Before the Lights Go Out

Trace how a flashback changes the meaning of a final choice.

9-10.RC.3 "Analyze and evaluate how an author's choices concerning how to structure a work of literature, order events within it (e.g., parallel episodes), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing…"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the time cues, then circle the two moments when someone invites another person inside. Draw an arrow between those moments to show the connection.

The Last Map

1 At 7:50, Lena locked the library's back door and watched the moving truck idle at the curb. The building would close at eight; its books were already boxed for the new branch across town. A girl in a yellow raincoat pressed her palm to the front glass. Lena had ten minutes to stack the last chairs, unplug the lamps, and turn in her key. Instead, she stood beneath a paper map covered with handwritten notes: where Mr. Ortiz taught chess, where neighbors brought soup during the blackout. The girl pointed at the map. Lena reached for the light switch.

2 The first winter she worked there, a storm had cut the power for three days. With no working phone at home, Lena had come to the library expecting a locked door. Mr. Ortiz was standing inside with a flashlight; he waved her in. Then came a family carrying blankets. Then a bus driver with a thermos of soup. They spread a street map across a table and wrote down which neighbors needed batteries, rides, or a place to meet. By morning, the map held more than addresses. Lena had thought of the building as a place to borrow books; that night, she learned what an open door could do.

3 At 7:51, Lena opened the front door and waved the girl in. She left the lamps on and lifted the map from its pins while the girl held the bottom corners. A few notes fell loose. Lena knelt to gather them, reading each one before she tucked it back: free piano lessons, spare umbrellas, a bench for anyone who needed to talk. Across the street, the grocer was pulling down his shade. "Could this hang in your window?" Lena called. He raised the shade again. At eight, the driver took the final box, and Lena turned in her key. The window stayed bright after the library went dark.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does the author interrupt the last ten minutes at the library with the blackout instead of telling the events in date order?

2. How do Mr. Ortiz's and Lena's actions at the door work as parallel episodes? What idea do they develop?

3. What effect does the return to 7:51 have on the pace of Lena's choice?

4. Why end with the bright grocery window after the library goes dark, rather than end when Lena turns in her key?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 80 to 100 word scene about someone facing a choice. Begin at the choice, shift to an earlier moment that changes its meaning, then return to the choice; repeat one concrete detail in both moments.

ANSWER KEY

Before the Lights Go Out

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-10.RC.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the time cues, then circle the two moments when someone invites another person inside. Draw an arrow between those moments to show the connection. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why does the author interrupt the last ten minutes at the library with the blackout instead of telling the events in date order?	**The blackout shows Lena learning that the library can connect neighbors, so readers understand why saving the map matters to her now.**
2	How do Mr. Ortiz's and Lena's actions at the door work as parallel episodes? What idea do they develop?	**Mr. Ortiz waves Lena in during the blackout, and Lena later waves the girl in. The repeated action shows Lena passing on the welcome she once received.**
3	What effect does the return to 7:51 have on the pace of Lena's choice?	**The story spends a full paragraph in the past but returns only one minute after 7:50. This slows the moment before Lena acts and gives her decision weight.**
4	Why end with the bright grocery window after the library goes dark, rather than end when Lena turns in her key?	**The contrast shows that the building closes, but the neighbors' shared map and the connections it records can continue elsewhere.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The wallet waited beside Amir's lunch tray. He could hand it to the office or slip it into his pocket. A red thread hung from its zipper. Last winter, his sister had tied red thread to her keys, then lost them anyway. Amir remembered her searching the snowy sidewalk until her fingers shook; the thread had made finding them possible. Back in the cafeteria, he rubbed the thread between his fingers. He took the wallet to the office. Whoever had tied that thread might be searching just as hard.

Accept explanations that connect the flashback, repeated doorway action, or final contrast to the story's meaning. The original scene should shift to an earlier moment, return to the choice, and use a repeated detail to change how that choice reads.