Sirens and Promises

Analyze how imagery, repetition, and structure shape a poem's meaning.

11.T.T.4.a "Read, discuss, evaluate, and critique a variety of poetic texts, considering poetic techniques used to present and design content and their associated implications on meaning and/or theme. (I)"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two sensory images, circle each repeated phrase or doubled word, and write 1 beside the moment the poem begins to turn from danger toward hope.

After the Sirens

1 At 5:17, the town's warning siren opens its metal throat. Its cry climbs the apartment walls, then slips beneath doors where breakfast plates still steam. On the hill, dry grass leans toward the highway, pale as old paper. Smoke does not yet cover the sun, but it stains the morning's edge a bruised orange. My father folds the map once, twice, and says nothing. In the kitchen, the radio repeats one sentence: leave now, leave now. Even the dog listens, head tilted, to the sky for instructions that never arrive.

2 We drive east with the windows closed. Behind us, the ridge wears a moving collar of gray, and every pine seems to hold one black breath. At the school gym, strangers arrange blankets in blue rows. A girl presses a paper cup of water into my hand. We carry what fits. We carry photographs, medicine, the keys to a house we cannot see. We do not carry the pear tree, the porch swing, or the chalk names fading on the sidewalk. Outside, ash settles softly, softly, on the yellow buses.

3 By noon, the wind turns, and the firefighters' planes stitch white lines across the ridge. No one calls the danger small. Still, the radio changes its sentence: stay together, stay together. In the gym, someone finds crayons, and children draw rivers wider than roads. My father unfolds the map and marks a blue lake with his thumb. I imagine rain practicing on its far surface, one quiet tap at a time. We carry what fits, I think, but sometimes what fits is a promise: a door reopened, a tree watered, a name written again in chalk.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the images of dry grass “pale as old paper” and the morning “bruised orange” shape the mood in paragraph 1?

2. Compare the repeated radio messages “leave now” and “stay together.” How does the change in repetition show a change in the poem’s situation?

3. What does the repeated pattern “We carry” emphasize in paragraph 2? Why does the list of things the speaker cannot carry matter?

4. How does the poem’s three-paragraph structure develop its theme? Refer to the final image of a name written again in chalk.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 90 to 110-word prose poem in three paragraphs about a community responding to a weather event. Use one personification, one repeated phrase, and a final image that shifts the mood toward cautious hope, then write two sentences explaining how two of your choices shape the poem's theme.

ANSWER KEY # Sirens and Promises

GRADE 11 · 11.T.T.4.a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two sensory images, circle each repeated phrase or doubled word, and write 1 beside the moment the poem begins to turn from danger toward hope. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the images of dry grass "pale as old paper" and the morning "bruised orange" shape the mood in paragraph 1?	**They create a tense, fragile, threatening mood by making the dry landscape seem vulnerable and the sky seem injured.**
2	Compare the repeated radio messages "leave now" and "stay together." How does the change in repetition show a change in the poem's situation?	**"Leave now" creates urgency and danger during evacuation. "Stay together" shifts the focus to mutual support after people reach shelter.**
3	What does the repeated pattern "We carry" emphasize in paragraph 2? Why does the list of things the speaker cannot carry matter?	**The repetition emphasizes the limited belongings people can save. The uncarried tree, swing, and chalk names show that evacuation also means leaving memories and home behind.**
4	How does the poem's three-paragraph structure develop its theme? Refer to the final image of a name written again in chalk.	**The structure moves from warning, to loss and displacement, to cautious recovery. The chalk image suggests that community life and personal history can begin again after disaster.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Rain drums its silver fingers on the bus shelter. By dawn, the creek has climbed the soccer field and swallowed the white goal lines. My neighbor lifts her grocery bags above her head. At the library, wet coats bloom over every chair.

We save what we can, we save what we can, passing candles, diapers, and phone chargers from hand to hand.

At sunset, the rain loosens its grip. Children float paper boats in a parking-lot puddle, and our street, still muddy, begins to reflect a strip of clear blue above the roofs.

The rain's fingers and grip personify the storm, making it seem forceful but temporary. The repeated phrase emphasizes shared effort, while the blue reflection shifts the theme toward recovery.

Accept equivalent interpretations when students support them with accurate details from the poem. For the open task, check for three paragraphs, the required techniques, a clear mood shift, and two sentences that explain the writer's choices. Keep the three poem paragraphs distinct and the two explanatory sentences in a separate block; count the poem itself toward 90–110 words.