After the Blackout

Notice how punctuation reveals details and turns.

11.5.W.7 "Students will use a colon or dash to reveal information in a sentence."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the complete thought before each colon or typed dash (--), then circle the words that follow it and reveal a detail or unexpected turn.

Opening Night Without Power

1 By six o'clock, the school auditorium held the usual signs of opening night: paper programs, warm spotlights, and a restless crowd. Then the lights went out. From backstage, Mara heard a second problem -- the sound system had died with the power. The actors stood frozen in their costumes while the audience's phone screens flashed on one by one. Mara, the stage manager, checked the emergency exit signs, which still glowed, and asked everyone to stay seated. She had one workable tool left: her voice. She stepped into the aisle and announced that the performance would begin without microphones.

2 The first scene took place in a crowded train station, but the set was nearly invisible. Mara gave the cast a simple instruction: make the station audible. An actor tapped two pencils against a chair to imitate footsteps; another shook a tin of dried beans for the approaching train. The sound was imperfect -- and suddenly the audience leaned forward to listen. When a character missed her train, the silence in the room made her disappointment sharper than any recorded effect could have. Mara noticed something else: the actors had stopped looking toward the dark control booth for cues.

3 By intermission, a custodian had found the cause: a tripped breaker in a locked utility room. Once the lights returned, the director faced a choice -- restore the recorded sounds or keep the cast's improvised version. The actors voted to keep making the noises themselves. For the final scene, they created a storm with their hands, their shoes, and a sheet of stiff paper. Afterward, Mara found a note tucked inside a program: "I could hear every choice you made." The note did not prove the blackout was lucky; it showed that the cast had turned a failure into a decision.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. In the first sentence, what does the colon reveal about the auditorium?

2. In paragraph 1, what does the dash reveal about Mara's "second problem"? What effect does holding back that detail create?

3. In paragraph 2, what unexpected response appears after the dash in "The sound was imperfect -- and suddenly the audience leaned forward to listen"?

4. Near the end, what does the colon reveal about the note Mara finds? Why is that detail more specific than saying a spectator liked the show?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write three sentences about a problem in a place you know. Use a colon to reveal a specific detail and a typed dash (--) to reveal an unexpected turn.

ANSWER KEY

After the Blackout

GRADE 11 · 11.5.W.7

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the complete thought before each colon or typed dash (--), then circle the words that follow it and reveal a detail or unexpected turn. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In the first sentence, what does the colon reveal about the auditorium?	**It reveals three signs of opening night: paper programs, warm spotlights, and a restless crowd.**
2	In paragraph 1, what does the dash reveal about Mara's "second problem"? What effect does holding back that detail create?	**The sound system has failed. Delaying that detail builds suspense about what else went wrong.**
3	In paragraph 2, what unexpected response appears after the dash in "The sound was imperfect -- and suddenly the audience leaned forward to listen"?	**The audience leans forward to listen, despite the imperfect sound.**
4	Near the end, what does the colon reveal about the note Mara finds? Why is that detail more specific than saying a spectator liked the show?	**It reveals the note's exact words: "I could hear every choice you made." The quote identifies what the spectator noticed about the performance.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The community garden faced one stubborn problem: its only hose had split overnight. We carried watering cans from the building next door -- and discovered that the trip helped us spot wilted plants we had overlooked. By noon, every bed had water.

Accept answers that identify the information revealed after each mark and explain its effect using evidence from the passage. In Part 3, check for three sentences with a colon after a complete clause and a dash that introduces an unexpected turn.