Jars, Ferns, Doors

Trace how setting, symbols, and structure build meaning in a short story.

ELA.10.R.1.1 "Analyze how key elements enhance or add layers of meaning and/or style in a literary text."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details about the jars, fern, and cash drawer. Circle changes involving the door or window, and number three moments that show Mara's feelings shifting.

The Closed Shop

1 At 5:40 each morning, Mara unlocked the door of her grandfather's closed bait shop before school. The harbor was still blue-gray, and the windows held a skin of salt. Inside, rows of empty jars caught the weak light. Her grandfather had labeled them in thick marker, CLAMS, WORMS, SHRIMP, as if the words could summon their contents. Mara came to water the fern by the register, but she also opened the cash drawer and listened to its wooden slide, the sound that once told her he was nearby.

2 One Tuesday, a customer paused outside, saw the dark sign, and moved on. Mara watched from behind the counter, holding a jar marked SHRIMP. She wanted to call out that the shop was not empty, not really. Instead, she placed the jar beside the fern and wiped a circle in the cloudy front window. Through it, she could see the ferry begin its crossing. Its horn sounded once, then again, spreading across the water like a question. Mara left the shop door unlocked when she went to class.

3 After classes, Mara returned with a sheet of paper from the library printer. She taped it beneath the faded sign: FERN FOR SALE, FIVE DOLLARS, PLEASE ASK INSIDE. The message made her laugh, because the fern had survived three winters and belonged to no one else. Near sunset, the same customer stepped through the door. He read the sign, smiled, and asked whether Mara's grandfather might sell bait again. Mara looked at the empty jars, then at the ferry lights trembling in the window. "Maybe," she said, and reached for the drawer.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the harbor setting and the description of the closed shop create a mood in the first paragraph? Explain how that mood adds meaning to Mara's situation.

2. What do the empty labeled jars suggest beyond their literal use in a bait shop? Use one detail from the passage to support your analysis.

3. What does the comparison of the ferry horn to "a question" reveal about Mara's future? How does this comparison affect the story's style?

4. Analyze how Mara's actions with the shop door develop her character from the beginning to the end of the story.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence continuation set the next morning. In the first three sentences, include one object from the story and one setting detail. In the fourth sentence, explain how those choices add a layer of meaning to your continuation.

Jars, Ferns, Doors

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details about the jars, fern, and cash drawer. Circle changes involving the door or window, and number three moments that show Mara's feelings shifting. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the harbor setting and the description of the closed shop create a mood in the first paragraph? Explain how that mood adds meaning to Mara's situation.	**The quiet blue-gray harbor, salt-covered windows, and empty jars create a lonely, still mood. The mood reflects Mara's sense of loss after her grandfather's absence.**
2	What do the empty labeled jars suggest beyond their literal use in a bait shop? Use one detail from the passage to support your analysis.	**The jars symbolize Mara's memories of her grandfather and the shop's former life. The labels seem as if they could "summon" their contents, suggesting her wish to bring the past back.**
3	What does the comparison of the ferry horn to "a question" reveal about Mara's future? How does this comparison affect the story's style?	**The comparison shows that Mara is uncertain whether the shop can have a future. It gives the scene a reflective, hopeful-but-unsettled style.**
4	Analyze how Mara's actions with the shop door develop her character from the beginning to the end of the story.	**At first, Mara unlocks the door as part of a private routine connected to her grandfather. Later, she leaves it unlocked and creates a sign, showing that she is becoming open to bringing customers and life back to the shop.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The next morning, Mara found a paper cup of coffee on the counter, its lid beaded with rain. Outside, the ferry disappeared into a white band of fog, but the shop bell rang before she could throw the cup away. A woman asked for worms, and Mara opened the drawer with both hands. The coffee and fog suggest an unexpected visitor and an uncertain future, while the bell adds a small sign that the shop may wake again.

Accept responses that explain how a specific story element, such as setting, repeated objects, imagery, or the sequence of events, adds meaning or style. For Part 3, accept varied continuations if the student includes the required details and clearly explains their effect.