Before the Curtain

Read a story opening to see how it sets a scene and introduces a problem.

5.W.3.a "Develop the exposition (e.g., describe the setting, establish the situation, introduce the narrator and/or characters)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show where or when the story begins, and circle clues that tell you who the narrator and other characters are. Write a 1 beside the sentence that first reveals the problem they face.

The Missing Moon

1 On Saturday morning, the town theater smelled of sawdust and orange paint. From behind the curtain, I watched rows of empty red seats disappear into the dark. In an hour, our fifth-grade class would perform *The Moon Thief* for a packed house. I was supposed to pull the ropes that moved the cardboard moon across the stage, a job nobody would notice unless I got it wrong.

2 My friend Lena crawled out from under the painted castle, holding a loose wheel. She had built the moon cart with her grandfather and knew every screw by heart. "It won't roll," she whispered. Across the stage, our teacher, Mr. Ortiz, called for the final rehearsal. Without the cart, the moon could not rise for the last scene, and Lena's face went pale.

3 I knelt beside the cart while actors in silver capes hurried past us. A small metal nut lay on the floor, just out of reach beneath the castle wall. Lena held up the wheel, and I could see the empty spot where the nut belonged. The audience was not here yet, but the clock above the exit clicked toward ten. Mr. Ortiz called my name.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which two details help you picture where and when this story begins?

2. What is the narrator's job in the play, and why does that job connect the narrator to the problem?

3. What do you learn about Lena when she is introduced, and why does that matter to the problem?

4. What needs to be fixed? Give two details that show why the characters have little time.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a new story opening of five or six sentences. Show where and when it begins, introduce a narrator or main character and at least one other character, and reveal a problem without solving it.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show where or when the story begins, and circle clues that tell you who the narrator and other characters are. Write a 1 beside the sentence that first reveals the problem they face. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which two details help you picture where and when this story begins?	**It begins on Saturday morning in the town theater. The empty red seats and curtain help establish the setting.**
2	What is the narrator's job in the play, and why does that job connect the narrator to the problem?	**The narrator pulls the ropes that move the cardboard moon. The broken cart may keep the moon from moving across the stage.**
3	What do you learn about Lena when she is introduced, and why does that matter to the problem?	**Lena built the moon cart with her grandfather and knows its parts well, so she may be able to help fix it.**
4	What needs to be fixed? Give two details that show why the characters have little time.	**The cart's loose wheel needs to be fixed. The class performs in an hour, and Mr. Ortiz has called for the final rehearsal.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At sunrise, the campground smelled of damp pine needles and wood smoke. I stood outside our tent with my older brother, Eli, holding an empty leash. Our dog, Pepper, always slept beside my boots, but this morning her blanket was cold. Eli pointed to fresh paw prints in the muddy path. Beyond the last campsite, the trail led into thick woods. Mom would wake soon, and I had promised to keep Pepper close.

For the marking task, accept any accurate setting details and character clues. The first sentence that reveals the problem is Lena's "It won't roll," though students may also mark the sentence introducing the loose wheel.