Books Above Water

Trace how competing priorities shape a character's choices.

9-10.RL.3 "Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) and events develop over the course of a text, interact with others, and advance the plot or develop the theme."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show Mara's competing priorities, circle Eli's words or actions that affect her, and number three of Mara's choices in the order they occur.

The Flood Records

1 By the time the river reached the library steps, Mara had stacked the town's oldest books on the top shelves. She worked there after school, partly for the quiet and partly because her grandfather's handwriting filled the margins of the flood records. Across the room, her younger brother Eli dragged a crate of novels toward the door. The shelter at the gym needed something for children to read, he said. Mara blocked his path. The books were safer here, she insisted, though she could see water seeping beneath the front door. Eli set down the crate without arguing and went outside.

2 An hour later, the lights failed. Mara's phone showed a message from Eli: the gym was crowded, and the little kids were frightened. He had borrowed a canoe to bring supplies from the library. Mara pictured the books soaked in the bottom of it, then noticed a penciled note in her grandfather's flood record: "When the bridge washed out, Mrs. Ortega carried books to the school in oilcloth. Children waited at the doors." She closed the record and searched for waterproof storage bins. When Eli returned, she handed him a bin of novels, but kept the flood records upstairs.

3 At the gym, Mara expected to leave the bin and hurry back. Instead, Eli asked her to read while he helped serve dinner. She chose a story about a ship lost in fog, but stopped when a girl in the front row asked whether the sailors ever found shore. Mara glanced at Eli, who was carrying trays between tables. "They keep looking," she said, and turned the page. Later, she wrote the library's number on scraps of paper so families could request books when the water receded. She still worried about the records upstairs, but she stayed until the youngest children fell asleep.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. At first, what two concerns pull Mara in different directions? How does her response to Eli show which concern wins?

2. How does the note in the flood record change Mara's response to Eli's plan without ending her concern about the books?

3. At the gym, how does Eli's request change what Mara does next, and how does that choice extend her role beyond delivering books?

4. How does Mara's final decision to stay, despite her worry about the records, develop an idea about caring for others?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an alternate ending that begins when Eli asks Mara to read at the gym. In five to six sentences, show Mara's competing motives, include a conversation that affects her choice, and explain how the new ending changes the plot and develops a different theme.

ANSWER KEY

Books Above Water

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-10.RL.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that show Mara's competing priorities, circle Eli's words or actions that affect her, and number three of Mara's choices in the order they occur. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	At first, what two concerns pull Mara in different directions? How does her response to Eli show which concern wins?	**Mara wants to protect the books, especially the records connected to her grandfather, but she knows the shelter needs books. She blocks Eli's crate, putting protection first.**
2	How does the note in the flood record change Mara's response to Eli's plan without ending her concern about the books?	**The note gives Mara an example of books helping children during a flood. She packs novels in a waterproof bin for Eli but keeps the flood records upstairs.**
3	At the gym, how does Eli's request change what Mara does next, and how does that choice extend her role beyond delivering books?	**Eli asks Mara to read, so she stays to comfort the children instead of leaving. She later gives families a way to request books after the flood.**
4	How does Mara's final decision to stay, despite her worry about the records, develop an idea about caring for others?	**Mara still values the records, but she stays because the children need her now. The ending suggests that caring for others can mean accepting uncertainty about something precious.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Mara wanted to calm the children, but she could not stop imagining the flood records underwater. "I need to go back," she told Eli, watching a child wait beside the unopened bin. Eli nodded and said he would read while she found a safer place for the records. Mara returned to the library, sealed the records in waterproof bins, and listened as water reached the lower shelves. Her choice shifts the action back to the threatened library and suggests that caring for a community can mean protecting its memory for the future.

Accept answers grounded in Mara's actions and interactions with Eli. For the alternate ending, look for two motives, a conversation that influences her decision, a resulting plot change, and a theme distinct from the original ending.