The Warning Radio

How setting and narration shape a story's meaning

11.3.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 setting details that create tension. Circle two statements or actions that make you question the narrator's account, then consider how your marks shape the story's mood and theme.

Bad Reception

1 By midnight, the high school gym smelled of wet wool and floor polish. Rain rattled the skylights while families waited for news about the river. I told everyone the warning radio had failed on its own. That was almost true. Its voice had dissolved into static before the county's evacuation order could reach the principal, and I had been standing beside it. My younger brother, Eli, sat under a basketball hoop, twisting the drawstring of his jacket. He had told me the river would stay inside its banks. I wanted him to be right more than I wanted to check.

2 An hour earlier, when the first siren sounded, Eli had begged me not to repeat the report from the county office. He was supposed to lead the buses out, but his best friend was still searching the river road for their dog. If the order spread, Eli said, the buses would leave without him. I turned the radio dial until the voice dissolved into static, then turned it back before anyone looked. "Bad reception," I told the principal. Now, as water tapped against the gym's lower doors, I kept hearing that small click beneath the rain.

3 The principal handed me a flashlight and asked whether another message had come. Across the gym, Eli's friend pushed through the doors, soaked but carrying no dog. He said the road was already covered. I began to answer that the radio was broken. Instead, I pointed to its steady red light and told the principal what I had done. She sent the buses toward the hill while the doors still opened. Eli would not look at me when he climbed aboard. Behind us, the gym lights shone on water creeping over the painted lines of the court.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do two details of the gym or the storm create a tense mood? Explain what each detail suggests about the danger.

2. How does the flashback change your understanding of the narrator's claim that the radio failed on its own? Use evidence from both parts of the story.

3. What do Eli's words and actions reveal about him, and how do they intensify the narrator's conflict?

4. How does the narrator's final choice affect the story's tone and suggest a theme? Support your answer with a detail from the ending.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an alternate ending of 75 to 100 words, beginning when the principal asks about another message. Keep the first-person narrator, include a setting detail and an action that changes how readers judge the narrator, and suggest a different theme.

ANSWER KEY

The Warning Radio

GRADE 11 · 11.3.R.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two setting details that create tension. Circle two statements or actions that make you question the narrator's account, then consider how your marks shape the story's mood and theme. 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 gym or the storm create a tense mood? Explain what each detail suggests about the danger.	**Rain rattling the skylights makes the storm feel close and forceful. Water tapping at the lower doors suggests the river is reaching the gym.**
2	How does the flashback change your understanding of the narrator's claim that the radio failed on its own? Use evidence from both parts of the story.	**The opening claim suggests an equipment failure, but the flashback reveals that the narrator turned the dial until the voice became static. The narrator concealed a choice, making the initial account unreliable.**
3	What do Eli's words and actions reveal about him, and how do they intensify the narrator's conflict?	**Eli begs the narrator to withhold the report because his friend is still on the river road. His concern for his friend pressures the narrator to choose between loyalty to Eli and warning the families.**
4	How does the narrator's final choice affect the story's tone and suggest a theme? Support your answer with a detail from the ending.	**Admitting the truth allows the buses to leave before the doors are blocked, creating relief, but Eli's refusal to look at the narrator keeps the ending painful. The choice suggests that protecting others may require risking a close relationship.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The rain struck the skylights so hard that I barely heard the principal's question. "Nothing new," I said, resting my hand over the radio's dial. Eli's friend stumbled in, dripping onto the court, and reported that the river road was gone. The principal checked the radio herself. When the county's warning filled the gym, she called for the buses without asking me again. I watched Eli help a child aboard, and I kept my hand in my pocket. For the first time, I was glad someone had stopped believing me.

Accept other supported interpretations of mood, conflict, and theme. Alternate endings should change the narrator's action or its consequences and use that change to suggest a theme distinct from the original ending's emphasis on admitting the truth.