When Bells Fall Silent

Trace how two themes develop and shape each other in a short story.

RL.11-12.2 "Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline evidence for two developing themes and label it T1 or T2. Number two places where the themes affect each other.

The Key to the Boathouse

1 At the edge of Bellwater stood a boathouse with a brass bell above its door. When the river rose, someone rang it, and neighbors knocked on the doors of anyone who could not climb the hill alone. Now weather alerts arrived on phones, but my grandfather still polished the bell each October. "A warning is only useful if it reaches everybody," he said. I loved the sound because it made our scattered houses feel like one place. I also loved that my family held the key to the boathouse, though I rarely thought about the work that key required.

2 In November, I found a split running through the beam that held the bell. I meant to tell the neighbors, but the council had already suggested replacing the boathouse with a concrete flood gate. I imagined the bell gone, and I put the key back in my pocket. Three weeks later, rain pushed the river across the road. Phones flashed one alert, then lost their signal. From the hill, I saw Mrs. Vale waiting on her porch, unable to manage the steep path alone. I reached for the key before remembering the beam.

3 I ran to the nearest house instead and told Mr. Chen about the split. He stared at me for a moment, then fetched his bicycle and sent his sons toward Mrs. Vale. We went door to door, knocking until every porch was empty. At dawn, the bell still hung above the muddy boathouse. I expected my grandfather to ask why I had let it fall silent. Instead, he set the key on the table at the town meeting. The neighbors voted to repair the beam and make copies of the key. No one called the bell enough by itself again.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the narrator's view of the bell in paragraph 1 establish a theme about belonging? What detail complicates that view?

2. How does hiding the split develop a theme about responsibility? Explain how that choice threatens the sense of belonging established earlier.

3. When the phones lose their signal, how do the narrator and neighbors change the relationship between the bell's tradition and the work of protecting people?

4. How does the town meeting develop both themes beyond the rescue? Explain why repairing the beam and copying the key matter together.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine the narrator never tells Mr. Chen about the split. In a 90 to 110 word paragraph, explain how this alternate ending would change the development and interaction of two themes. Use at least two details from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

When Bells Fall Silent

HIGH SCHOOL · RL.11-12.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline evidence for two developing themes and label it T1 or T2. Number two places where the themes affect each other. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the narrator's view of the bell in paragraph 1 establish a theme about belonging? What detail complicates that view?	**The bell makes scattered houses feel like one community, but the narrator values holding its key without considering the work of keeping everyone safe.**
2	How does hiding the split develop a theme about responsibility? Explain how that choice threatens the sense of belonging established earlier.	**The narrator protects the bell's place in town history instead of warning neighbors that it may be unsafe. Keeping that knowledge private could leave people, including Mrs. Vale, without help.**
3	When the phones lose their signal, how do the narrator and neighbors change the relationship between the bell's tradition and the work of protecting people?	**The narrator admits the bell cannot safely serve as a warning, and the neighbors go door to door. They carry out the tradition's purpose, reaching everyone, without relying on the bell itself.**
4	How does the town meeting develop both themes beyond the rescue? Explain why repairing the beam and copying the key matter together.	**Repairing the beam preserves the bell, while copying the key shares responsibility for using it. The town keeps its tradition but no longer leaves access to one family.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

If the narrator kept the split secret after the phones lost their signal, the bell might remain silent while Mrs. Vale waited on her porch. Mr. Chen and his sons would not know to start knocking on doors. The bell would still represent shared history, but the narrator's desire to protect it would prevent neighbors from acting together. Hidden damage would turn a symbol of belonging into an obstacle to responsibility. Unlike the town meeting, where neighbors vote to repair the beam and copy the key, this ending would leave both access and knowledge in one family's hands.

Accept themes phrased in students' own words when they trace change across the story and explain a connection between the themes. For Part 3, look for a plausible alternate outcome grounded in at least two passage details, not a claim that the beam definitely collapses.