Where Meaning Waits

Trace how sentence structure controls what a reader notices.

L.11-12.3.a "Apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one clause that delays a main action, circle repeated words in a sentence, and draw an arrow to a detail revealed near a sentence's end. Use your marks to track how the sentences direct your attention.

The Leak

1 When rain began slipping through the library ceiling, Mara set a metal bowl beneath the leak. The first drop struck with such a bright ping that the people at the tables looked up; the second, arriving before anyone spoke, fell on a book left open beside the bowl. Mara lifted it by its dry cover, but its pages, heavy with water, sagged between her hands. Though the storm had already emptied the street, she could still hear a bus idling outside. Across the room, under a window that would not close, sat the library's oldest atlas.

2 Not the atlases stacked safely in the cabinet, not the maps sealed in plastic sleeves, but that single oversized book had been placed in the open for a school exhibit. Mara crossed the room, carrying the wet book against her coat, and found that someone had tied the atlas to its display stand with a thin cord. If she could find the scissors before the water reached the table, she could cut the cord. In the drawer below lay pencils, tape, two bent paper clips, and, tucked beneath a form, a small pair of scissors.

3 By the time Mara freed the atlas, drops were falling through three separate holes. She pushed the display table toward the dry center of the room while a bus passenger, who had come in to escape the rain, moved a cart of books out of her way. Only when the ceiling stopped dripping did Mara notice the damp track left by the display table's wheels: the path she had chosen crossed an electrical outlet. The books were safe; the outlet, she realized, might not be. She called the building manager and kept everyone away from that wall.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. In the first sentence, what does the opening "When" clause make you notice before Mara acts? How would starting with "Mara set a metal bowl" change the focus?

2. In paragraph 2, how do the repeated "not" phrases change the effect of the phrase "that single oversized book"?

3. The drawer sentence lists several objects before the scissors. How does that order shape your experience of Mara's search?

4. Why does paragraph 3 begin its outlet discovery with "Only when the ceiling stopped dripping"? Explain how that order changes what seems dangerous.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence scene about a worker repairing a cracked greenhouse pane: begin one sentence with a dependent clause, and place a crucial discovery at the end of another sentence. Add one sentence explaining how one of those choices guides the reader's attention.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one clause that delays a main action, circle repeated words in a sentence, and draw an arrow to a detail revealed near a sentence's end. Use your marks to track how the sentences direct your attention. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In the first sentence, what does the opening "When" clause make you notice before Mara acts? How would starting with "Mara set a metal bowl" change the focus?	**The opening clause establishes the leak before Mara responds. Starting with Mara would put her action before its cause.**
2	In paragraph 2, how do the repeated "not" phrases change the effect of the phrase "that single oversized book"?	**The repeated phrases rule out protected books and maps, making the exposed atlas stand out.**
3	The drawer sentence lists several objects before the scissors. How does that order shape your experience of Mara's search?	**The list delays the useful object, so the reader encounters the search through unhelpful items before reaching the scissors.**
4	Why does paragraph 3 begin its outlet discovery with "Only when the ceiling stopped dripping"? Explain how that order changes what seems dangerous.	**It shows that Mara notices the outlet only after the leak stops. The danger shifts from water falling on books to water near an electrical outlet.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

While rain tapped the greenhouse roof, the worker pressed a strip of clear tape over the cracked pane. The glass held, but water kept pooling beneath the seed trays. When she moved the nearest tray, she found the real problem: a split irrigation hose. Placing the hose at the end shifts attention from the cracked pane to the source of the water.

Accept interpretations that connect a specific sentence structure to the order in which the reader notices events or details. For Part 3, check for three scene sentences, a fourth sentence explaining a syntactic choice, an opening dependent clause, and a crucial detail placed at a sentence's end.