

# The Compass Test

Track time shifts, pacing, and clues in a museum mystery.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5** “Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.”

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## 1 READ AND MARK \_\_\_\_\_ Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline every phrase that signals a change in time. Circle two suspicious clues, then number the paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 to track how the order of events builds mystery and surprise.

### After Hours

- ① At 10:47 p.m., Mara stood alone in the museum's dark map room, listening to rain tap the skylight. The security alarm had not sounded, yet the glass case holding the Brass Compass was open. On the floor, a wet footprint pointed toward the locked west door. Mara checked her phone. Her brother Eli, a night guard, had sent one message twelve minutes earlier: Meet me by the compass. Now he did not answer. From the hallway came a slow click, then another. Mara slipped the curator's key into her pocket and waited behind a tall globe.
- ② Three hours earlier, Eli had found a silver button beneath the same case. It belonged to no museum uniform, but its thread was bright blue, like the ribbon on the curator's raincoat. When Mara arrived for a school research project, Eli showed her the button and joked that the compass must be choosing a new owner. Mara noticed that his joke ended quickly. He asked whether she had seen the curator near the west door. Before she could reply, the curator appeared, smiling as he locked the map room. “Old buildings make strange noises,” he said. Eli folded the button into his palm and told Mara to go home.
- ③ In the hallway, the clicks stopped. Mara counted to five, then stepped out. The west door was still locked, but a blue thread clung to its handle. She followed it past the planetarium, where Eli's flashlight blinked once through a storage-room window. As Mara reached the window, the museum lights snapped on. Eli stood inside with the curator, who held the Brass Compass. “I took it,” Eli said, “to prove the case could be opened without an alarm.” The curator raised the silver button. “And I arranged the clues,” he added. Mara stared at her brother. His frightened message had been part of the test.

**2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE** \_\_\_\_\_ Use the passage

**1** The second paragraph shifts to three hours earlier. What information does this flashback give, and how does placing it after the first paragraph add to the mystery?

**2** Identify two moments in paragraph 1 where the author slows the pacing. Explain how this slower pacing creates tension.

**3** How does paragraph 3 change the meaning of the blue thread, silver button, and Eli's message?

**4** Explain how the order of the three paragraphs creates surprise at the end.

**3 YOUR TURN** \_\_\_\_\_ Your own words

Write a six-sentence mystery scene. Begin at a tense moment, include a one-sentence flashback, and end with a surprise that changes the meaning of an earlier clue; make the tense moment last at least three short sentences.

---

---

---

**PART 1 • READ AND MARK**

Underline every phrase that signals a change in time. Circle two suspicious clues, then number the paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 to track how the order of events builds mystery and surprise. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

**PART 2 • ANSWERS**

| # | QUESTION                                                                                                                                                             | ANSWER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | The second paragraph shifts to three hours earlier. What information does this flashback give, and how does placing it after the first paragraph add to the mystery? | <b>The flashback introduces the silver button, blue thread, Eli's concern about the curator, and the locked map room. Placing it after the open case and missing-message scene makes readers connect the earlier clues to the current danger.</b>         |
| 2 | Identify two moments in paragraph 1 where the author slows the pacing. Explain how this slower pacing creates tension.                                               | <b>The detailed wet footprint and the separate, slow clicks delay action. Mara waiting behind the globe also pauses the scene, making readers anticipate who or what is in the hallway.</b>                                                               |
| 3 | How does paragraph 3 change the meaning of the blue thread, silver button, and Eli's message?                                                                        | <b>The ending reveals that the curator arranged the clues and that Eli's alarming message was part of a test. Details that seemed to point to a crime were staged.</b>                                                                                    |
| 4 | Explain how the order of the three paragraphs creates surprise at the end.                                                                                           | <b>The text begins with an apparent theft, moves back to suspicious earlier evidence, and returns to the present for the reveal. This order encourages readers to suspect the curator or fear for Eli before learning they planned the test together.</b> |

**PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)**

At midnight, Nia heard the greenhouse latch scrape. She froze beside the seed trays. The sound came again. That afternoon, her uncle had warned her that the rare orchid would bloom only once. Nia opened the door and found her little cousin holding a watering can beside the orchid. He had loosened the latch because he was hiding a birthday card under the pot, and the "rare orchid" was a plastic decoration for the party.

Accept answers that accurately cite the passage and explain how time order or pacing affects a reader's expectations. For the writing task, accept varied settings and surprises if the response has exactly six sentences, a clear one-sentence flashback, at least three short tense-opening sentences, and a final reinterpretation of an earlier clue.