Before the Warning

Study how pacing, sensory detail, and limited viewpoint build suspense.

10.T.T.1 "Narrative Techniques: Evaluate and apply narrative techniques to enhance text's appeal to audiences or achieve specific purposes."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two places where the pacing speeds up or slows down, and circle two sensory details. In the margin, label each mark U for urgency or S for suspense, based on its effect.

The Brass Key

1 At 5:40 a.m., Lena stood on the empty platform with her bike beside her. The first train would arrive in five minutes, but rain drummed so hard on the station roof that she could barely hear the river below. In her pocket, a brass key pressed against her palm. Her grandfather had mailed it with one message: "Use this only when the bridge lights go out." Lena watched the signal across the tracks blink green, green, green. Then it vanished. The platform lamps dimmed, and a gull cried somewhere in the rain.

2 She ran toward the locked maintenance door at the end of the platform. Water splashed over her shoes. Behind her, the loudspeaker clicked once, then released only a thin hiss. Lena fitted the key into a rusted panel beside the door. It would not turn. She tried again, slower this time, and felt the tiny teeth catch. From the river came a low grinding sound, like stones rolling along a riverbed. The bridge, hidden by rain, began to groan. Lena held her breath and turned the key once more.

3 The panel sprang open. Inside, a red lever waited beneath a square of glass. Lena remembered her grandfather repairing bicycles at his kitchen table, his hands steady even when a chain snapped loose. "Pull it before the second warning," he had said. A bell rang once. Lena pulled the lever. Far above the river, the bridge lights flared white, then amber, stopping traffic before the span lifted. The grinding softened. On the platform, Lena opened her fist. The brass key had left a small crescent in her skin. She smiled, but did not yet know why.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Paragraph 2 shifts from quick action to a slower moment. Quote one short action sentence and one slower moment, then explain how the shift affects suspense.

2. What sound image makes the danger feel close and threatening? Explain its effect on the reader.

3. What important information does the author delay until paragraph 3? How does delaying it build suspense?

4. How does keeping the narration focused only on Lena's observations and thoughts affect the audience? Use one detail from the passage in your answer.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 90-110-word suspense scene about a character who receives an unexpected message. Use one sensory detail, one sentence of five words or fewer, and one important piece of information that is revealed near the end.

ANSWER KEY

Before the Warning

GRADE 10 · 10.T.T.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two places where the pacing speeds up or slows down, and circle two sensory details. In the margin, label each mark U for urgency or S for suspense, based on its effect. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Paragraph 2 shifts from quick action to a slower moment. Quote one short action sentence and one slower moment, then explain how the shift affects suspense.	**Possible quotes: "Water splashed over her shoes" and "She tried again, slower this time, and felt the tiny teeth catch." The quick sentence increases urgency, while the slower failed attempt stretches suspense before the bridge danger grows.**
2	What sound image makes the danger feel close and threatening? Explain its effect on the reader.	**"A low grinding sound, like stones rolling along a riverbed," or the bridge that "began to groan." The sound suggests that the bridge is moving or failing, making readers anticipate danger.**
3	What important information does the author delay until paragraph 3? How does delaying it build suspense?	**The author delays the explanation that the lever restores the bridge lights and stops traffic before the span lifts. Readers worry about the key and lever before learning whether Lena can prevent an accident.**
4	How does keeping the narration focused only on Lena's observations and thoughts affect the audience? Use one detail from the passage in your answer.	**It keeps readers uncertain with Lena, so the danger feels immediate. For example, she hears the grinding sound and sees the signal vanish without knowing what is happening.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Maya stopped at the auditorium door when her phone buzzed in the dark. The message showed no name, only a photo of her trumpet case open on the stage. She had locked it in the band room an hour earlier. Cold air slid under the door and raised bumps on her arms. Do not go in. Still, the case was her grandmother's, and its brass latch carried a scratch shaped like a lightning bolt. Maya gripped the handle. From inside, a single trumpet note rose, thin and trembling. Then her phone buzzed again. The new photo showed her brother standing behind her.

Accept varied annotations and responses when students identify a clear narrative technique and explain a reasonable effect on suspense, urgency, or reader interest. For Part 3, check the word count and required techniques, then accept scenes that use those techniques purposefully.