The Confident Verb

Read a literary account, test your inferences, and weigh conflicting evidence.

RL.11-12.10 "Routinely and flexibly develop and apply background knowledge along with a variety of comprehension strategies to understand and analyze grade-appropriate, complex literary text independently."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline two details that change what you think happened at the gate, circle two details that leave a question unresolved, and number the points where you revise your first interpretation of the word *failed*.

The Gate on Ash Street

1 The city called it the Night of the Broken Gate, though the brass gate on the canal still swung easily when I pushed it. I had come to collect my mother's things before the control house became a museum, a word that made its damp rooms sound finished. On the wall, a new plaque said the gate had failed at 2:14 a.m., sending water down Ash Street. Under it, someone had left a row of candles. My mother had operated the gate that night, and I had spent twelve years letting the word *failed* do the work of a name.

2 In her desk I found a flood forecast folded around a carbon copy of the night's orders. The forecast showed water rising past the hospital's ground floor if the east gate stayed shut; beside it my mother had written, 'Open east gate. Keep water from Ward C.' The carbon copy bore three signatures, including hers, but no mark showed whose hand first proposed the order. I pictured the narrow houses on Ash Street, where my uncle had slept above his bakery until the warning bells drove him out. At family dinners he called the flood an accident. He also kept my mother's photograph in the kitchen, facing the wall.

3 At the museum's opening, the curator asked whether I wanted the forecast displayed beside the plaque. Through the window, children were floating paper boats in the canal; one tipped, filled, and continued downstream. I could not tell whether my uncle knew about the order, or whether my mother had ever seen the houses after the water receded. I told the curator to display the forecast, but not without the signatures, the missing proposal, and the plaque's confident verb. When she asked which account was true, I said the hospital was still standing. It was not the answer she had requested.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. After reading the forecast and the order, how might you revise your first interpretation of the plaque's word *failed*? Explain what the evidence does and does not establish.

2. What can you conclude from the three signatures, and what would be an unsupported conclusion about the decision to open the gate?

3. How does the uncle's photograph complicate his description of the flood as an accident? Distinguish your inference from what you know for certain.

4. Why does the narrator answer the curator by saying the hospital was still standing? Use evidence from both the forecast and Ash Street in your explanation.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 95 word replacement museum label for the gate. Use evidence from the plaque, the forecast or order, and the uncle's words or actions; distinguish what is known from what remains uncertain, and explain why one simple verdict is inadequate.

ANSWER KEY

The Confident Verb

HIGH SCHOOL · RL.11-12.10

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline two details that change what you think happened at the gate, circle two details that leave a question unresolved, and number the points where you revise your first interpretation of the word *failed*. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	After reading the forecast and the order, how might you revise your first interpretation of the plaque's word *failed*? Explain what the evidence does and does not establish.	**The order suggests that opening the gate was a deliberate way to protect the hospital, rather than a mechanical breakdown. The passage does not establish who proposed the order or exactly what the plaque's writer meant by *failed*.**
2	What can you conclude from the three signatures, and what would be an unsupported conclusion about the decision to open the gate?	**Three people, including the narrator's mother, signed the order. The signatures do not show that she proposed it or decided alone.**
3	How does the uncle's photograph complicate his description of the flood as an accident? Distinguish your inference from what you know for certain.	**Keeping the mother's photograph facing the wall suggests anger or other unresolved feelings. His exact feelings and whether he knew about the order remain unknown.**
4	Why does the narrator answer the curator by saying the hospital was still standing? Use evidence from both the forecast and Ash Street in your explanation.	**The forecast shows a threat to the hospital, and the narrator points to its survival. Ash Street flooded, so that answer acknowledges a possible benefit without settling whether the decision was justified.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The city's plaque says the gate failed at 2:14 a.m. and sent water down Ash Street. A forecast warned that the hospital would flood if the east gate stayed shut, and a written order called for opening it. Three people signed the order, but the record does not identify who proposed it. The narrator's uncle called the flood an accident and kept the operator's photograph facing the wall; his reasons remain unknown. The hospital still stood afterward, yet Ash Street flooded. Neither 'failure' nor 'rescue' tells the whole story.

Accept interpretations that distinguish the recorded order from an unproven account of who proposed it. The label should use all three requested sources, identify a genuine uncertainty, and stay within 70 to 95 words.