Behind the Curtain

Notice how speech, sound, and sentence length shape a scene.

6.W.3.b "Use literary and narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, rhythm, description, and poetic devices to develop experiences, events, and/or characters."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one line of dialogue that reveals a character's feelings, circle two sensory details, and number three short sentences that make the action feel faster.

The Cardboard Moon

1 Mara stood behind the curtain with a cardboard moon under her arm. The school play would begin in five minutes, and the painted stars still smelled like wet paint. Onstage, Eli tested the wooden door. It stuck halfway open. He pulled harder, and the whole frame shuddered. "We can skip the door," Mara whispered. "The story needs it," Eli said, staring at the crowded seats beyond the curtain. Mara heard the restless rustle of programs and felt the moon bend slightly in her hands.

2 The lights dimmed. Eli gave the door one last tug. Crack. A hinge slipped loose, and the door leaned toward the stage floor. Mara caught the frame before it fell. For a moment, no one moved. Then footsteps tapped closer from the wings. Their teacher was carrying a roll of tape, but the music had already started. "Hold it steady," Eli said. Mara pressed her shoulder against the frame as he pushed the door upright. The cardboard moon scraped the floor behind her.

3 On cue, Eli stepped through the doorway and began his first line. Mara stayed hidden behind the frame, holding it in place. Her shoulder ached. Her fingers slipped. She braced her foot against the wall. When Eli spoke of a long journey, Mara heard a small laugh from the audience. He was pointing at the moon she had dropped by the door. "Even the moon followed me home," he added. Mara bit back a laugh and lifted the moon into the painted sky. The scene rolled on.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does Eli's line, “The story needs it,” show about him?

2. How do the three brief sentences at the start of paragraph 2 affect the moment when the door breaks?

3. How does the “restless rustle of programs” add pressure to Mara's situation?

4. What does Eli's line, “Even the moon followed me home,” add to the scene? What does it show about him?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 5- to 7-sentence scene about a character handling a surprise during a school event other than a play. Include one line of dialogue that reveals a feeling, two sensory details, and three short sentences that quicken the pace.

ANSWER KEY

Behind the Curtain

GRADE 6 · 6.W.3.b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one line of dialogue that reveals a character's feelings, circle two sensory details, and number three short sentences that make the action feel faster. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does Eli's line, "The story needs it," show about him?	**Eli wants to keep the play's story intact, even though the door is causing trouble.**
2	How do the three brief sentences at the start of paragraph 2 affect the moment when the door breaks?	**They make the action feel quick and sudden, especially when the hinge breaks with a crack.**
3	How does the "restless rustle of programs" add pressure to Mara's situation?	**It lets readers hear the waiting audience, making the approaching start of the play feel more urgent.**
4	What does Eli's line, "Even the moon followed me home," add to the scene? What does it show about him?	**It turns the dropped moon into part of the story and shows that Eli can improvise.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the school science fair, a sharp vinegar smell rose from Nia's table as her volcano began to bubble over. The judge's shoes squeaked closer on the tile. "I'm scared it'll ruin your project," Nia told the student beside her. Foam rose. Nia lunged. The tray wobbled. She caught the tray, slid it beneath the volcano, and smiled when the foam spilled safely inside.

Accept other supported interpretations of the dialogue and pacing. For the original scene, check for 5 to 7 sentences, dialogue revealing a feeling, two sensory details, and three short sentences that speed the action.