

Keys to Meaning

Trace how a character's changing view develops a central idea.

8R2 "Determine one or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; summarize a text. (RI&RL)"

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show Mara's view of the train station changing. Number the underlined details 1, 2, and 3 in story order so you can trace a central idea.

The Last Key

- ① On the first Saturday of June, Mara reported to the aging train station to sort donations for the town museum. Her grandfather had once sold tickets there, but Mara thought the station was only a drafty building full of broken chairs. When the museum director handed her a ring of keys, Mara chose the smallest tasks, labeling jars and stacking papers. Near noon, she found a leather suitcase beneath a bench. Its tag read, "Return to E. Vale," but no address followed.
- ② Rather than place the suitcase in the lost and found box, Mara opened it with a key that fit. Inside were three letters, a faded photograph, and a brass conductor's whistle. The letters described a girl named Elsie who had traveled alone to study nursing in 1944. Mara realized that the station had carried people toward uncertain futures. She spent the afternoon checking old newspapers for the Vale name, even after her friends texted her to meet at the river.
- ③ On Monday, Mara showed the letters to her grandfather, who remembered Elsie Vale as the town's first ambulance driver. Together they located Elsie's granddaughter at a nearby clinic. When Mara returned the suitcase, the granddaughter said Elsie had kept every ticket because leaving home had frightened her. Mara looked at the station differently. At the next museum meeting, she volunteered to organize an exhibit about travelers who had taken brave first steps. The building still had broken chairs, but it no longer seemed empty.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What central idea about the train station develops across the passage?

2 What theme is supported by Mara's choice to research the suitcase instead of meeting her friends? Use two events from the passage as evidence.

3 How does the author develop Mara's view of the station from the beginning to the end of the passage? Use one early detail and one later detail.

4 Write a two-sentence summary of the passage. Include the main problem, Mara's actions, and the result.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a five-sentence paragraph about a theme different from the one you named in Question 2. State the theme, use three details from the passage to show how it develops, and end with a one-sentence summary of the passage.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline details that show Mara's view of the train station changing. Number the underlined details 1, 2, and 3 in story order so you can trace a central idea. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What central idea about the train station develops across the passage?	The station is more than an old building because it holds the personal stories of people whose journeys shaped the community.
2	What theme is supported by Mara's choice to research the suitcase instead of meeting her friends? Use two events from the passage as evidence.	A person can grow by taking responsibility even when an easier choice is available. Mara researches the Vale name instead of meeting friends, then helps return the suitcase and volunteers to create an exhibit.
3	How does the author develop Mara's view of the station from the beginning to the end of the passage? Use one early detail and one later detail.	At first, Mara sees the station as a drafty building with broken chairs. After learning Elsie's story and returning the suitcase, Mara sees it as a place filled with meaningful histories and volunteers to honor travelers.
4	Write a two-sentence summary of the passage. Include the main problem, Mara's actions, and the result.	Mara finds a suitcase at the old train station and investigates it rather than putting it in lost and found. She returns it to Elsie Vale's granddaughter, learns about Elsie's courageous journey, and decides to create an exhibit about travelers.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The story suggests that old places gain meaning from the people connected to them. At first, Mara sees the station as a drafty building with broken chairs. The suitcase and letters reveal that Elsie left home for an uncertain future. Elsie's granddaughter explains why Elsie saved the tickets. Overall, Mara finds Elsie's suitcase, returns it to her family, and comes to value the station's history.

Accept equivalent central ideas or themes that are supported by accurate details, including ideas about courage, responsibility, or preserving personal history. For the summary, accept wording that includes the suitcase, Mara's investigation and return of it, and her changed understanding.