When Lights Fail

Read how narrative choices shape a turning point.

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

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two sensory details, circle a line of dialogue that changes Mara's plan, and write 1 beside a sentence that stretches the pause and 2 beside a sentence that makes an event feel sudden.

The Unplanned Cue

1 From behind the curtain, Mara watched the school auditorium fill with winter coats and damp umbrellas. Tonight she was running the lights for her first play, and her hands left dark fingerprints on the control board. A low hum came from the ceiling lamps. Onstage, her brother Eli waited inside a cardboard castle, gripping a silver-painted spoon like a sword. Mara had practiced every cue twice. When the curtain rose, she slid the first switch, and warm light spread across the painted stones. Then the board went black.

2 For a breath, nobody moved. The actors stood frozen, their faces pale in the light from the exit signs. A shoe scraped the stage. Someone in the audience coughed. Mara reached beneath the desk for the spare flashlight, but its switch clicked against her thumb without a glow. “Use the window!” Eli whispered from the castle. Mara glanced at the narrow window beside the booth. A streetlamp outside cast a bright stripe across its glass. She grabbed the round mirror from her bag and angled it toward the stage.

3 A thin circle of light landed on Eli's spoon. He lifted it high, as if the sudden glow belonged in the story. The audience laughed, and the other actors began to move again. Mara held the mirror steady until the lamps flickered back on. After the final bow, Eli found her in the booth. “I thought you had planned that,” he said. Mara looked at the fingerprints on the dark board. She had wanted every cue to be perfect, but the part she would remember was the one she had never rehearsed.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the details about Mara's hands and her practice make the blackout matter more?

2. Why does the writer pause on a scraping shoe and a cough before Mara acts?

3. How does Eli's whispered line change what Mara does next?

4. What does Mara's final thought reveal about how the experience changed her?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 100 word scene about a character solving a small problem during a school event other than a play. Include two sensory details, a line of dialogue that changes the character's next action, a brief sentence that quickens the pace, and a final reflection that shows what the character learns.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two sensory details, circle a line of dialogue that changes Mara's plan, and write 1 beside a sentence that stretches the pause and 2 beside a sentence that makes an event feel sudden. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the details about Mara's hands and her practice make the blackout matter more?	**Her fingerprints suggest she is nervous, and practicing every cue twice shows how much she wants the performance to go as planned.**
2	Why does the writer pause on a scraping shoe and a cough before Mara acts?	**The small sounds stretch the silence, letting the reader feel how long and awkward the blackout seems.**
3	How does Eli's whispered line change what Mara does next?	**It directs her attention to the window, where she sees streetlamp light and uses a mirror to aim it at the stage.**
4	What does Mara's final thought reveal about how the experience changed her?	**She began by wanting perfect cues, but she ends up valuing the unexpected solution she had to invent.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the school bake sale, the gym smelled of cinnamon and warm paper cups. Nia reached for the price cards, but a gust from the open door scattered them under the tables. “Write the prices on the bags,” her friend Jo said. Nia grabbed a marker. One after another, she labeled the brown bags. Customers stepped forward again, their coins clinking against the metal tray. Nia had worried about keeping everything neat; now she knew people only needed a clear way to choose.

For the marking job, accept sensory details such as the low hum or scraping shoe. Accept any sentence whose pacing effect the student can explain, such as “For a breath, nobody moved” for a pause or “Then the board went black” for sudden change.