What the Steps Hold

Trace how details support both a character's words and their unspoken feelings.

9-10.RL.1 "Cite strong, relevant and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly and inferentially."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that explain why Lena values the steps, and circle two details that reveal what the entrance has been like for Mr. Cho. Number the details you would use to explain why Lena takes down her sign.

The Fish on the Steps

1 By the time Lena reached the school entrance, orange tape had closed the front steps. A crew would begin building a ramp on Monday, and the painted tiles along the steps would be covered by concrete. Lena knelt to photograph a blue fish she had painted there with her brother three summers earlier. Its tail had chipped, but she could still find the crooked white line he had insisted was a wave. At lunch, she taped a sign to the doors: SAVE OUR STEPS. She left the entrance through the side door, where the narrow threshold caught her sneaker.

2 On Saturday, Mr. Cho found Lena tracing the fish onto a sheet of paper. He had graduated decades before the fish existed, but he knew every crack in the steps. "I used to wait here while my friends went inside," he said, resting one hand on the wheel of his chair. The side door, he explained, had been locked during after-school events. Lena looked at her sign, now damp around the edges. She pulled it down without tearing it. "I don't want the fish to disappear," she said. "Neither do I," said Mr. Cho. "But I want to get through the front door."

3 On Monday, Lena brought the tracing and a folder of photographs to the site supervisor. She asked whether a few painted tiles could be saved and set beside the new ramp. The supervisor could promise only to check how the tiles were fixed in place. Lena thanked her, then moved behind the orange tape as the crew unloaded tools. That afternoon, Mr. Cho arrived for a meeting and paused beside her. Lena held up the tracing, its fish lopsided under the paper's wrinkles. "We might have to paint another one," she said. They stood where the ramp would begin, facing the doors together.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does the fish matter to Lena? Support your answer with two details from the first paragraph.

2. What can you infer about Mr. Cho's experience of the school entrance? Use two details from the second paragraph.

3. Why does Lena take down her sign? Use one detail from the first paragraph and one from the second to support your inference.

4. What does Lena's suggestion that they might paint another fish reveal about her attitude toward the project? Support your inference with two details from the final paragraph.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write one paragraph making a claim about what the story suggests belonging in a shared space means. Use two pieces of evidence from different paragraphs, and explain how each supports your claim.

ANSWER KEY

What the Steps Hold

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-10.RL.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that explain why Lena values the steps, and circle two details that reveal what the entrance has been like for Mr. Cho. Number the details you would use to explain why Lena takes down her sign. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why does the fish matter to Lena? Support your answer with two details from the first paragraph.	**Lena painted it with her brother three summers earlier, and she still remembers that he insisted its crooked white line was a wave. The fish holds a shared memory.**
2	What can you infer about Mr. Cho's experience of the school entrance? Use two details from the second paragraph.	**He knows the steps well but has been excluded by them. He waited while his friends went inside, and the side door was locked during after-school events.**
3	Why does Lena take down her sign? Use one detail from the first paragraph and one from the second to support your inference.	**Lena begins to understand that saving the steps would preserve a barrier for others. The side-door threshold catches her sneaker, and Mr. Cho says he wants to get through the front door.**
4	What does Lena's suggestion that they might paint another fish reveal about her attitude toward the project? Support your inference with two details from the final paragraph.	**She is open to the ramp but still wants to preserve or replace the artwork. She asks if tiles can be saved, and when the supervisor cannot promise that, Lena holds up her tracing and suggests painting another fish.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The story suggests that belonging in a shared space means being able to use it as well as remember it. In the first paragraph, Lena recognizes her brother's "crooked white line," showing that the steps hold a personal memory. In the second, Mr. Cho says he "used to wait here while my friends went inside," showing that the same entrance excluded him. Together, these details show why the entrance needs to make room for more people without forgetting its history.

Accept other defensible inferences supported by relevant, specific details from the passage. For the open response, look for evidence from two different paragraphs and an explanation of how both details support the student's claim.