The Missing Cue

Trace how shifts in time and pace build toward a turning point.

W.11-12.3.c "Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three phrases that shift the story through time, circle words that show events happening at the same time, and number these final actions in order: the actor speaks, Mara makes a sound, and the lights fade.

Before the Lights Fade

1. At 7:58, two minutes before the school play began, Mara found the empty hook beside the stage door. The brass bell that marked the final line was gone. She checked the prop table, then the narrow shelf beneath it. Nothing. Onstage, the actors were taking their places; beyond the curtain, the audience settled into a hush. At rehearsal the day before, Mara had watched the lead actor speak his last words, then heard the bell ring as the lights faded. Tonight the lighting operator would listen for that sound before fading to black.

2. Ten minutes into the play, Mara retraced the bell's path. Yesterday, she remembered, a stagehand had put unused props in the storage closet before the floor was swept. She opened the closet and saw the bell through the glass of a locked cabinet. The cabinet key hung in the office across the hall. Meanwhile, onstage, the second scene ended; only one short scene remained. Mara crossed the hall, found the office locked, and tugged the cabinet's handle anyway. It held. From the theater came the first words of the final scene. She had less than three minutes.

3. Mara ran back to the stage door. A costume rack stood beside it, crowded with metal hangers. She pulled two free and held them near her ear. Their thin clang was close enough to a bell to carry across the stage. The lead actor moved toward the center of the set. Mara raised the hangers. One breath. Two. He spoke the final line. She struck the hangers together, and the lights began to fade. For a moment the audience stayed silent. Then applause rose from the dark. Afterward, she wrote "check the cabinet" at the top of tomorrow's prop list.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does the passage return to yesterday just before Mara searches the storage closet?

2. What is happening onstage while Mara looks for the bell, and how does moving between these events build tension?

3. How do the sentences “One breath. Two.” change the pace just before the final line?

4. What would the reader lose if the passage revealed the bell in the locked cabinet before Mara noticed the empty hook?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 80- to 105-word scene about a relay runner approaching a baton exchange. Begin with a problem, include a brief flashback and an event happening at the same time, then slow down the decisive moment and end with an outcome.

The Missing Cue

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three phrases that shift the story through time, circle words that show events happening at the same time, and number these final actions in order: the actor speaks, Mara makes a sound, and the lights fade. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why does the passage return to yesterday just before Mara searches the storage closet?	**Remembering that a stagehand put props in the closet gives Mara a reason to search there next.**
2	What is happening onstage while Mara looks for the bell, and how does moving between these events build tension?	**The play advances from the second scene into the final scene while Mara searches. Each move back to the stage shows that she has less time to find a solution.**
3	How do the sentences “One breath. Two.” change the pace just before the final line?	**The short sentences stretch the last seconds into separate beats, increasing suspense before Mara makes the cue.**
4	What would the reader lose if the passage revealed the bell in the locked cabinet before Mara noticed the empty hook?	**The reader would know where the bell was before Mara began searching, so the discovery in the closet would have less suspense.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

By the final curve, Nia could hear footsteps closing behind her. At yesterday's practice, she had dropped the baton when she reached too early; now she kept her hand steady. While her teammate accelerated ahead toward the exchange zone, the runner in the next lane drew even with Nia. The painted mark came closer. One stride. Her teammate's hand opened. Nia waited for his fingers to steady, then pressed the baton into his palm. He shot forward without breaking pace. Behind them, the other team fumbled its exchange, and Nia finally let herself look at the finish.

Accept different wording when students explain how the time shifts, simultaneous action, or short sentences affect the buildup. For the writing task, look for all three sequencing techniques and a clear outcome.