Choices Under Smoke

Trace how craft reveals pressure, fear, and priorities.

10.P.AC.1 "Reading like a Writer: Interpret texts through the author's lens by identifying, analyzing, and evaluating craft techniques that are connected to the responses, thoughts, decisions, and questions triggered by the text."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two images that make the danger feel close, circle one repeated word or phrase, and number one question that reveals Mara's fear. These choices show how the author guides your response to Mara's decisions.

The Things That Leave

1 At 2:13 a.m., Mara stood in her driveway while ash settled on the hood of her father's truck like gray flour. The evacuation order glowed on her phone. Inside, her grandfather slept beside an oxygen concentrator whose steady hum had always sounded ordinary. Now each breath seemed to borrow time. Mara packed medicine, water, and the machine's compatible portable battery, then paused at the framed photograph of her grandmother. "We can replace things," her father said from the door. Mara closed the drawer holding the photograph and carried the battery outside.

2 Outside, the street was a moving ribbon of red taillights. Neighbors lifted pets, coolers, and boxes into cars. Mara wanted to shout that everyone was leaving too slowly, but the words stayed behind her teeth. Her father checked the battery's charge indicator twice. "Not the quilts," he said when Mara reached for a bag. "Not the albums." He pointed to the truck bed, where the concentrator was secured beside water. For the first time, Mara understood that choosing what to save was also choosing what to leave.

3 As the truck rolled downhill, Mara watched their house shrink in the side mirror until it looked no larger than a dark postage stamp. The fire itself was hidden beyond the ridge, which made it worse. Without flames to measure, her mind supplied them: flames in the garden, flames at the windows, flames climbing the porch steps. She gripped the seat belt and asked no one, "Will there be anything to return to?" Her father kept his eyes on the road. "We are here," he said.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the comparison of ash to “gray flour” shape the reader’s response to the evacuation?

2. Why does the author describe the oxygen concentrator’s hum as once “ordinary” but now connected to breaths that “borrow time”?

3. What does the repeated dialogue, “Not the quilts” and “Not the albums,” reveal about Mara’s father and the family’s situation?

4. How do the hidden fire and the repeated image of imagined flames develop Mara’s thoughts before she asks her question?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 90 to 120 word continuation set at the evacuation center. Use one sensory image, one repeated word or phrase, and one question to reveal Mara’s thoughts as she makes a decision.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 10 · 10.P.AC.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two images that make the danger feel close, circle one repeated word or phrase, and number one question that reveals Mara's fear. These choices show how the author guides your response to Mara's decisions. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the comparison of ash to "gray flour" shape the reader's response to the evacuation?	**It makes the ash seem familiar but unsettling, showing that the fire has invaded an ordinary home setting.**
2	Why does the author describe the oxygen concentrator's hum as once "ordinary" but now connected to breaths that "borrow time"?	**The contrast raises the stakes by showing that the machine has become urgently important to Mara's grandfather's safety.**
3	What does the repeated dialogue, "Not the quilts" and "Not the albums," reveal about Mara's father and the family's situation?	**The short repetition shows urgent prioritizing. Mara's father chooses medical equipment, water, and safety over sentimental belongings.**
4	How do the hidden fire and the repeated image of imagined flames develop Mara's thoughts before she asks her question?	**They place the reader inside Mara's uncertainty and anxiety. Because she cannot see the fire, her imagination makes the danger feel larger and more frightening.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the community center, rows of cots made the gym look like a waiting room for a storm. Mara set the oxygen concentrator beside her grandfather's chair and connected it to the portable battery. Its green light blinked, blinked, blinked. Across the room, a volunteer handed out paper cups of water, one by one. Mara almost asked about the house, but she saw her father studying the map on his phone. Not yet, she told herself. Not while Grandpa needed calm more than news. She pulled a blanket over his knees and sat beside him. What could she do except stay awake and listen to the machine breathe?

Accept answers that identify a specific craft choice and explain its effect on the reader's understanding of Mara's thoughts, fears, or decisions. For Part 3, accept varied scenes that meet the word range and use the required image, repetition, question, and decision purposefully.