

The Archive Alarm

Trace how a narrative opening creates stakes and momentum.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3a “Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters...”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that establish the problem and why it matters, circle words that identify the narrator or another character, and number the major events 1 through 5 to trace the sequence.

Letters Underwater

- ① At 6:42 on Tuesday, the evacuation alarm cut through the quiet of Riverton High’s library. I was labeling photographs for the town’s centennial exhibit when water began to seep beneath the archive-room door. By noon, the display cases were supposed to hold letters from soldiers, factory workers, and my great-grandmother, who had organized the first school board. Instead, the alarm sent students toward the exits while Ms. Alvarez, the librarian, stared at the widening dark line on the carpet. I understood why she looked frightened, but I also saw the metal cabinet where the oldest letters were stored.
- ② Ms. Alvarez told me to leave, and for a second I nearly obeyed. Then the alarm stopped, replaced by the hiss of water behind the door. I pointed to the cabinet and said it could not stay in a flooded room. She hesitated, measuring the risk more carefully than I had. When the assistant principal arrived with a ring of keys, Ms. Alvarez asked him to shut off the sprinkler valve while she and I moved the cabinet into the hallway. We worked silently, lifting one end at a time. The cabinet was heavier than it looked, and each scrape across the tile sounded like lost time.
- ③ After the valve closed, the three of us opened the archive room. A shallow pool covered the floor, but the cabinet’s bottom drawer remained dry. Ms. Alvarez exhaled and pressed her palm against its dented side. I expected relief to feel simple. Instead, I kept thinking about how close I had come to leaving because an adult had told me to. Later, as students returned for their backpacks, Ms. Alvarez announced that the exhibit would open a day late. I watched her place the rescued letters on a cart, and I realized that preserving a town’s memory sometimes begins with noticing what others have not yet seen.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What problem does the first paragraph establish, and why does that problem matter to the narrator?

2 What point of view does the passage use? Give one detail that shows how this point of view lets the reader understand the narrator's response.

3 How does the second paragraph create a smooth progression from the alarm to the effort to save the letters? Name two linked events.

4 What realization does the narrator reach at the end, and which earlier experience leads to it?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a 130-to-160-word first-person opening paragraph about a situation that becomes urgent. Introduce the narrator and at least one other character, show why the problem matters, and use at least three connected events to move the paragraph forward.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline details that establish the problem and why it matters, circle words that identify the narrator or another character, and number the major events 1 through 5 to trace the sequence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What problem does the first paragraph establish, and why does that problem matter to the narrator?	Water is seeping into the archive room, threatening historic letters needed for the centennial exhibit, including letters connected to the narrator's great-grandmother.
2	What point of view does the passage use? Give one detail that shows how this point of view lets the reader understand the narrator's response.	It uses first-person point of view. The narrator says, "I nearly obeyed" and later reflects on being close to leaving, revealing the narrator's thoughts and conflict.
3	How does the second paragraph create a smooth progression from the alarm to the effort to save the letters? Name two linked events.	After Ms. Alvarez tells the narrator to leave, the narrator points out the cabinet. Then the assistant principal is asked to shut off the sprinkler valve while Ms. Alvarez and the narrator move the cabinet.
4	What realization does the narrator reach at the end, and which earlier experience leads to it?	The narrator realizes that preserving memory can begin with noticing what others have not seen. This follows the narrator noticing the cabinet, nearly leaving, and helping move it from the flooded room.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At 5:10 on Friday, I was locking the stage door after rehearsal when I heard a thin chirp from the auditorium. The sound came from the control booth, where Eli had left the school's borrowed digital projector charging for Monday's film festival. First I called his name, but he had already gone. Then I found a warning light flashing beside the projector's overheated battery. I remembered that the festival would bring families from across town and that our media club had spent months making the films. I texted Eli, ran to the front office for the custodian's number, and returned with a fire extinguisher nearby. When Ms. Chen answered, she told me to unplug the projector and wait outside the booth. I watched the warning light fade through the glass, unsure whether I had acted soon enough.

Accept answers that identify the water threat, the historical importance of the letters, the first-person perspective, and the ordered response to the emergency. For the writing task, check for 130 to 160 words, a clear narrator and character, meaningful stakes, and a logical sequence of at least three events.