The Unlatched Door

How setting, flashback, and narration shape a theme

10.3.R.3 "Students will evaluate how literary elements impact theme, mood, and/or tone, using textual evidence: • setting • plot structure (e.g., foreshadowing, flashback, in media res) • conflict (i.e., internal, external) • characters (e.g...."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that create an uneasy mood, circle the words that begin the flashback, and number the narrator's first explanation of the broken glass and later admission 1 and 2. Use your marks to track how your understanding of the accident changes.

Before the Judges Arrived

1 The glass broke just as rain began hammering the school greenhouse roof. I stood beside a tray of tomato seedlings, holding the handle of the side door. Across the room, Eli froze with a watering can in his hands. Mrs. Vale hurried in, her shoes squeaking on the wet tiles. "Mara, what happened?" she asked. I said the wind must have caught the door after Eli left it open. Eli stared at me, then at the jagged pane on the floor. Behind Mrs. Vale, the hallway clock ticked toward the science fair, when visitors would see our project.

2 Only an hour earlier, Eli had pointed to the loose latch. "Push until it clicks," he told me before leaving for the lab. I tried, but the door stuck, and the seedlings needed water before the judges arrived. I pulled it nearly shut and went back to work. When Eli returned, neither of us mentioned the door. Now, with rain pushing through the broken pane, I could hear his warning more clearly than Mrs. Vale's questions. Eli set down the watering can without a word. He did not tell her what he had said to me, though his hands shook as he gathered the scattered soil.

3 Mrs. Vale asked us to move the seedlings away from the rain. As Eli lifted a tray, I noticed a bright scrape on the metal latch, exactly where I had forced it. I could let Mrs. Vale believe my story about Eli; the scrape would not speak for itself. Instead, I told her I had left the door unlatched. She looked at the broken glass, then asked us to find a broom and cardboard. Eli helped me cover the opening, but he did not smile when I thanked him. Outside, the rain softened, and inside, the floor was still wet.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do two details of the greenhouse setting create the mood before Mara admits what happened?

2. How does the flashback change your understanding of Mara's first explanation? Use evidence from both parts of the story.

3. What do Eli's actions after the glass breaks suggest about him, and how do they help develop the story's theme?

4. Why should a reader question Mara's account at first? Explain how her narration affects the theme.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an alternate ending from Eli's point of view in three sentences, beginning when Mrs. Vale asks them to move the seedlings. Then write two sentences explaining how that point of view shifts the story's theme.

ANSWER KEY

The Unlatched Door

GRADE 10 · 10.3.R.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that create an uneasy mood, circle the words that begin the flashback, and number the narrator's first explanation of the broken glass and later admission 1 and 2. Use your marks to track how your understanding of the accident changes. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do two details of the greenhouse setting create the mood before Mara admits what happened?	**Rain hammering the roof and water entering through the broken pane make the greenhouse feel tense and exposed while Mara avoids telling the truth.**
2	How does the flashback change your understanding of Mara's first explanation? Use evidence from both parts of the story.	**Mara first says Eli left the door open, but the flashback shows Eli warned her about the latch and she left the door nearly shut. Her first explanation shifts blame away from herself.**
3	What do Eli's actions after the glass breaks suggest about him, and how do they help develop the story's theme?	**Eli stays silent despite his shaking hands and helps clean up. His restraint makes Mara's choice to admit her mistake more meaningful and shows that her accusation has hurt him.**
4	Why should a reader question Mara's account at first? Explain how her narration affects the theme.	**Mara blames Eli even though she remembers leaving the door unlatched. Her unreliable account lets readers see how fear of blame can lead someone to hide the truth.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

As I lifted a tray, I watched Mara glance at the scratched latch while Mrs. Vale waited for an answer. When Mara admitted she had left the door unlatched, I was relieved, but my hands still trembled. I helped her cover the pane, knowing I would need time before trusting her again. Eli's point of view shows that a confession does not erase the harm caused by a false accusation. It shifts the theme from the courage of admitting a mistake to the slower work of rebuilding trust.

Accept answers that connect specific details to an effect on mood or theme, even if students phrase the theme differently. For the alternate ending, look for three sentences from Eli's perspective and two that explain a plausible shift in theme.