The Crooked Track

Notice how pacing and dialogue develop a scene.

9-10.W.3.b "Use narrative or literary techniques or poetic devices, such as dialogue, pacing, rhythm, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two spots where short sentences or quick actions speed the scene, and circle two lines of Nia's dialogue that reveal her character. Write 1 and 2 beside descriptions that show how the narrator's feelings change from beginning to end.

Tin Sparrow

(1) The gym smelled of floor polish and hot wires. Our robot, Tin Sparrow, waited at the edge of the taped course while three judges checked their clipboards. It had crossed the same course twelve times in practice. Now its left wheel gave a small, helpless twitch. Across the gym, another team's robot zipped between cones, and I felt our four weeks of work shrinking to one stubborn inch. "We have two minutes," Nia said, tapping the countdown timer above the door. I reached for the wheel, but she caught my wrist. "Listen first." The motor was humming; the wheel was not turning.

(2) I crouched. The gym's cheers blurred behind the thin buzz at my ear. A strip of blue tape, left from marking our practice course, had curled beneath the axle. I pulled it free. The wheel rolled once, then stopped. "It's loose inside," I whispered. Nia held out the tiny screwdriver she kept tucked in her sleeve. The judge called, "Thirty seconds." Screw out. Cover off. A silver gear tilted sideways. My fingers shook so hard I dropped the screw, and it bounced under the judges' table. Nia slid her foot against it before it could disappear.

(3) She handed it back without saying what I expected: *I told you to listen*. I set the gear straight and tightened the cover as the judge raised one hand. "Time." For a beat, neither of us moved. Then Nia nudged the robot onto the starting mark and pressed the button. Tin Sparrow lurched, steadied, and rolled past the first cone. It missed the next turn and stopped short of the finish line. I waited for Nia to blame me. Instead, she pointed to the mark where it had started. "It moved," she said. I found myself smiling at the crooked track it had left.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the description of the other team's robot affect the way you experience Tin Sparrow's problem?

2. Choose two details from paragraph 2 that make the repair feel rushed. How do they affect the scene's pace?

3. What does Nia's "Listen first" reveal about her? How does one of her later actions develop that impression?

4. How does the narrator's reaction to the unfinished run differ from their feelings at the start? Use a detail from each paragraph to explain.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write one paragraph of 80 to 110 words about a character trying to deliver an important message before someone leaves. Include dialogue, a burst of short sentences that speeds up one moment, and a final thought or action that reveals a change in the character.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two spots where short sentences or quick actions speed the scene, and circle two lines of Nia's dialogue that reveal her character. Write 1 and 2 beside descriptions that show how the narrator's feelings change from beginning to end. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the description of the other team's robot affect the way you experience Tin Sparrow's problem?	**The other robot zips between cones while Tin Sparrow barely moves. The contrast makes Tin Sparrow's failure feel more urgent and discouraging to the narrator.**
2	Choose two details from paragraph 2 that make the repair feel rushed. How do they affect the scene's pace?	**The judge calls "Thirty seconds," and the brief sentences "Screw out. Cover off." make the remaining time feel short and the action feel fast.**
3	What does Nia's "Listen first" reveal about her? How does one of her later actions develop that impression?	**Nia approaches the problem carefully rather than grabbing at the wheel. Later, she offers a screwdriver and catches the dropped screw, showing that she stays focused and helps under pressure.**
4	How does the narrator's reaction to the unfinished run differ from their feelings at the start? Use a detail from each paragraph to explain.	**At first, the narrator feels four weeks of work shrinking to one inch. At the end, the narrator smiles at the crooked track, taking satisfaction in the robot's progress despite its unfinished run.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The bus doors folded shut as Mara reached the curb. "Wait!" she shouted, but her father was already moving toward a seat. She held up the note she had written that morning: I'm sorry. He looked away. The engine coughed. The bus rolled. Mara ran three steps, then stopped. She could have sent the note later, when neither of them had to look at the other. At the red light, she caught up and pressed the note against his window. Her father turned to read it. Mara kept her hand there until he looked at her.

Accept different marked passages and interpretations when students can explain how the chosen language affects pace, reveals character, or shows a change in feeling. For the original paragraph, check that each required technique contributes to the scene rather than appearing only as a formality.