

Key Before Curtain

Trace how a writer builds tension, action, and resolution.

9-10W3 "Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three details that build tension or setting, circle three actions that move the event forward, and number the four major turning points in the order they occur.

The Missing Key

- ① At 6:40 on Friday, Maya pushed through the side door of the community theater with a borrowed flashlight clenched in her fist. Rain ticked against the metal awning, and the hallway smelled of wet coats and old paint. Twenty minutes earlier, Mr. Ortiz had called to say that the opening-night prop key, needed to unlock the costume room, was missing. Maya had last carried it after rehearsal. She told herself it had to be in the building, although her stomach tightened each time the flashlight beam crossed an empty doorway.
- ② First, she checked the stage manager's desk, lifting clipped scripts and a coil of blue tape. Nothing. Next, she retraced the path from the wings to the lobby, counting her steps as thunder rolled above the roof. At the water fountain, a silver glint stopped her. The key lay beneath the radiator, just beyond her reach. Maya dropped to her knees, but the key skidded farther back when her fingers brushed it. Behind her, the audience began to gather, their voices swelling near the entrance.
- ③ Then Maya remembered the paint-stirring stick stored in the janitor's closet. She sprinted there, returned with the thin wooden handle, and slid it carefully under the radiator. On the first try, the stick snagged a dusty bottle cap. On the second, it nudged the key into the open. Maya caught it before it could slide past her shoe. When she handed it to Mr. Ortiz, he exhaled so loudly that she laughed. A moment later, the costume-room lock clicked, and warm light spilled across the hallway.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

- 1** How do the opening setting details establish Maya's problem and raise the stakes? Use one detail from the first paragraph.

- 2** What event changes Maya's search from checking many places to focusing on one location?

- 3** How does the writer slow down the action when Maya tries to reach the key? Cite two details.

- 4** Which final detail shows that the conflict is resolved, and how does it change the mood?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 90- to 110-word scene about someone who must find an important object before an event begins. Use First, Then, and Finally to organize the sequence, include at least three sensory details, and end with a clear resolution.

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 a vertical margin line on the left side, creating a narrow left margin. The paper appears to be from a notebook or a standard ruled document.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline three details that build tension or setting, circle three actions that move the event forward, and number the four major turning points in the order they occur. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the opening setting details establish Maya's problem and raise the stakes? Use one detail from the first paragraph.	The rainy, empty theater creates an uneasy setting, and Maya must find the missing prop key before the opening-night costume room can be unlocked.
2	What event changes Maya's search from checking many places to focusing on one location?	A silver glint at the water fountain stops her, and she sees the key beneath the radiator.
3	How does the writer slow down the action when Maya tries to reach the key? Cite two details.	The writer describes Maya dropping to her knees and the key skidding farther back when her fingers brush it, which makes the problem feel more difficult and tense.
4	Which final detail shows that the conflict is resolved, and how does it change the mood?	The costume-room lock clicks and warm light spills across the hallway. This shifts the mood from tense to relieved.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

First, Devon reached the bus stop and felt his pocket go flat. His transit card was gone, and the bus headlights already glowed at the corner. He searched his backpack while cold wind snapped the loose straps against his coat. Then he remembered buying a snack near the library. He ran back, hearing the bus brakes hiss behind him. Beside the library door, the card rested in a puddle, its blue edge shining under a streetlamp. Finally, Devon grabbed it, sprinted to the stop, and climbed aboard as the doors folded shut.

Accept equivalent evidence-based explanations for the questions. For the narrative, look for a coherent event sequence, concrete details, a complication, and a resolved ending within the required word range.