Ropes and Roads

Track how dramatic choices shape a character's decision.

11.RL.1 "Key Ideas and Plot Details Analyze the development of universal themes (e.g., loss of innocence, coming of age, relationship with nature) prevalent in American literature (e.g., short stories, poems, plays, novels, essays..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two lines that show Eli's changing idea of leaving, circle each aside or direct address, and number 1, 2, and 3 beside three events that move him from departure to choice.

The Last Watch

1 [Dawn on a wooden pier beside Lake Erie, 1912. Fog hides the far shore. ELI, seventeen, holds a travel bag. His mother, MARA, mends a fishing net.] MARA: The train leaves before the gulls settle. ELI: I know. I have counted every whistle since Monday. [He looks toward the water.] MARA: Your father learned this lake before he learned patience. ELI: Then I will learn the city before it teaches me fear. [A bell rings from the distant station.] MARA: Go, but do not call leaving the same as becoming someone new.

2 [MARA turns away, but her hands stop moving.] MARA: Your ticket was paid for with winter catches. Do not waste it. ELI: I will send money home. MARA: I asked for no promise. [ELI steps to the pier's edge.] ELI, aside to the audience: I thought departure meant cutting the rope. Yet every knot she ties follows me. [He kneels and helps finish the net.] MARA: That knot will hold? ELI: Until you need it. MARA: And you? ELI: I may not. But I can return knowing what holds.

3 [The station bell rings again. MARA lifts the net, and a torn section opens between them.] ELI: Mother, wait. [He takes thread from his bag and stitches the tear.] MARA: You will miss the train. ELI: Perhaps. [He faces the audience.] ELI: A road is not a river. It does not carry me unless I choose to step forward. [The bell falls silent.] MARA: Then choose. ELI sets down the needle, takes his bag, and walks toward the station. MARA watches the lake brighten in sunlight.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does Eli's idea of leaving change from the first paragraph to the end of the scene? Use two details from the dialogue or action.

2. What does Eli's aside, "I thought departure meant cutting the rope," reveal about him?

3. How does the sentence "[The bell falls silent.]" fit into the structure of the scene and move the plot forward?

4. How do Eli's aside and his direct address to the audience contribute to the theme of coming of age?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an original 6 to 8 line dramatic scene set in a natural place. Include at least one stage direction and one aside or direct address, and show a character making a choice connected to growing up. Then write exactly two sentences explaining how the dramatic convention and setting develop the theme.

ANSWER KEY

Ropes and Roads

GRADE 11 · 11.RL.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two lines that show Eli's changing idea of leaving, circle each aside or direct address, and number 1, 2, and 3 beside three events that move him from departure to choice. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does Eli's idea of leaving change from the first paragraph to the end of the scene? Use two details from the dialogue or action.	**At first, Eli sees leaving as learning the city before it teaches him fear. By the end, he understands that he must choose his own path while keeping his connection to Mara, shown when he repairs the net and then walks toward the station.**
2	What does Eli's aside, "I thought departure meant cutting the rope," reveal about him?	**It reveals that Eli privately fears leaving will sever his bond with his mother, but he is beginning to understand that their connection can remain.**
3	How does the sentence "[The bell falls silent.]" fit into the structure of the scene and move the plot forward?	**The silent bell removes the immediate pressure of the train deadline. It creates a pause in which Mara tells Eli to choose, and Eli makes his decision to leave.**
4	How do Eli's aside and his direct address to the audience contribute to the theme of coming of age?	**The aside reveals Eli's private struggle with separation, while the direct address shows his new understanding that adulthood requires personal choice. Together, they make his departure a deliberate step toward maturity.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

[At the trailhead, NIA tightens her boots.]
NIA: I can still follow your map, Grandfather.
NIA, aside to the audience: His marks kept me safe, but they cannot choose my mountain.
GRANDFATHER: The clouds are gathering.
NIA: Then I will read them and turn back if I must.
[She folds the map and starts up the sunlit path.]

Nia's aside reveals that she values her grandfather's guidance but must make her own judgment. The gathering clouds and her decision to read them connect nature to her coming of age.

Accept equivalent claims that use accurate details from the scene and explain how those details develop Eli's movement toward independent choice. For the open task, accept varied themes if the scene includes the required convention, natural setting, character choice, and a clear two-sentence explanation.