Behind the Door

Study how a narrator, a flashback, and a repeated sound shape a scene.

9.3.W.1 "Students will compose narratives reflecting real or imagined experiences that: • include engaging plots involving well-developed, complex characters resolving conflicts • establish narrator(s) that enhance(s) the narrative • are..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the moment the story shifts into the past, and number the three paragraphs in the order their main events happen. Circle the repeated sound to track how it builds tension.

The Brass Key

1 The basement door rattled as another gust pushed rain through the community center's back stairwell. Beyond the locked archive, cardboard boxes of recorded interviews sat on the lowest shelf. Water had reached the first step. Ms. Alvarez, the volunteer who had labeled every tape, searched her pockets for the brass key. "It was on the hook," she said. Click. She tried the handle again. I felt the key's teeth press through my jacket lining. I could tell her where it was. Instead, I watched a thin ribbon of water slide under the archive door.

2 An hour earlier, I had slipped the key off its hook to hear my grandmother's interview. She had died before I was old enough to ask why she left her home country. Ms. Alvarez had told me to wait until the recordings were cataloged, and I had nodded as if waiting were easy. In the archive, my grandmother's voice came from a small player, rough and bright: "I was frightened on the train, but I went anyway." When the storm alarm sounded, I grabbed my jacket and ran upstairs, forgetting the key was still in its pocket.

3 Click. Ms. Alvarez tried the handle once more, then looked toward the rising water. "We can still move the boxes," she said, "if we get inside now." My mouth went dry. "I took the key," I said, pulling it free. "I wanted to hear my grandmother." She held my gaze for a moment that felt longer than the storm. Then she opened the door, and we carried the lowest boxes up the stairs. Later, I expected a lecture. Instead, she handed me a pencil. "Start with the labels," she said. "You can help me finish the catalog."

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does the narrator wait until the second paragraph to explain how the key got into the jacket pocket?

2. What two competing feelings make the narrator's decision to return the key difficult? Use details from the passage.

3. How does telling this story in first person affect what you know about the narrator before Ms. Alvarez knows it?

4. How does the repeated “Click” build tension, and what does Ms. Alvarez's final line reveal about how the conflict ends?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write one scene of 80 to 100 words about a character who must admit a mistake before a shared task can succeed. Start at a tense moment, briefly step back to reveal the mistake, then return to its consequence. Use first-person narration, a repeated sound or phrase, sensory detail, dialogue, and varied sentence lengths.

ANSWER KEY

Behind the Door

GRADE 9 · 9.3.W.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the moment the story shifts into the past, and number the three paragraphs in the order their main events happen. Circle the repeated sound to track how it builds tension. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why does the narrator wait until the second paragraph to explain how the key got into the jacket pocket?	**The delay leaves readers wondering why the narrator has the key while water approaches the archive. The flashback then explains both the mistake and the narrator's reason for taking it.**
2	What two competing feelings make the narrator's decision to return the key difficult? Use details from the passage.	**The narrator wants to protect the interviews from the rising water but fears admitting to Ms. Alvarez that they took the key after being told to wait.**
3	How does telling this story in first person affect what you know about the narrator before Ms. Alvarez knows it?	**Readers know the key is pressing against the narrator's jacket lining and see the narrator hesitate. Ms. Alvarez only knows that the key is missing.**
4	How does the repeated "Click" build tension, and what does Ms. Alvarez's final line reveal about how the conflict ends?	**Each "Click" marks another failed attempt to open the door as the water rises. Her final line shows that she lets the narrator help finish the catalog rather than ending their work together.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Beep. Our robot stopped inches from the finish line, its wheels twitching against the gym floor. Mina stared at the frozen screen. "The code worked yesterday," she whispered. Yesterday, after she left, I had changed the turning speed because I wanted the final run to be mine. I never tested it. Beep. The timer kept counting, and the room smelled of hot dust and rubber. "I changed the speed," I said. Mina blinked, then pulled up the settings. We restored the old number together. The robot rolled forward, slower than I wanted, but it crossed the line.

For the marking job, accept paragraph order 2, 1, 3, with the shift underlined at "An hour earlier" and both instances of "Click" circled. For the open task, accept any coherent 80 to 100 word scene that includes the requested sequence and narrative techniques.