

Words at Closing

Notice how indirect and contradictory language shapes a community's response to change.

9-10L5a "Interpret figures of speech, including euphemism and oxymoron, in context and analyze their role in the text."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each euphemism and circle each oxymoron. In the margin, write E or O and a few words about what the phrase suggests.

The Marlowe's Last Season

- ① On Tuesday evening, Maya stood outside the Marlowe Theater with her school newspaper notebook. The city had announced that the 1920 building would be "retired from public use" after the winter season. A banner on the doors called the change a "fresh start," although the plan included demolition and apartments. Former usher Mr. Alvarez touched the cracked ticket window and said the lobby held a deafening silence before every opening night. Maya wrote his words beside the sound of traffic and the smell of rain on the sidewalk.
- ② Inside, the planning director described the project as a "necessary adjustment" to the neighborhood. She said the theater's two maintenance workers would be "released to pursue other opportunities." Maya noticed that neither phrase named the losses directly. In the back row, actors held programs from past shows. Their whispered objections formed an orderly chaos, as speakers waited for the microphone while friends passed notes and wiped their eyes. When the vote ended, applause rose briefly, then collapsed into a quiet roar of disappointed conversations nearby.
- ③ Afterward, Maya interviewed Mr. Alvarez beneath the marquee. He refused to call the theater obsolete. "It is a closed chapter," he said, "but chapters can be read again." Maya understood that he meant the building would be gone, while its stories could remain in people's memories. For her article, she placed the officials' polished phrases beside the witnesses' sharper language. The contrast made her article harder to write, because each voice carried a different version of the same ending under the darkened sign above the sidewalk tonight.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What does the phrase “retired from public use” mean in this passage, and why might the city use it instead of “demolished”?

2 Explain why “deafening silence” is an oxymoron. What does it suggest about the theater lobby before a show?

3 What does “orderly chaos” reveal about the meeting? Explain how the oxymoron helps readers understand the crowd.

4 How does Mr. Alvarez’s description of the theater as “a closed chapter” differ from the officials’ euphemisms? What feeling does his phrase add to the passage?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write exactly four sentences about a familiar place that is changing or closing. Include one euphemism and one oxymoron, and use your fourth sentence to explain how each phrase shapes the mood.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each euphemism and circle each oxymoron. In the margin, write E or O and a few words about what the phrase suggests. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does the phrase “retired from public use” mean in this passage, and why might the city use it instead of “demolished”?	It means the theater will no longer be open to the public and will be demolished. The phrase softens the harshness of demolition.
2	Explain why “deafening silence” is an oxymoron. What does it suggest about the theater lobby before a show?	Silence cannot literally be deafening, so the words contradict each other. The phrase suggests an intense, expectant hush in the lobby.
3	What does “orderly chaos” reveal about the meeting? Explain how the oxymoron helps readers understand the crowd.	The meeting has structure because people wait for the microphone, but it is also emotionally unsettled because people whisper, pass notes, and cry. The oxymoron captures both control and confusion.
4	How does Mr. Alvarez’s description of the theater as “a closed chapter” differ from the officials’ euphemisms? What feeling does his phrase add to the passage?	His phrase admits that an ending has happened but suggests the theater’s stories can still be remembered. Unlike the officials’ language, it adds personal reflection, loss, and a small sense of hope.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The library was scheduled for a “renewal,” though the plan would close it for years and tear out its old reading room. At the final checkout desk, a noisy silence settled over the students. We returned books slowly and watched dust cover the familiar shelves. The euphemism makes the loss sound gentler, while the oxymoron creates a sad, tense mood.

Accept other accurately identified euphemisms from the passage, including “fresh start,” “necessary adjustment,” and “released to pursue other opportunities.” Students should explain both the indirect meaning of euphemism and the purposeful contradiction in each oxymoron.