The Cost of Late

Analyze how a narrator's choices shape a debate about library fines.

11-12.RC "Students analyze the author's technique, purpose, and perspective in grade-level fiction and nonfiction text, using textual evidence to support analysis."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show what the narrator believes about overdue books, and number them in the order they appear. Circle a detail that complicates either belief so you can trace how the narrator's perspective develops.

What Came Back

1 On the first Monday after our library stopped charging overdue fines and erased old ones, a boy returned a field guide with a rubber band around its swollen cover. He laid three coins on the desk anyway. "For the damage?" I asked. "For being late," he said, and stared at the floor. I had argued against ending fines at the staff meeting. A borrowed book, I thought, should come back on time, and a small charge made that rule visible. I slid the coins back to him. The band left a pale stripe across the picture of a hawk.

2 That afternoon, our returns cart filled faster than I could shelve it. A woman brought back a stack of cookbooks she had kept in a closet for months. She said she had stopped coming in because she could not pay what she owed. I wanted to call her return a success, but another patron was waiting for one of those books. A waived fine did not give him back the weeks he had lost. I wrote his name on a hold slip, then set her books on the cart beside the field guide.

3 At closing, I found the boy's field guide on the repair shelf. A spilled drink had wrinkled its pages, and the library still asked borrowers to pay for damaged books. I called his family, not to collect a fine, but to explain the difference and offer a payment plan. He answered and asked whether he could borrow another guide tomorrow. I told him yes. Ending fines has not made books indestructible or waiting harmless. It has changed which problem we meet first: a late book behind a closed door, or a late book back on the desk.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the boy's coins and his reaction at the desk complicate the narrator's opening argument for fines? Use a detail from the first paragraph.

2. Why does the narrator place the woman's return next to the waiting patron's experience? Explain what this contrast adds to the discussion of fines.

3. What does the narrator accomplish by admitting that ending fines has not made "waiting harmless"? Connect this admission to the passage's purpose.

4. How does the narrator's perspective change from the staff meeting to the final sentence? Support your answer with evidence from both points in the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine the waiting patron writes about the same events. In five sentences, explain how that writer could frame two details from the passage differently to support a different position on fines. Quote both details, then explain how the new perspective would change the writer's purpose.

The Cost of Late

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show what the narrator believes about overdue books, and number them in the order they appear. Circle a detail that complicates either belief so you can trace how the narrator's perspective develops. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the boy's coins and his reaction at the desk complicate the narrator's opening argument for fines? Use a detail from the first paragraph.	**The narrator thought a fine made the return rule visible, but the boy offers "three coins" and stares at the floor. His reaction suggests that fines can make returning a book feel frightening or shameful.**
2	Why does the narrator place the woman's return next to the waiting patron's experience? Explain what this contrast adds to the discussion of fines.	**The contrast shows both a benefit and a cost: the woman returns books after her old fines are erased, but another patron has lost weeks of access to one of them.**
3	What does the narrator accomplish by admitting that ending fines has not made "waiting harmless"? Connect this admission to the passage's purpose.	**The admission acknowledges a real objection to ending fines. It helps the narrator argue for the change without dismissing patrons who wait for overdue books.**
4	How does the narrator's perspective change from the staff meeting to the final sentence? Support your answer with evidence from both points in the passage.	**At the meeting, the narrator argues against ending fines because a charge makes the return rule visible. By the end, the narrator values getting a late book "back on the desk" rather than leaving it "behind a closed door," while still recognizing the harm of delays.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The waiting patron might focus on the "stack of cookbooks she had kept in a closet for months" as books other readers could not use. That writer could describe the return as welcome but much too late. The detail "his name on a hold slip" could become the opening image, making the wait feel personal. Unlike the narrator, this writer might support a small overdue fine. The writer's purpose would be to persuade library leaders to protect patrons who return books on time.

Accept interpretations that distinguish overdue fines from charges for damage and support claims with accurate passage details. For Part 3, accept any plausible position that reframes two quoted details and explains how the waiting patron's perspective shapes the new purpose.