Buckets at Dusk

Trace how imagery, repetition, and personification shape a poem's purpose.

9.T.T.4 "Poetic Techniques: Evaluate and apply poetic techniques to enhance text's appeal to audiences or achieve specific purposes."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline repeated words or phrases, circle two vivid sensory images, and number each example of personification to evaluate how these choices shape the poem's purpose.

The Empty Lot

1 At dawn, the vacant lot is a field of cracked clay, and the hose coughs once, then quits. We carry buckets from the school sink. We carry buckets past the bus stop, past the mural where blue birds lift their painted wings. The sun presses its copper hand on our shoulders. Still, we carry. Mrs. Vale measures water with a dented can, giving each tomato plant a careful drink. Near the fence, one marigold nods, its orange face bright against the dust beside a bent wire gate.

2 By noon, the lot shimmers like a skillet. Our arms ache, and salt darkens the collars of our shirts. Yet we carry, one pail at a time. A robin lands on the rake handle and watches. The basil releases a sharp green smell when Eli loosens the soil. Beside him, Maya tucks seeds into narrow beds, as if placing small promises underground. We do not own this land, but our fingerprints stay on every shovel handle. From the sidewalk, a man slows, then returns with two empty milk jugs.

3 At sunset, the first wet leaves hold light like coins. We carry the last bucket together, its rim knocking softly against our knees. Water threads through the beds, and the thirsty ground drinks without a sound. Tomorrow, the hose may still cough. Tomorrow, the clay may split again. But along the fence, green shoots raise their thin flags. A girl from the apartment building kneels beside the marigold and asks if she can help. Behind her, traffic hums, windows glow, and the blue birds on the mural seem ready to fly.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. The phrase "We carry" appears several times. What does this repetition suggest about the speakers' response to difficult work? Use one detail from the poem.

2. How does the personification in "The sun presses its copper hand on our shoulders" affect the description of the work?

3. How do the images "cracked clay" and "the first wet leaves hold light like coins" create a change in mood?

4. Why might the writer repeat "Tomorrow" in the third paragraph instead of ending only with the green shoots?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 6 to 8 line poem about people completing a small task together. Include a repeated phrase at least three times, one example of personification, and two sensory images, then add one sentence explaining how one technique supports your poem's purpose.

ANSWER KEY

Buckets at Dusk

GRADE 9 · 9.T.T.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline repeated words or phrases, circle two vivid sensory images, and number each example of personification to evaluate how these choices shape the poem's purpose. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	The phrase "We carry" appears several times. What does this repetition suggest about the speakers' response to difficult work? Use one detail from the poem.	**It suggests determined, shared persistence. Even when the hose quits and their arms ache, the speakers keep bringing water.**
2	How does the personification in "The sun presses its copper hand on our shoulders" affect the description of the work?	**It makes the sun seem forceful and heavy, emphasizing the discomfort and effort of working in the heat.**
3	How do the images "cracked clay" and "the first wet leaves hold light like coins" create a change in mood?	**The poem shifts from a dry, difficult mood to a hopeful mood as water and new growth appear.**
4	Why might the writer repeat "Tomorrow" in the third paragraph instead of ending only with the green shoots?	**The repetition acknowledges that the drought may continue, so the signs of growth and new help feel like cautious hope rather than an easy solution.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

We sweep the winter sidewalk.
We sweep the glassy snow before sunrise.
We sweep while the broom sings against the ice.
Cold air bites our cheeks.
At each doorway, yellow porch lights blink awake.
We sweep a path wide enough for wheels and boots.
By breakfast, the street holds the clean salt smell.

Technique explanation: Repetition makes the neighbors' work feel steady and shared.

Accept equivalent interpretations when students accurately cite a technique and explain a reasonable effect on mood, message, or audience. For Part 3, check for all required techniques and an explanation that connects one technique to the poem's purpose.