When Lights Fail

Read a story and trace how its elements shape its meaning.

6.3.R.3 "Students will analyze how literary elements contribute to the meaning of a literary text: • setting • plot • characters (i.e., protagonist, antagonist) • characterization • conflict (i.e., internal, external) • point of view (i.e...."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details about the auditorium that affect the play, circle one clue to Nia's private thoughts or feelings, and number three actions that move the problem toward a solution.

A Different Kind of Play

1 The school auditorium smelled of sawdust and wet coats. Outside, rain rattled the windows; inside, the stage lights failed ten minutes before the sixth-grade play. Nia stood beside the painted castle she had worked on for weeks. Without the stage lights, the audience could barely see the set. Mr. Bell, the stage manager, crossed his arms. “The show is canceled,” he said. “No one can perform safely in the dark.” Nia's stomach sank. Her little brother had saved his allowance for a ticket.

2 Nia wanted to argue, but she remembered tripping over a loose cord during rehearsal. Mr. Bell was right about the dark. Then a beam from her friend's flashlight swept across the castle. It cast a huge, crooked shadow on the curtain. Nia imagined a different play, one told with shapes and voices from behind a screen. “Could we clear the floor and use flashlights?” she asked. Mr. Bell pointed toward the crowded stage. “You have five minutes to prove it is safe.”

3 Nia and her friends rolled the cords offstage and checked the floor with Mr. Bell. They held cardboard trees and dragons between flashlights and the white curtain. From the seats, Nia saw shadows taller than the painted castle. Mr. Bell tested the clear path, then opened the curtain. Nia's hands still shook as she spoke the first line, but she did not hide behind the others. When her brother laughed at the dragon's giant ears, Nia smiled. The play had changed; its story had not.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the auditorium setting change what Nia and her friends must do to perform the play?

2. What external conflict does Nia face? What inner struggle does she face, and how does it affect her plan?

3. How does Mr. Bell stand in Nia's way at first? What do his words and actions show about him?

4. Is the story told in third person limited or third person omniscient? How does knowing Nia's thoughts help you understand her choice?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a different ending in four or five sentences from Mr. Bell's third-person limited point of view. Show his private thoughts, let the failed stage lights affect his decision, and resolve his conflict with Nia in a new way.

ANSWER KEY

When Lights Fail

GRADE 6 · 6.3.R.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details about the auditorium that affect the play, circle one clue to Nia's private thoughts or feelings, and number three actions that move the problem toward a solution. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the auditorium setting change what Nia and her friends must do to perform the play?	**The stage lights fail, so they use flashlights and shadows instead of the painted set. They also clear cords from the stage so they can perform safely.**
2	What external conflict does Nia face? What inner struggle does she face, and how does it affect her plan?	**Mr. Bell cancels the show because the dark stage is unsafe. Nia wants to argue, but she knows he is right about the danger. That leads her to suggest clearing the floor and using flashlights.**
3	How does Mr. Bell stand in Nia's way at first? What do his words and actions show about him?	**He cancels the show, opposing Nia's goal. His warning about the dark and his check of the cleared path show that he cares about safety.**
4	Is the story told in third person limited or third person omniscient? How does knowing Nia's thoughts help you understand her choice?	**It is third person limited: readers know Nia remembers tripping and imagines a new play, but they do not know Mr. Bell's private thoughts. Her memories show why she seeks a safe solution instead of simply arguing.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Mr. Bell looked at the dark stage and pictured someone stumbling over a prop. He told Nia the actors could perform in the bright cafeteria instead. Nia frowned at the thought of leaving her castle behind, but she helped carry the small props down the hall. As the audience followed, Mr. Bell felt the tight knot in his shoulders loosen. The show began among lunch tables, with Nia's painted castle propped against a wall.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of Nia's conflicts and Mr. Bell's concern for safety. For the new ending, look for access to Mr. Bell's thoughts without access to another character's private thoughts.