Voices Before Dawn

A model poem uses repetition, image, and sound to honor unseen work.

12.T.T.4.b "Apply knowledge of various poetic techniques and conventions to create poetic text for an intended purpose. (C)"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline every occurrence of the exact words *While the city sleeps*. Circle two comparisons that help the poem portray the value of overnight work.

Before Morning

1. While the city sleeps, the street sweeper combs the avenue, its brushes whispering over bottle caps and leaves. At 3:17, the driver lifts a coffee cup, a small moon warming both hands. Windows hold their dark blue breath; traffic lights blink red, then red again. The bus depot hums beyond the river, and the pavement keeps every tire track like a temporary record. No crowd applauds this work. Still, the clean curb waits for morning as patiently as a held note beneath pale lamps that have watched all night.

2. While the city sleeps, a baker folds dawn into dough, pressing air from it with flour-dusted palms. The ovens open their orange mouths, and heat rolls out like weather. On a steel table, six loaves rise in quiet rows. *Listen:* crackle, crease, crust, the quick consonants of a kitchen making morning. Outside, a delivery truck backs slowly, beeping one bright syllable at a time. The baker does not call the night lonely. She calls it a long, useful hallway leading toward the first customers at sunrise, where hungry faces will become familiar.

3. While the city sleeps, the hospital elevator climbs, carrying a nurse toward the pale lobby. Her shoes make a soft metronome on tile. Each floor opens briefly, then closes like an eye refusing to surrender. At the entrance, she meets the sweeper and the baker. Three shadows cross beneath fluorescent light, then separate. The city will wake and call itself busy. This poem keeps another name for it: cared for by hands it seldom sees. Their labor is the quiet architecture of morning for everyone who arrives each day.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does placing the repeated phrase at the start of each paragraph support the poem's purpose?

2. What technique is used in the words “Windows hold their dark blue breath,” and what mood does it create?

3. Identify the sound technique in “crackle, crease, crust, the quick consonants.” How does it suit the baker's scene?

4. Explain the meaning of “Their labor is the quiet architecture of morning.” How does this metaphor shape the reader's view of the workers?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 8-line poem that honors an overlooked kind of work and makes readers notice its value. Use a refrain of 2 to 5 words exactly twice, one simile or metaphor, alliteration, and at least one line break that creates a pause or delayed completion.

ANSWER KEY # Voices Before Dawn

GRADE 12 · 12.T.T.4.b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline every occurrence of the exact words *While the city sleeps*. Circle two comparisons that help the poem portray the value of overnight work. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does placing the repeated phrase at the start of each paragraph support the poem's purpose?	**The repeated phrase links the three workers' scenes and emphasizes that important work happens unseen while most people sleep.**
2	What technique is used in the words "Windows hold their dark blue breath," and what mood does it create?	**Personification. It creates a hushed, waiting mood in the sleeping city.**
3	Identify the sound technique in "crackle, crease, crust, the quick consonants." How does it suit the baker's scene?	**Alliteration with repeated hard c or k sounds. It creates a crisp, active sound that echoes the bakery's work.**
4	Explain the meaning of "Their labor is the quiet architecture of morning." How does this metaphor shape the reader's view of the workers?	**The metaphor presents the workers' labor as a structure that makes morning possible. It makes their overlooked work seem essential and carefully built.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At six, the custodian moves
through hallways with a ring of keys.
Before the doors open, he gathers yesterday's paper,
and the floor becomes a dark, calm lake.
Mop water murmurs around the lockers.
He leaves no signature, only a clean path
for sneakers, stories, and the sudden bell.
Before the doors open, the school is already cared for.

Accept reasonable evidence-based explanations of technique and effect. For the poem, verify the eight lines, a repeated 2-to-5-word refrain used exactly twice, a comparison, alliteration, and a clear purpose of honoring overlooked work. Display the model as exactly eight intentional lines. The breaks after moves and path delay completion; the four-word refrain Before the doors open occurs exactly twice.