

The Empty Space

Trace how a choice changes the plot and develops a theme.

9.RL.1 "Key Ideas and Plot Details Explain stated or implied themes, analyzing their development over the course of texts, and the relationship of characters, setting, and plot to those themes..."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB This is original classroom fiction. Underline a detail showing Lena's early goal, box her turning-point choice and mark a later consequence. Connect each to a possible theme.

The Empty Space

- ① Lena had arranged the library display so carefully that even the empty spaces matched. Her history club would unveil "Our Town Remembers" at the weekend festival: factory photographs on the left, the restored train station on the right, and a large central portrait of the mayor who had saved it from demolition. Each caption had the same number of lines. When Mr. Ortiz brought a scratched lunch tin, she placed it behind the photographs. "It will interrupt the pattern," she said. He ran one finger along the dented lid. "My mother carried this to the factory. She helped collect signatures for the station." Lena pointed to the central portrait. "We already have that story." She had spent weeks on the display and wanted visitors to see that she knew how to finish a project.
- ② The evening before the festival, Lena tested the display by asking her younger brother to explain it. He studied the portrait. "One important man saved everything," he said. "The other people just worked there." Lena began to correct him, then looked again at her captions. They named the mayor's speech and the station's reopening, but none of the people who had filled the petition pages. Mr. Ortiz had left a photocopy of his mother's signature beside the tin. Lena could squeeze her name into an existing caption without moving anything. Instead, she took down the portrait. Its absence left a pale rectangle. She called Mr. Ortiz and asked what his mother had done after signing. He told her about carrying blank petition sheets to the factory gate and returning with names. Lena wrote until the library lights blinked for closing.

③ On festival morning, the portrait returned in a smaller frame beside the lunch tin and a copy of the petition. The new caption credited the mayor's decision and the residents who had pressed for it. Lena had no matching object for the display's remaining space. She put a blank card there: "Whose work have we missed?" A visitor preferred the old, neater arrangement. Lena felt the reply rising in her throat, but another visitor was naming an aunt who had typed the petitions. By noon, several cards held names and contact details for follow-up. Lena did not paste those unverified stories into the display. She gathered them into a folder labeled "Questions." When her brother returned, he said the town looked busier now. Lena straightened the empty card beside the folder and left room for another one.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

① What does Lena initially want the display to show about herself? Cite a detail from paragraph 1.

② Why does her brother's comment create a turning point rather than merely add another opinion?

③ How does the library-display setting shape the conflict and Lena's choice?

④ What do the blank card and the "Questions" folder suggest together? Use the ending.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Explain a theme developed across the story. Trace how Lena's goal, a turning-point choice and the ending develop that theme. Use at least three relevant details from different parts of the story, naming paragraph locations. Include how the display setting shapes the conflict. Explain the connections rather than only retelling events.

Trace the development

State a theme as a complete idea. Select evidence from the beginning, turning point and ending; note the role of the display setting.

Write the analysis

Explain how the selected details develop your theme across the plot. Quote accurately or paraphrase and give paragraph locations.

Test your interpretation

Consider the detail that Lena keeps new stories in a Questions folder. Explain how it supports, qualifies or challenges your theme; revise your claim if needed.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

This is original classroom fiction. Underline a detail showing Lena's early goal, box her turning-point choice and mark a later consequence. Connect each to a possible theme. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does Lena initially want the display to show about herself? Cite a detail from paragraph 1.	She wants it to show that she can finish a polished project. Matching empty spaces and equal-length captions reveal her concern with order and presentation.
2	Why does her brother's comment create a turning point rather than merely add another opinion?	It exposes the misleading impression created by Lena's own choices: only the mayor seems active. She checks her captions and realizes that the petition workers are absent.
3	How does the library-display setting shape the conflict and Lena's choice?	Limited arranged space makes including another story seem like a threat to the design. Removing and resizing the portrait changes whose work the public display makes visible.
4	What do the blank card and the "Questions" folder suggest together? Use the ending.	Lena now invites missing perspectives but plans to investigate them before presenting them as facts. The ending links openness with careful verification rather than simply adding every story.

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Evidence plan. Theme: representing a community responsibly requires both openness to missing voices and care with evidence. Paragraph 1: Lena values a finished pattern. Paragraph 2: she removes the portrait after seeing what her arrangement implies. Paragraph 3: she invites names but checks new stories. **Analysis.** At first, Lena treats completeness as a neat visual pattern: even the empty spaces match (paragraph 1). The library display makes this priority consequential because visitors learn the town's history through what she includes. Her brother's belief that one man saved everything reveals how the design erases other people's work. Lena could add a name without changing the arrangement, but instead removes the portrait and asks Mr. Ortiz for more information (paragraph 2). At the festival, the mayor remains alongside evidence of residents' efforts, so the change expands the account rather than simply replacing one hero with another. The blank card invites further voices, while the Questions folder keeps unverified stories separate (paragraph 3). The unfinished space becomes a sign of responsible inquiry. **Interpretation check.** A theme such as "Every story should immediately be included" does not fit the folder. The ending qualifies openness with a duty to investigate.

TEACHER ASSESSMENT NOTES

Accept other themes supported across the whole story, including the limits of tidy accounts or the value of revising a confident first judgment. Require a complete thematic idea and analysis of character, setting and plot, not just dynamic/static labels. Students need not claim that Lena rejects visual order or distrusts every visitor. The smaller portrait remains, and the new accounts are leads for inquiry. All characters and events are original classroom fiction.