The Water Ahead

Trace how word choice changes a scene's mood.

8.RL.4 "Interpret words and phrases as intended by the author of the text. Determine technical, figurative and connotative meanings of words and phrases. Analyze how specific word choices, shape meaning, mood, and tone."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle two words or phrases that make Mara's fear vivid, and underline two that show her growing confidence.

Lane Four

1 At the edge of the pool, Mara rolled her goggles between her palms. The starting blocks stood in a row above the deep blue water. Across the lanes, the clock's red numbers glared at her: six minutes until the race. Her stomach was a fist she could not unclench. When she dipped a toe into the water, its chill climbed her leg. Behind her, sneakers squeaked on the tiles, and every squeak seemed to say, Not ready.

2 Coach Imani stopped beside her but did not tell her to relax. Instead, she pointed to the far wall, where a strip of sunlight had found the water. "Pick one lane, not the whole pool," she said. Mara watched the light tremble across lane four. She remembered the slow laps she had swum before anyone else arrived, one steady stroke after another. The clock still glared, but its numbers no longer filled the room. She set her goggles over her eyes and stepped onto the block.

3 The whistle cut through the chatter, and Mara bent toward the water. For a moment, the surface looked like a sheet of hammered glass. Then she dove, and the noise above her became a distant hum. Her arms found their rhythm, and the lane line slid beside her like a quiet guide. She did not know who was ahead. At the turn, she touched the wall and pushed away, carrying the sunlight in her mind. The race had not grown smaller; she had grown ready to meet it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does it suggest about Mara's feelings when the clock's numbers "glared" at her?

2. What does "Her stomach was a fist she could not unclench" mean, and what mood does it create?

3. Coach Imani says, "Pick one lane, not the whole pool." What does she want Mara to focus on?

4. How does calling the lane line "a quiet guide" change the mood from the beginning of the passage?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write three sentences about taking a seat in a crowded cafeteria. Describe the action with an uneasy mood, describe the same action with a welcoming mood, then explain how one word or phrase from each description creates its mood.

ANSWER KEY

The Water Ahead

GRADE 8 · 8.RL.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle two words or phrases that make Mara's fear vivid, and underline two that show her growing confidence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does it suggest about Mara's feelings when the clock's numbers "glared" at her?	**Mara feels threatened or pressured by the time remaining before the race.**
2	What does "Her stomach was a fist she could not unclench" mean, and what mood does it create?	**Mara's stomach feels tight because she is nervous. The image creates a tense mood.**
3	Coach Imani says, "Pick one lane, not the whole pool." What does she want Mara to focus on?	**She wants Mara to focus on swimming her own lane instead of worrying about the entire race or the other swimmers.**
4	How does calling the lane line "a quiet guide" change the mood from the beginning of the passage?	**The lane line seems helpful and steady, creating a calmer mood than the tense beginning.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I took a seat in the crowded cafeteria beneath a ceiling that seemed to press down on me. I took a seat in the crowded cafeteria as laughter floated warmly from every table. "Press down" makes the first moment uneasy, while "floated warmly" makes the second feel welcoming.

Accept other passage-supported interpretations of the figurative language. For the writing task, look for two descriptions of taking a seat with contrasting moods and an explanation tied to specific wording.