The Last Bell

How literary devices shape a storm story

12.3.R.4 "Students will evaluate how literary devices impact theme, mood, and/or tone, using textual evidence: • figurative language (i.e., simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, imagery, symbolism) • sound devices (i.e., onomatopoeia…"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two examples of figurative language, circle a sound device, and number the two moments that create an ironic reversal. Use your marks to consider how these choices shape the story's mood and theme.

Before the Water Rose

1 At the town meeting, the council voted to remove the brass bell beside the footbridge the following week. A new electric siren, they said, could warn everyone when the creek rose. Mara, who lived nearest the water, watched a worker tie a red ribbon around the bell's handle. The ribbon fluttered like a small flame in the gray air. "A museum piece," someone called it, and the room laughed. Outside, rain stitched dark lines across the street. Mara took the long way home past the bridge, where the bell stood above the bank on two iron posts.

2 By midnight, the storm had cut the power. The siren's control box showed a blank screen, and water was already licking the bridge supports. Mara knocked on the houses along the lower road, but the wind swallowed her voice. Across the creek, kitchen lights winked out one by one. She ran to the bell, seized the cold handle, and pulled. Clang. Clang. The notes struck the windows and came back thin but steady. A porch door opened, then another. People stepped into the rain with coats over their heads and called to the neighbors behind them.

3 At dawn, the lower road lay under muddy water, but every house had emptied before the creek reached its doors. The council chair arrived carrying the bell's removal order inside a dry plastic sleeve. She looked at the soaked ribbon, now tangled around the handle, and folded the paper without speaking. Mara did not ask for an apology. She listened as neighbors counted who still needed blankets and who needed help climbing the hill. Behind them, the bell hung motionless. In the new light, its dull brass seemed less like a relic than a promise nobody had made alone.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the comparison between the ribbon and a flame affect the mood at the town meeting? Use a detail from the passage.

2. How do "Clang. Clang." and the short sentences around the bell's ringing affect the mood? Support your answer with another detail from that scene.

3. What is ironic about the council chair's arrival at dawn? Explain how this reversal affects the story's tone.

4. In the final sentence, what might the bell symbolize? Use its description and one earlier event to explain how that symbol develops a theme.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a new scene set the next morning in 4 to 6 sentences. Use one figurative device and one sound device to shift the mood from fear toward cautious hope, then explain in your final sentence how those choices shape the mood and a theme of communal responsibility.

ANSWER KEY

The Last Bell

GRADE 12 · 12.3.R.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two examples of figurative language, circle a sound device, and number the two moments that create an ironic reversal. Use your marks to consider how these choices 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 does the comparison between the ribbon and a flame affect the mood at the town meeting? Use a detail from the passage.	**The ribbon "fluttered like a small flame" against gray air. The contrast introduces a hint of danger beneath the meeting's laughter.**
2	How do "Clang. Clang." and the short sentences around the bell's ringing affect the mood? Support your answer with another detail from that scene.	**The sharp, repeated sound creates urgency. When porch doors open in response, the mood begins to shift toward hope.**
3	What is ironic about the council chair's arrival at dawn? Explain how this reversal affects the story's tone.	**She brings an order to remove the bell after it warned residents when the new siren could not. Her silent folding of the order gives the ending a reflective, restrained tone.**
4	In the final sentence, what might the bell symbolize? Use its description and one earlier event to explain how that symbol develops a theme.	**The bell suggests shared responsibility. Mara rings it, and neighbors call to others; its description as a "promise nobody had made alone" connects their actions to the theme that safety depends on a community acting together.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The neighbors carried damp chairs beneath the school awning while rain tapped softly overhead. A neighbor set a kettle on a camp stove, and its small hiss threaded through their quiet talk. Mara watched the first cups travel from hand to hand like tiny lanterns. Nobody knew when the water would retreat, but someone had already made a list of who needed medicine. The gentle sounds and lantern simile shift the mood toward cautious hope and suggest that a community survives by noticing each person's needs.

Accept other interpretations when students connect a specific device and textual detail to a defensible effect on mood, tone, or theme. For the new scene, check that the sound and figurative devices appear in the scene and that the final sentence explains their effects.