

The Unseen Vote

Track time shifts, repetition, and an unresolved ending.

9-10R5 "In literary texts, consider how varied aspects of structure create meaning and affect the reader. (RL) In informational texts, consider how author's intent influences particular sentences, paragraphs, or sections. (RI)"

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number the paragraphs 1-3, underline each phrase that signals a change in time, and circle each mention of the key. Use your marks to notice how the order of events builds uncertainty.

The Key in Mara's Hand

- ① At 6:17 p.m., Mara stood outside the darkened community center with a brass key pressed into her palm. Rainwater ran along the curb and gathered at the locked doors. Inside, the town council was supposed to vote on closing the center's ceramics room, but the building was empty. Her phone showed three missed calls from her grandfather, the center's caretaker. On the door, a paper notice lifted in the wind: MEETING MOVED TO THE OLD DEPOT. Mara looked toward the depot across town, then at the key. It was warm from her hand.
- ② That morning, Mara had rolled her eyes when her grandfather asked her to carry the key. "The council will not listen to a ninth grader," she said, sliding it into her pocket anyway. At school, she learned that the ceramics room was more than a place for mugs. Students used its kiln to make clay water filters for a nearby stream study. Her science teacher showed the class how the porous clay could trap some particles, though not make unsafe water safe to drink. By lunch, Mara had drafted a speech. She never expected to use it in a depot during a storm.
- ③ Now a bus hissed to a stop beside Mara. She climbed aboard, clutching the key and her wet speech. Through the window, the community center shrank behind her, its dark doors still locked. At the depot, she would find out why her grandfather had called and whether the council had begun without her. The last line of her speech read, "A room can hold more than clay." Mara read it once, then folded the page over the brass key. The bus turned toward the old depot, but the vote, and Mara's place in it, remained unseen.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

- 1** In paragraph 1, what does Mara learn about the meeting, and what important reason for her grandfather's calls remains unknown?

- 2** How does the shift to “That morning” in paragraph 2 change your understanding of why Mara carries the key and speech?

- 3** The key appears at the beginning and near the end of the passage. How does this repeated object help show a change in Mara?

- 4** Why does the author end before revealing the vote or Mara's speech? Describe the effect of this structural choice on the reader.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 90–110-word scene in one paragraph. Begin with an unresolved present moment, shift briefly to an earlier moment that explains a repeated object or phrase, then return to the present and end before the outcome is revealed. After your scene, write one sentence explaining how your order of events creates suspense.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Number the paragraphs 1–3, underline each phrase that signals a change in time, and circle each mention of the key. Use your marks to notice how the order of events builds uncertainty. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In paragraph 1, what does Mara learn about the meeting, and what important reason for her grandfather's calls remains unknown?	She learns that the meeting has moved to the old depot. She still does not know why her grandfather called or whether the council has started without her.
2	How does the shift to "That morning" in paragraph 2 change your understanding of why Mara carries the key and speech?	The flashback shows that her grandfather gave her the key and that Mara learned the ceramics room has an important use. It explains why she prepared a speech and makes her trip to the depot more important.
3	The key appears at the beginning and near the end of the passage. How does this repeated object help show a change in Mara?	At first, the key is an uncertain object in Mara's hand. By the end, she clutches it while traveling to speak, so it represents her growing responsibility and decision to act.
4	Why does the author end before revealing the vote or Mara's speech? Describe the effect of this structural choice on the reader.	Ending before the result keeps the outcome uncertain. It creates suspense and leaves the reader focused on whether Mara will reach the meeting and make a difference.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the stadium gate, Eli checked the scoreboard again. The final audition list should have appeared ten minutes ago, yet the screen showed only a blinking cursor. He gripped his grandfather's small flashlight, though daylight still filled the parking lot. Two weeks earlier, his grandfather had handed him the flashlight before Eli performed at the nursing home. "Aim it where you need to see," he had said. A volunteer approached the gate with a folder. Eli clicked on the flashlight, sending a narrow beam across the blank screen, and waited for the volunteer to speak. The flashback explains why the flashlight matters, while the unfinished ending keeps the result uncertain.

Accept answers that identify the flashback, return to the present, repeated key, or withheld outcome and explain a supported effect such as suspense, increased stakes, or a clearer view of Mara's responsibility. For the open response, check for all three time positions, meaningful repetition, an unresolved ending, and a valid explanation of structural effect.