond town. Still, she followed the lamp to a rusted signal box. Inside, a relay clicked steadily, though no train could use it. Taped to the metal door was a note in her grandfather's narrow handwriting: “For Mara. When the road disappears, do not mistake stillness for an ending.” The rain began then, tapping the roof like impatient fingers.
- ③ Mara read the note twice. For a moment, she imagined the closed tunnel opening and her grandfather stepping from the dark, carrying his tool bag. Then the relay stopped. The sudden silence made her angry, not because the message had failed, but because it had asked her to continue without an answer. She opened the compass. Its needle trembled, then settled toward home. Mara walked past the green lamp without touching it. At the stairs, she looked back. The lamp had gone dark, but the platform no longer seemed empty.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How does the setting in the first paragraph establish Mara's conflict? Use two details from the paragraph.

2 What does the note mean when it says, "do not mistake stillness for an ending"? Explain using an event from the story.

3 How does the green lamp change from the second paragraph to the ending, and what does that change suggest about Mara?

4 Why is Mara angry when the relay stops? What does this reaction reveal about what she wants?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a four-sentence reader's claim explaining how the compass and the relay work together as symbols in the story. Include one short quotation from the passage and explain how it supports your claim.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline details that create uncertainty or loss, and circle details that show Mara making a choice. Number 1, 2, and 3 beside three moments when her understanding shifts, so you can trace how the story develops. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the setting in the first paragraph establish Mara's conflict? Use two details from the paragraph.	Mara has promised to go straight home after the memorial service, but she remains alone at the empty platform, watching the departure board. These details show that grief and her grandfather's connection to the railroad are pulling her away from home.
2	What does the note mean when it says, "do not mistake stillness for an ending"? Explain using an event from the story.	The note means that a quiet or stopped moment does not mean life is over. When the relay stops, Mara chooses to continue walking home rather than wait for a sign from the past.
3	How does the green lamp change from the second paragraph to the ending, and what does that change suggest about Mara?	At first, the blinking green lamp draws Mara toward the abandoned track and mystery. At the end it is dark as she leaves, suggesting that she is no longer waiting for the past to direct her.
4	Why is Mara angry when the relay stops? What does this reaction reveal about what she wants?	Mara is angry because the message asks her to continue without an answer. She wants certainty and wishes her grandfather could return or explain what to do.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The relay represents the part of Mara that waits for a signal from the past. Its steady clicking keeps the abandoned track feeling alive, but its stop forces her to face the present. The compass offers a different kind of guidance when its needle settles "toward home." Together, the objects show that remembering her grandfather can guide Mara without keeping her at the platform.

Accept supported responses that explain Mara's movement from waiting for a sign toward choosing to go home. For the open task, accept other reasonable symbol interpretations if the student uses an accurate quotation and explains its connection to both objects.