

Wind at the Door

Read a dramatic scene for structure, character, theme, and historical context.

11.RL "The student will use textual evidence to demonstrate comprehension and build knowledge from a variety of grade-level complex literary texts read to include literary nonfiction (including world, British, and American literature)..."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Read this original fictional scene aloud with a partner. Number its three bracketed stage directions 1-3. Underline Eli's final speech and mark the aside; distinguish what the audience hears from what Mara hears.

The Letter

Part 1: The letter

April 1936, a farm kitchen in the Oklahoma Panhandle. Eli, seventeen, holds a letter offering California cannery work. Mara, his mother, mends a flour sack.

[Dust taps the windowpanes; a tin cup trembles on the table.]

MARA: Your grandfather said this land could feed a family.

ELI: It did, before the grass went under the plow.

MARA: You talk as if leaving will make the wind forget us.

ELI: No. I talk because it remembers every field we stripped bare.

He places the letter beside the cup.

Part 2: The door

Mara lifts the letter but does not open it.

[The wind rises, and Eli braces the kitchen door with his shoulder.]

MARA: California is a word on paper. Here, I know the names of every neighbor.

ELI: Names do not stop dust from filling their lungs.

MARA: And a cannery does not promise dignity.

ELI: Neither does watching the garden disappear.

ELI, aside: I want to be brave enough to stay, but I am more afraid of becoming part of this empty house.

Mara hears only the wind and sets the letter down.

Part 3: The choice

A sudden gust forces the door open.

[Catalog pages whirl across the floor; Mara catches a picture of green orchard rows.]

MARA: Your father planted shelterbelts after the first storm. He believed roots could hold a place together.

ELI: Then let me go long enough to send money for seed.

Mara studies the orchard picture.

MARA: Take the letter. Do not mistake going for forgetting.

Eli picks it up. The wind falls quiet, not defeated, but briefly answered. Outside, brown fields wait beneath a pale spring sky for rain.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

- 1 How do the three bracketed stage directions structure the scene and move the plot from conflict toward a decision?

- 2 What do Eli's comment about plowed grass and his aside reveal? How does the aside change the audience's knowledge without changing Mara's?

- 3 Explain how Mara's sentence, "Do not mistake going for forgetting," functions as a turning point in the scene and develops a theme.

- 4** How does the 1936 Oklahoma setting shape the characters' conflict? Use two details from the scene.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write exactly six script entries: one bracketed stage direction and five speeches, including exactly one aside. Show a character reconsidering a choice because of the natural setting. Put each entry on its own line; a long speech may wrap without becoming a new entry.

Draft your six entries

Keep the stage direction, private aside and changed choice distinct.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Read this original fictional scene aloud with a partner. Number its three bracketed stage directions 1-3. Underline Eli's final speech and mark the aside; distinguish what the audience hears from what Mara hears. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the three bracketed stage directions structure the scene and move the plot from conflict toward a decision?	The first direction establishes the dust threat, the second intensifies the conflict as Eli holds the door, and the third gives Mara the orchard image that helps her reconsider Eli's departure.
2	What do Eli's comment about plowed grass and his aside reveal? How does the aside change the audience's knowledge without changing Mara's?	His dialogue connects damaged land with their hardship. The aside shows competing desires: he admires the courage of staying but fears being trapped. The audience hears this private conflict, while Mara hears only the wind.
3	Explain how Mara's sentence, "Do not mistake going for forgetting," functions as a turning point in the scene and develops a theme.	The sentence changes Mara from resisting Eli's plan to allowing it. It develops the theme that leaving a damaged home for survival does not have to mean abandoning one's connection or responsibility to that place.
4	How does the 1936 Oklahoma setting shape the characters' conflict? Use two details from the scene.	Dust threatens health: Eli says it fills neighbors' lungs, while his disappearing garden signals damaged livelihood. The offered cannery work creates an alternative, but Mara values neighbors and the land. These details make departure a choice between survival elsewhere and attachment here.

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

[Rain drums on the roof of a boat shed.]

NIA: The river took the dock. I leave at dawn.

JOSE: Will you leave us to tie the boats alone?

NIA, aside: I wanted leaving to feel like courage.

NIA: I will stay tonight. Give me a rope.

JOSE: Then we begin here.

TEACHER ASSESSMENT NOTES

The scene is original classroom fiction, not testimony or a historical quotation. Dust Bowl hardship and westward migration supply its historical setting; the particular family and letter are invented. Evidence must come from the scene: it mentions dust in lungs, not dust filling homes. An aside addresses the audience without being heard by the other character. The sample has six separate entries: one direction and five speeches, one an aside. Its change of choice responds to the flooded setting and shared work. Accept other evidence-based interpretations. Historical context: Library of Congress, Dust Bowl Migration (loc.gov/classroom-materials/dust-bowl-migration/).