Before the Applause

Trace how shifts in time shape a scene's tone.

11-12.W.3.c "Use a variety of techniques to sequence events to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the time cues, then number the events in the order they happened. Circle one detail that changes meaning by the end of the passage.

Opening Night

1. At 9:14, every person in the theater rose at once. Mara, the stage manager, gripped a flashlight that had failed when she needed it most. The actors had just slipped behind the scenery, and for one long heartbeat, the room was silent. An hour earlier, the same aisle had been crowded with wet umbrellas and impatient whispers. The storm had arrived too late to cancel opening night and too early to trust the power. Above the seats, the EXIT signs glowed steadily, while the chandelier blinked twice, as if rehearsing a warning.

2. At 8:47, halfway through the final scene, the chandelier went dark. A line vanished from the lead actor's mouth; across the room, someone laughed too loudly. Mara waited for the generator to start, but the only sound was rain pressing against the roof. She could stop the show and send everyone home. Instead, she reached for her flashlight, shook it once, and got no beam. The actor remained still in the dark. Mara counted three breaths, then leaned toward the nearest row and asked for a phone light.

3. One light appeared, then six. Mara asked their owners to aim toward the center aisle, and she guided the actors out from behind the scenery. For the next twenty-seven minutes, the play continued between the seats. Whenever a phone dimmed, another lit up farther down the aisle. At 9:14, the final line ended and everyone stood, not to leave, but to applaud. The actors slipped behind the scenery before returning for a bow. Mara looked up at the EXIT signs. They still marked the way out, but no one was moving toward them.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does the passage begin with the audience standing before it explains what happened earlier?

2. How do “An hour earlier” and “At 8:47” help you follow the events after the opening scene?

3. What does “For the next twenty-seven minutes” allow the writer to skip, and how does that choice affect the pace?

4. How does the return to the EXIT signs in the final paragraph change the tone of the ending?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write one 80 to 110 word scene that begins near its ending, flashes back to an earlier problem, then returns to a later outcome. Use at least two clear time cues and shift the tone from tension to relief.

Before the Applause

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the time cues, then number the events in the order they happened. Circle one detail that changes meaning by the end of the passage. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why does the passage begin with the audience standing before it explains what happened earlier?	**Standing could mean the audience is leaving or applauding. Delaying the explanation creates suspense until the final paragraph.**
2	How do "An hour earlier" and "At 8:47" help you follow the events after the opening scene?	**They signal a move backward in time, then locate the blackout before the audience stands at 9:14.**
3	What does "For the next twenty-seven minutes" allow the writer to skip, and how does that choice affect the pace?	**It skips most of the improvised performance, moving quickly from Mara's solution to the audience's response.**
4	How does the return to the EXIT signs in the final paragraph change the tone of the ending?	**Earlier, the signs suggest the audience might need to leave. At the end, no one moves toward them, reinforcing the shift from worry to shared relief.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At 3:02, the judges lifted their spoons, and I braced for the verdict. Two hours earlier, my first batch of soup had tasted like seawater. I had tipped it down the sink while the clock above the stove clicked toward the deadline. At 2:40, I started again, adding one pinch of salt at a time and tasting after each one. Now a judge set down her spoon and asked for the recipe. The others kept eating. I stopped gripping the edge of the table, although the clock still seemed impossibly loud.

Accept answers that identify the time shift and explain its effect on suspense, pace, or tone using passage details. For the writing task, look for a coherent return to the later moment and an outcome that supports the shift to relief.