After the Curtain

How word choices shape a final night at the theater

11-12.RL.4 "Interpret the impact of specific word choices and figurative language on meaning, mood, and tone, including words with multiple meanings (e.g., connotation, jargon, allusions, colloquialisms)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle three words or phrases that suggest more than their literal meaning, then underline nearby details that help you explain their effect on the mood or tone.

The Last Light

1 By the time the audience left the Marlowe Theater, rain had turned the alley into a strip of black glass. I stayed to help my mother, who had worked backstage since before I was born. "Time to strike," the stage manager called. A week earlier, I would have heard a threat in that word. Tonight it meant carrying scenery to the curb: the city had sold the building, and the painted kitchen wall would not survive the morning. My mother folded a paper moon in half. Its silver face vanished without a sound.

2 Inside, the house was empty. That was what the crew called the seats, but my mother always spoke of the theater as if it could set a place for us at dinner. She found a ticket under the front row and smoothed it against her palm. "Full house," she said, remembering the night it came from. Her voice had the bright, brittle sound of a spoon tapped against a cracked cup. I wanted to tell her we could still visit the new theater across town. Instead, I picked up a broom.

3 At midnight, the stage manager left one bulb burning on a stand in the center of the bare stage. He called it the ghost light, a small guard against anyone stumbling in the dark. Outside, trucks waited with their mouths open. My mother stood beside the bulb and said, "Leave it till morning." For the first time all night, she did not sound as though she were apologizing for taking up space. I followed her through the side door, carrying the paper moon. Behind us, that single light made a narrow path across the boards.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does “strike” first sound threatening to the narrator, and what does it mean in this scene?

2. What does “house” mean to the crew, and what other meaning does the narrator’s description suggest?

3. How does the comparison to a spoon tapped against a cracked cup affect your understanding of the mother’s voice?

4. What mood does the “ghost light” create at the end? Explain how one detail near it supports your answer.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write five sentences from the stage manager’s viewpoint as the narrator and mother leave through the side door. Use an original figurative image and a word with two plausible meanings, then use your fifth sentence to explain how those choices shape the tone.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle three words or phrases that suggest more than their literal meaning, then underline nearby details that help you explain their effect on the mood or tone. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why does “strike” first sound threatening to the narrator, and what does it mean in this scene?	**It can mean to hit or attack, but the stage manager means to take down the scenery. The threatening sense makes the theater’s closing feel harsher.**
2	What does “house” mean to the crew, and what other meaning does the narrator’s description suggest?	**To the crew, the house is the audience seating. The dinner image also suggests a home, showing how personally the mother feels about the theater.**
3	How does the comparison to a spoon tapped against a cracked cup affect your understanding of the mother’s voice?	**“Bright” suggests she tries to sound cheerful, while “brittle” and “cracked” suggest that cheer could break. The comparison makes her sadness audible.**
4	What mood does the “ghost light” create at the end? Explain how one detail near it supports your answer.	**It creates a lonely but gently hopeful mood. The theater is bare, yet the single light makes a path across the stage as the narrator leaves.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I held the side door for them as the narrator carried the paper moon into the alley. Behind me, the bulb’s glow reached across the boards like a hand searching for theirs. I wanted to hold back the morning, but the trucks were already waiting. Their footsteps faded, and I went inside to finish my work. The two uses of “hold” show my wish to help and my inability to stop the closing, while the reaching light gives the farewell a tender tone.

Accept interpretations of mood and tone that cite specific language in the passage. For Part 3, the figurative image and both meanings of the chosen word should fit the stage manager’s perspective.