Behind the Curtain

How word choices shape a scene

8.RL.4.a "Determine technical, figurative and connotative meanings of words and phrases."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle "spike mark" and "cue," underline two phrases that mean more than their literal words, and box "sharp" and "steady." Use your marks to track how the words create meaning and mood.

The First Line

1. The auditorium smelled of dust and fresh paint. On the floor, a strip of blue tape showed Mara her spike mark, the exact spot where she had to stand when the curtain rose. She had practiced walking to it all week. Tonight, however, the taped X seemed to drift farther away each time she looked. Behind her, Leo waited at the sound board for his cue, the line that told him when to play the recorded rain. Mara had the first line, and the audience was already settling into its seats.

2. From the wings, Mara heard a sharp whisper: "Don't freeze again." She knew the voice belonged to Nia, who had watched her stumble at rehearsal. The word again landed like a pebble in Mara's shoe; small, but impossible to ignore. She stepped toward the blue tape as the house lights faded. In the dark, a few audience members rustled their programs. Mara pictured their eyes as rows of tiny flashlights, all pointed at her. Then Leo's recorded rain began, soft enough to leave room for her voice.

3. Mara reached her spike mark and found that the floor beneath it was solid. She spoke the first line, and the words came out clear. Nia's whisper had sounded cruel in the wings, but now Mara heard another voice from the cast, quiet and steady: "You've got this." At the end of the scene, Leo missed his next cue by a beat. Mara waited without turning. This time the silence was a doorway, not a trap; she could choose when to step through it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. In this theater scene, what is a spike mark, and what is a cue?

2. What does it mean that the word “again” landed like a pebble in Mara's shoe?

3. How do “sharp” and “steady” give the two voices different feelings?

4. What does Mara mean when she thinks the silence is “a doorway, not a trap”?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence scene set outside a theater. Use one activity-specific term, one figurative phrase, and one word that creates a mood. Below your scene, identify each choice and explain what it means in context.

Behind the Curtain

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle “spike mark” and “cue,” underline two phrases that mean more than their literal words, and box “sharp” and “steady.” Use your marks to track how the words create meaning and mood. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In this theater scene, what is a spike mark, and what is a cue?	**A spike mark shows an actor where to stand. A cue signals when someone should do something, such as play the recorded rain.**
2	What does it mean that the word “again” landed like a pebble in Mara's shoe?	**Nia's word bothers Mara and is hard to ignore, even though it is only one small word.**
3	How do “sharp” and “steady” give the two voices different feelings?	**“Sharp” makes Nia's whisper seem hurtful. “Steady” makes the other cast member's voice seem calm and supportive.**
4	What does Mara mean when she thinks the silence is “a doorway, not a trap”?	**The pause no longer makes Mara feel stuck. She feels able to choose when to speak.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the free-throw line, I set my feet for an unguarded basketball shot. The gym held its breath. Across the court, a teammate glared at me. I bent my knees and sent the ball toward the hoop.
Term: “Free-throw line” is the marked place for an unguarded shot.
Figurative phrase: “The gym held its breath” suggests tense quiet.
Mood word: “Glared” suggests anger or pressure.

Accept other underlined phrases that have a supported figurative meaning. For the original scene, accept activity-specific terms and mood words when the student's explanations fit their context.