The Weight of a Rope

How a story's order shapes its meaning

7.RL.5 "Analyze how the overall form or structure of a text (e.g., drama, poetry, narrative, short story) contributes to its meaning."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number the paragraphs, underline the words that move the story into the past and back to the present, and circle a detail repeated in the first and last paragraphs. Use your marks to think about how the story's order shapes its meaning.

The Curtain Rope

1 My hand closed around the curtain rope as the auditorium lights dimmed. Across the stage, the actors stood ready for the first scene of our school play. I had one job: open the curtain when the music stopped. The piano played its last few notes, and my fingers tightened instead of moving. From behind the heavy cloth, I could hear the audience shifting in their seats. Ms. Vega raised two fingers, our silent signal. I knew exactly what to do. So why did the rope feel too heavy to pull?

2 Five months earlier, I had held that same rope at the winter concert. I mistook a cough for my cue and opened the curtain while the choir was still lining up. One singer dropped her folder, and loose pages skated across the floor. No one yelled at me afterward, but I heard laughter from the front row all the way home. Since then, I had practiced opening and closing the curtain after school, when the auditorium was empty and nobody could see me make a mistake.

3 Ms. Vega lowered one finger, then the other. I pulled. The curtain slid halfway open and caught on something near the wall. My face grew hot, but I did not let go. I waved to Leo, who checked the rope's path and freed a knot. Together we drew the curtain open. The first actor stepped into the light, a few seconds late. I still held the rope, but now its weight reminded me that I could ask for help and keep going.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. The story begins at the play before explaining the winter concert. What question does this order raise for the reader?

2. How does the middle paragraph change your understanding of the narrator's hesitation in the first paragraph?

3. Why does the story return to the interrupted play after the winter concert memory?

4. The rope appears in the first and last paragraphs. How does its meaning change across the story?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a new ending in two or three sentences that uses the rope again but changes what the narrator learns. Then write two sentences explaining how the opening, the winter concert memory, and your ending work together to create a different meaning.

ANSWER KEY

The Weight of a Rope

GRADE 7 · 7.RL.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number the paragraphs, underline the words that move the story into the past and back to the present, and circle a detail repeated in the first and last paragraphs. Use your marks to think about how the story's order shapes its meaning. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	The story begins at the play before explaining the winter concert. What question does this order raise for the reader?	**It makes the reader wonder why the narrator cannot pull the rope even though they know what to do.**
2	How does the middle paragraph change your understanding of the narrator's hesitation in the first paragraph?	**The winter concert memory shows that the narrator hesitates because they fear repeating an embarrassing mistake, not because they forgot their job.**
3	Why does the story return to the interrupted play after the winter concert memory?	**Returning to the play shows the narrator acting despite that fear, then asking for help when the curtain catches.**
4	The rope appears in the first and last paragraphs. How does its meaning change across the story?	**At first its weight represents the narrator's fear of making a mistake. At the end, it reminds them that they can ask for help and keep going.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Ms. Vega lowered her fingers, but I noticed a painted tree leaning into the curtain's path. I waited while Leo moved it, then pulled the rope when the stage was clear. The opening makes the narrator's pause look like fear, and the winter concert memory explains why a wrong cue worries them. My ending turns the rope into a sign of careful judgment, suggesting that a pause can help someone notice a problem.

Accept answers that connect the shift into the past and the return to the play with a change in the reader's understanding. For the open task, the new ending and explanation should support a meaning different from the original ending's focus on asking for help and continuing.