The Box of Books

Notice how a narrative opening establishes place, voice, and characters.

8.W.3.a "Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that establish when and where the scene begins, circle the first mention of the narrator and Niko, and write a 1 beside a sentence that shows what the narrator believes about the books.

Before the Doors Close

1 On the last Saturday before the town library closed for repairs, I carried a cardboard box up its stone steps. Rain darkened the sidewalk, and the clock above the entrance read 8:55. Inside, the lights were on, but the return slot was taped shut. My little brother, Niko, held the door while I balanced the box against my hip. We had found the books in our grandmother's attic the night before, each one stamped with the library's name. I hoped we had arrived before anyone noticed they were missing.

2 At the front desk, a woman in a green sweater was covering shelves with plastic sheets. She looked at the box, then at the rain dripping from my sleeves. “We're not checking books in today,” she said. Niko started to explain, but I nudged his elbow. I did not want her to think Grandma had stolen anything. When I opened the box, the woman lifted a thin blue book from the top. A faded paper card slipped from its cover and landed beside her stapler.

3 The woman read the card without speaking. Across its top, someone had written “For the new library, 1974.” Below it were dozens of signatures, including Grandma's. “These weren't borrowed,” she said. “They were donated for the opening exhibit, then stored away when the building flooded.” Niko grinned, but I kept staring at Grandma's looping signature. I had come to return a box of overdue books. Instead, we had carried in a piece of the library's first day, just as its doors were about to close again.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which details establish when and where the scene begins? Give one detail for each.

2. How can you tell the narrator is telling this story from their own point of view rather than Niko's? Use a detail from the passage.

3. How is Niko introduced, and what does his first action suggest about his role in the scene?

4. What does the narrator believe about the books at first, and how does the discovery change that view?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 5 to 6 sentence opening for a new story. Establish when and where it begins, use a first-person narrator, introduce another character through an action, and hint at a problem.

ANSWER KEY

The Box of Books

GRADE 8 · 8.W.3.a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that establish when and where the scene begins, circle the first mention of the narrator and Niko, and write a 1 beside a sentence that shows what the narrator believes about the books. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which details establish when and where the scene begins? Give one detail for each.	**It is the last Saturday before the town library closes for repairs, and the narrator is on the library's stone steps.**
2	How can you tell the narrator is telling this story from their own point of view rather than Niko's? Use a detail from the passage.	**The narrator uses "I" and shares a private worry that the woman might think Grandma had stolen the books.**
3	How is Niko introduced, and what does his first action suggest about his role in the scene?	**Niko is introduced as the narrator's little brother. He holds the door while the narrator carries the box, showing that he is helping.**
4	What does the narrator believe about the books at first, and how does the discovery change that view?	**The narrator believes the books are overdue and worries that Grandma might seem to have stolen them. The card shows that the books were donated for the library's opening exhibit.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At dawn on the first day of the school play, I stood in the empty auditorium with a roll of tape in my hand. My friend Lena crawled under the front row and pulled out a silver shoe. "That's the third one," she whispered. The costumes were locked backstage, but somehow pieces kept turning up in the seats. I wanted to tell our director right away. Lena pointed toward the balcony, where a light clicked on, and I suddenly wished we had waited for the others.

Accept different passage details when they support the stated point. For the opening, look for a clear time and place, a first-person voice, another character introduced through action, and a hinted problem.