Compass Under Stars

Analyze how imagery, symbolism, and setting build meaning in a literary scene.

ELA.11.R.1.1 "Evaluate 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 three details that make the observatory or lake seem alive, and circle every mention of the compass. In the margin, note what the compass seems to mean at the beginning and at the end.

Lake Vesper

1 On the last evening before the town drained Lake Vesper for repairs, Mara walked to the abandoned observatory above the dam. The building had no telescope now, only its round roof, tilted like a closed eye. Inside, rain had written brown maps down the walls. Mara carried her father's brass compass, found in the pocket of his coat after he died. Its needle quivered although she stood still. Through the broken dome, the lake reflected the first stars, then broke them apart whenever wind crossed the water.

2 At the railing, Mara opened the compass. Her father had taught her to use it on hikes, saying that a direction mattered only if someone chose to follow it. Tonight, the needle swung toward the observatory instead of north. Mara laughed once, sharply, and the sound vanished among the empty instruments. She wanted to call the movement a trick of rust, but the compass was polished, warm from her hand. Below, workers' lamps moved along the dam in a slow line, preparing to lower the water by morning. The lake seemed to hold its breath.

3 Then Mara noticed a strip of paper tucked beneath the compass lid. In her father's cramped writing, it said, Look up before you decide you are lost. She read the sentence twice. The roof's open circle framed a thin path of stars, and one bright point hung directly above the lake's dark center. Mara did not know whether her father had left the note for this night or for any night she might need it. She closed the compass and placed it on the railing. When the workers' first gate groaned open, she turned toward the town, carrying no map but looking upward.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the descriptions of the observatory as a “closed eye” and the rain as “written brown maps” add to the setting's mood?

2. How does the compass develop from paragraph 1 to paragraph 3? Explain the larger meaning it gains for Mara.

3. What is the effect of the sentence, “The lake seemed to hold its breath,” just before the water will be lowered?

4. How does the final image of Mara “carrying no map but looking upward” show a change in her perspective?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write four sentences about a character who finds an ordinary object in an important setting. Use one vivid image, then show how the object's meaning changes for the character by the final sentence.

ANSWER KEY

Compass Under Stars

GRADE 11 · ELA.11.R.1.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three details that make the observatory or lake seem alive, and circle every mention of the compass. In the margin, note what the compass seems to mean at the beginning and at the end. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the descriptions of the observatory as a "closed eye" and the rain as "written brown maps" add to the setting's mood?	**They make the observatory seem watchful, neglected, and marked by time, creating a melancholy, mysterious mood.**
2	How does the compass develop from paragraph 1 to paragraph 3? Explain the larger meaning it gains for Mara.	**It begins as her father's practical hiking tool, then becomes a connection to his guidance and a symbol of finding direction during loss.**
3	What is the effect of the sentence, "The lake seemed to hold its breath," just before the water will be lowered?	**The personification creates suspense and makes the lake seem vulnerable, as if it anticipates the coming change.**
4	How does the final image of Mara "carrying no map but looking upward" show a change in her perspective?	**Mara no longer depends only on a physical tool for direction. Looking upward shows that she accepts her father's message and seeks hope or guidance beyond a map.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the empty bus stop, I found my grandmother's red scarf knotted around the bench. It snapped in the wind like a small flag, bright against the gray street. At first, I saw it as proof that she had forgotten something. When I wrapped it around my neck and walked home, it became a sign that her warmth could travel with me.

Accept responses that explain how a specific element, such as imagery, setting, personification, or symbolism, shapes meaning or style. For the open task, accept varied objects and interpretations if the response includes four sentences, a vivid image, and a clear shift in the object's meaning.