

When Lights Fail

Analyze how a writer builds and releases tension through narrative choices.

8.T.T.1 "Narrative Techniques: Analyze and apply narrative techniques."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two sensory details, circle each line of dialogue, and box Maya's thoughts or memories. Use your marks to see how the writer creates tension and then releases it.

After Closing

- ① At closing time, Maya heard the aquarium pumps cough and fall silent. Blue light drained from the jellyfish tank, leaving the room striped with shadows. Her flashlight trembled across wet tiles as she hurried toward the maintenance door. "Mr. Chen?" she called. Only the slow slap of water against glass answered. Maya had volunteered here all summer, but tonight the familiar exhibits seemed to hold their breath. Beyond the lobby windows, rain tapped, and a warning bell gave one thin chirp.
- ② Maya remembered Mr. Chen's lesson from the week before. A power failure could lower oxygen in some tanks, he had said, and the backup generator should start within minutes. She pictured the tiny seahorses she had fed that morning, their curled tails gripping the grass. The generator did not rumble. Instead, a red indicator blinked beside the door. Maya pressed the radio button once, then again, listening to static between each try. Her palms grew damp around the radio.
- ③ Then a voice crackled through the radio. "Maya, the generator switch is behind the filter cabinet," Mr. Chen said. She squeezed between two carts, smelling salt and machine oil. For one second, her hand searched along the wall. Click. The generator roared, and bubbles raced upward in the dark tanks. Light returned in a soft blue wash. Maya laughed quietly, but she kept her eyes on the seahorses until their tails loosened and they began to drift.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

1 How do the sensory details in the first paragraph shape the mood of the scene?

2 Why does the author include Maya's memory of Mr. Chen's lesson in the second paragraph?

3 How does the author use pacing in the second paragraph to increase tension?

4 What effect does Mr. Chen's dialogue have on the final paragraph?

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Write a 4- to 5-sentence scene in which a character faces a small urgent problem. Include dialogue, one sensory detail, the character's thought, and a change in pacing from slow to quick.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline two sensory details, circle each line of dialogue, and box Maya's thoughts or memories. Use your marks to see how the writer creates tension and then releases it. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the sensory details in the first paragraph shape the mood of the scene?	Details such as the wet tiles, shadows, rain, and slow slap of water create an uneasy, tense mood.
2	Why does the author include Maya's memory of Mr. Chen's lesson in the second paragraph?	The memory explains that a power failure can lower oxygen in tanks, making the generator's failure feel urgent.
3	How does the author use pacing in the second paragraph to increase tension?	Short sentences such as "The generator did not rumble" and the repeated radio attempt slow the moment and emphasize Maya's worry.
4	What effect does Mr. Chen's dialogue have on the final paragraph?	His dialogue gives Maya the information she needs, speeds the action toward a solution, and begins to release the tension.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Rain hammered the bus shelter as Luis dug through his backpack for his missing house key. "Check the side pocket," his sister said, but his fingers found only cold wrappers. What if Grandma is waiting in the dark? Then metal tapped his knuckle, and he pulled the key free.

Accept responses that identify a specific narrative technique and explain its effect on tension, mood, pacing, or characterization. For Part 3, accept varied situations if the response has 4 to 5 sentences and includes all required techniques.