The White Wall

How a story's beginning and ending shape its meaning

11-12.RC.3 "Analyze and evaluate how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a work of literature (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story…"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number the paragraphs in the order their events happen, then underline one detail in each that shows how the wall or the neighbors' actions change. Circle the final image to help you consider the effect of the ending.

What the Wall Held

1. By Monday morning, the wall in the public library was white again. A painter's drop cloth lay folded beside the return slot, and the room smelled of fresh paint. I stood where my brother's handwriting had been, the words *We have room for two* now invisible beneath a second coat. At the desk, a librarian stamped due dates as if nothing had changed. I had come to photograph the wall, but my phone showed only a clean rectangle and my own shadow at its edge. I put the phone away without taking a picture.

2. Three weeks earlier, a storm had pushed the river through the streets below the library. The building stood on higher ground, and its doors stayed open through the night. When the power failed, the librarian set out battery lanterns and asked us to write on the wall so people arriving could find one another. My brother wrote our address and offered the spare beds upstairs. Other messages listed missing dogs, dry blankets, and rides to the clinic. By morning, the wall held so many names that strangers took turns reading them aloud to people whose phones had died.

3. After the water receded, the city ordered repairs to the library. Someone said the wall had to be sealed before mold could spread. I could not argue with that, although I wished someone had asked us first. As I turned toward the exit, a woman came in carrying two heavy bags. She asked the librarian where to leave clean blankets for families still out of their homes. He pointed her to a table near the door. I stayed long enough to watch her set the bags down. Then I went outside, where the library window reflected the street and hid the wall from view.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might the author begin with the painted wall instead of the storm? Explain how that choice affects your first impression of the wall.

2. How does placing the storm in the second paragraph change the meaning of the blank wall in the first paragraph? Use a detail from the storm.

3. Why place the reason for sealing the wall just before the woman arrives with blankets? Explain how this sequence complicates your view of the loss.

4. The story ends with the window hiding the wall from view. How does this image shape the ending's effect? Support your reading with another detail from the final paragraph.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 60 to 90 word alternative final scene beginning when the woman enters the library. Then, in one sentence, explain how your ending changes the original story's meaning or effect.

ANSWER KEY

The White Wall

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.RC.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number the paragraphs in the order their events happen, then underline one detail in each that shows how the wall or the neighbors' actions change. Circle the final image to help you consider the effect of the ending. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might the author begin with the painted wall instead of the storm? Explain how that choice affects your first impression of the wall.	**Beginning with the painted wall makes its loss noticeable before readers know why it matters. The narrator's erased message and unused camera suggest that something worth preserving has disappeared.**
2	How does placing the storm in the second paragraph change the meaning of the blank wall in the first paragraph? Use a detail from the storm.	**The storm reveals that the wall helped neighbors find one another and offer shelter, supplies, and rides. Its blank surface now represents the loss of a record of those actions, not just a change in paint.**
3	Why place the reason for sealing the wall just before the woman arrives with blankets? Explain how this sequence complicates your view of the loss.	**The need to prevent mold makes sealing the wall understandable, even though the narrator regrets it. The woman's arrival then shows that neighbors can continue helping after the messages are gone.**
4	The story ends with the window hiding the wall from view. How does this image shape the ending's effect? Support your reading with another detail from the final paragraph.	**The hidden wall leaves the narrator's sense of loss unresolved. At the same time, the woman's donation suggests that the help once recorded on the wall continues without it.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The woman came through the door with two bags of blankets. The librarian brought out a corkboard and a stack of blank cards. On one card, I wrote my brother's offer of two beds and our phone number. The woman wrote that she could deliver blankets to anyone unable to reach the library. By closing time, the board held six offers, and I no longer needed a photograph to prove what had happened. This ending replaces the original's uncertainty with confidence that the neighbors will keep helping.

Accept supported interpretations of the final image, including readings that emphasize loss, continued cooperation, or both. For Part 3, check that the new scene begins at the woman's arrival, is 60 to 90 words, and is followed by one sentence explaining its changed effect.