# The Empty Chair

Trace how shifts in time change a scene's meaning.

**RL.9-10.5** "Analyze how an author's choices concerning text structure, order of details, sequence and manipulation of time (e.g., flashback, pacing) create effects (e.g., emotional impact, character development)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Number the four time segments in the order you read them, underline words that signal shifts in time, and circle two small details that slow the recital scene.

### The Third Note

(1) The piano bench creaked beneath Elena as the curtain lifted. In the front row, a yellow raincoat lay across an empty chair. She found the first note, then the second. At the third, her right hand stopped. The room seemed to hold its breath with her. A program rustled. Someone coughed near the exit. Elena stared at the coat's crooked sleeve, which hung over the seat like an arm reaching toward the floor. She could have begun again, but her fingers stayed suspended above the keys while the stage lights warmed the back of her neck.

(2) Three weeks earlier, Grandma Jo had sat beside Elena at this same piano, tapping the rhythm on its wooden lid. When Elena missed a chord, Grandma Jo made a face so dramatic that they both laughed. Afterward, she walked home through the rain in her yellow coat. That night, she went to the hospital with a pain in her chest. Elena visited the next morning, carrying the recital program in her pocket. "Don't wait for me to hear it," Grandma Jo said. "Play it so you can hear yourself." Grandma Jo died two days later. Before the recital, Elena had placed the coat on the chair herself.

(3) Now Elena lowered her hands to the keys and began again. She missed the same chord, but this time she kept playing. A few people shifted in their seats; no one left. When the last note faded, she did not look toward the coat. She looked down at her hands, surprised that they were steady. A month later, at a crowded school rehearsal, Elena chose the piece again. No coat waited in the front row. She still paused before the third note, but only long enough to breathe, and then she played through it.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might the author show the empty chair before explaining the raincoat?

2. How does the scene from three weeks earlier change the meaning of Elena's pause at the third note?

3. The author describes a rustling program, a cough, and the warmth of the lights while Elena's hand hangs over the keys. What effect does this slow pacing create?

4. Why does the author move ahead one month instead of ending the story when the recital ends?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 100 word scene about someone waiting for an important message. Begin at a tense present moment, move briefly to an earlier moment, then return to the present. In your final sentence, explain how that order affects the reader.

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## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number the four time segments in the order you read them, underline words that signal shifts in time, and circle two small details that slow the recital scene. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Why might the author show the empty chair before explaining the raincoat? | **The unexplained coat creates curiosity and makes Elena's pause puzzling until the later scene reveals its connection to Grandma Jo.** |
| 2 | How does the scene from three weeks earlier change the meaning of Elena's pause at the third note? | **It reveals that Grandma Jo has died and that Elena placed her coat on the chair. Her pause now suggests grief, not simply nervousness about performing.** |
| 3 | The author describes a rustling program, a cough, and the warmth of the lights while Elena's hand hangs over the keys. What effect does this slow pacing create? | **It stretches a brief pause, letting readers feel Elena's discomfort and the pressure of performing while she is grieving.** |
| 4 | Why does the author move ahead one month instead of ending the story when the recital ends? | **The later rehearsal shows a lasting change: Elena still remembers the difficult moment, but she can pause, breathe, and keep playing.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The phone lit up just as I reached for the door. I held it face down, watching rain slip along the window. That morning, my brother had gone into surgery with a joke about finally sleeping through my trumpet practice. I had laughed, though his hands were shaking. Now the phone buzzed again. I turned it over: Mom had written, "He's awake. He wants his headphones." I laughed at the screen before I could stop myself. By delaying the message until after the memory, the scene makes his joke feel fragile, then brings relief.

Accept interpretations supported by the passage, especially those connecting the order of events or the slowed pause to grief and Elena's growing ability to keep playing. For Part 3, check the word count, both time shifts, and the final sentence's explanation of effect.