The Last Ledger

How word choices shape a story's changing tone

RL.11-12.4 "Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone and on the text as a whole."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle words linked to counting or debt, underline images of sound or light, and number two places where these choices shift the tone.

A Clean Space

1 On the last evening of my father's shoe shop, I counted what would fit in two cardboard boxes. The rent notice lay beside the register, its red stamp louder than the ticking wall clock. Father had crossed each item off his ledger: spare laces, brass tacks, jars of polish. Outside, rain needled the window, and the street signs blurred into unpaid numbers. He set a pair of worn boots on the counter, then took them down again. "Not ours," he said. I wrote nothing beside them, but left a clean space on the page.

2 The boots belonged to Mrs. Alvarez, who drove the early bus and had left them for new soles. Father could have returned them untouched; the shop would be empty by morning. Instead, he pulled his stool under the lamp and worked while I held each boot steady. His hammer tapped a small, stubborn rhythm against the rain. At nine, Mrs. Alvarez arrived with wet cuffs and a paper bag of oranges. "I can pay next week," she said. Father closed the ledger without turning to the page where her name waited.

3 He handed her the boots, and she set the oranges between us like a second, smaller sun. The shop still smelled of glue and damp leather; the empty shelves had not filled themselves. Yet when she stepped outside, her footsteps landed firmly on the pavement, each one clear through the open door. Father switched off the lamp. In the dark glass, I could see Father and myself for a moment, small among the shelves. I carried the boxes to the car, leaving the ledger behind because Father asked me to.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does "rain needled the window" suggest about the rain and the narrator's state of mind? Support your reading with another phrase from paragraph 1.

2. What does "a small, stubborn rhythm" suggest about Father's work? How does this sound differ from the sounds in paragraph 1?

3. Why might the narrator call the oranges "a second, smaller sun" rather than simply say they are bright? Explain what this image adds to the tone.

4. How does leaving the ledger behind change the effect of the counting and debt words used earlier? What does this choice suggest about the ending?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write four sentences from Mrs. Alvarez's perspective as she walks home in the repaired boots. Use a new sound image and a new light image to create both relief and uncertainty; in a fifth sentence, explain how your images work together.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle words linked to counting or debt, underline images of sound or light, and number two places where these choices shift the tone. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does "rain needled the window" suggest about the rain and the narrator's state of mind? Support your reading with another phrase from paragraph 1.	**The rain seems sharp and relentless, matching the narrator's distress. The street signs blurring into "unpaid numbers" shows that worry about money shapes what the narrator sees.**
2	What does "a small, stubborn rhythm" suggest about Father's work? How does this sound differ from the sounds in paragraph 1?	**The hammer's rhythm makes Father's work seem steady and determined. Unlike the ticking clock and needling rain, it is a sound he chooses to make.**
3	Why might the narrator call the oranges "a second, smaller sun" rather than simply say they are bright? Explain what this image adds to the tone.	**The sun image gives Mrs. Alvarez's gift a sense of warmth and generosity. Its small size keeps the hope modest, since the shop is still closing.**
4	How does leaving the ledger behind change the effect of the counting and debt words used earlier? What does this choice suggest about the ending?	**Early counting and debt words make the shop's closing feel like a financial reckoning. Leaving the ledger suggests Father values his act of care over collecting payment, though it does not undo the loss.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

An engine growled beyond the corner as I tested my boots on the wet sidewalk. A streetlamp laid a thin stripe of gold across the gutter. The new soles held, though I did not know where the cobbler would work tomorrow. The smell of oranges still clung to my gloves. The growl keeps tomorrow uncertain, while the narrow light offers relief without pretending everything is fixed.

Accept supported interpretations of the figurative language and tone, including readings that find the ending hopeful but unresolved. For Part 3, look for distinct sound and light images and an explanation of their combined effect.