Before the Curtain

Trace how word choice and sound change a scene.

RL.7.4 "Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds on a passage."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two phrases that mean more than their literal words, circle one word that creates a strong feeling, and number two places where sounds repeat. Use your marks to track how the mood changes.

The First Line

1 The school auditorium went dark just before Mira's first line. From behind the curtain, she heard the audience shift in their seats. The darkness swallowed the painted village, the cardboard trees, even the bright red bench she had helped build. Mira gripped her script so tightly that its corners bent. Beside her, Mr. Chen searched a supply box for the battery lantern they used during rehearsals. Mira could still hear the clock above the exit: tick, tick, tick. Each tick seemed to push her closer to a stage she could not see.

2 Mr. Chen found the lantern, but its switch would not move. He pressed it once, then twice. Click, click. Nothing. Mira pictured the audience growing restless, though no one had spoken. She took the lantern and felt a strip of tape stuck across the switch. When she peeled it away, the switch slid forward. A thin ribbon of light slipped through the curtain. Mr. Chen lifted the lantern higher, and the ribbon widened across the floorboards. Mira breathed out. The painted village was still there, waiting for her to step into it.

3 From the seats came a whisper: 'A glow!' Mira's little brother had spotted the lantern. Mr. Chen held it near the scenery while the actors took their places. Mira heard the clock again: tick, tick, tick. Now the sound felt like a steady beat instead of a warning. She mouthed the words she had practiced: 'Go slow, let the story grow.' The rhyme helped her keep her pace as she walked into the light. When she spoke her first line, the audience grew quiet, and the village seemed to wake around her.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does “swallowed” suggest about the darkness in the first paragraph? How does that word affect the mood?

2. What is the “thin ribbon of light” in the second paragraph? What does comparing it to a ribbon help you picture?

3. The passage repeats “tick, tick, tick” twice. How does the sound feel different to Mira the second time?

4. Which words rhyme in “Go slow, let the story grow”? How does the rhyme affect Mira as she walks onstage?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write three or four sentences about a different moment when someone feels nervous, then calmer. Include one figurative phrase and a repeated sound or rhyme, and explain how each shapes the mood.

ANSWER KEY

Before the Curtain

GRADE 7 · RL.7.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two phrases that mean more than their literal words, circle one word that creates a strong feeling, and number two places where sounds repeat. Use your marks to track how the mood changes. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does "swallowed" suggest about the darkness in the first paragraph? How does that word affect the mood?	**It suggests the darkness seems to take away everything Mira can see, making the scene feel frightening or uncertain.**
2	What is the "thin ribbon of light" in the second paragraph? What does comparing it to a ribbon help you picture?	**It is a narrow beam from the lantern. "Ribbon" helps the reader picture its thin shape stretching through the curtain.**
3	The passage repeats "tick, tick, tick" twice. How does the sound feel different to Mira the second time?	**At first, the ticks make Mira feel pressured. Later, they feel like a steady beat that helps her keep going.**
4	Which words rhyme in "Go slow, let the story grow"? How does the rhyme affect Mira as she walks onstage?	**"Slow" and "grow" rhyme. The rhyme gives Mira a rhythm that helps her keep her pace.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the pool, my stomach was a knot as I waited for my turn to dive. Drip, drip, drip sounded from the shower behind me, but once I jumped, the splashes sounded like applause. The knot shows how tense I felt before the dive. Repeating "drip" stretches out the wait, while the comparison to applause makes the ending feel welcoming.

Accept other supported interpretations of the mood. For Part 3, look for a clear shift from nervousness to calm and an explanation of both the figurative phrase and the sound choice.