Before the Curtain

Word choice and imagery shape a character's experience.

9-10.W.3.d "Use strong, effective word choice and figurative language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three precise sensory details and circle two figurative phrases in the passage. Use your marks to track how Mara's feelings change.

The Lantern

1. Behind the auditorium curtain, Mara waited with a glowing paper lantern in her hands. The painted moon above the set hung crooked, and the floor smelled of dust and fresh sawdust. Through the velvet, the audience sounded like a jar of bees someone had just shaken. Mara's first line was only four words, but it pressed against her throat like a stone. Across the stage, Eli adjusted a cardboard window and gave her a quick nod. The stage manager raised three fingers. Mara tightened her grip until the lantern's thin bamboo handle creaked.

2. The curtain scraped open. A white spotlight pinned Mara to the porch set, and the audience disappeared into a dark, breathing wall. She stepped forward, but her shoe caught the edge of a loose board. The lantern swung; its paper sides shivered. For one sharp second, she could hear the hum of the lights and nothing else. Then Eli leaned through the cardboard window and said his cue, clear as a bell. Mara planted both feet, looked at the crooked moon, and spoke her four words. Her voice came out small, then steadied as it reached the back row.

3. By the final scene, the lantern had become part of her hand. Mara crossed the stage beneath the painted moon, no longer watching for the loose board. When the curtain fell, applause burst through the room like rain on a tin roof. Eli grinned and pointed at the lantern, now dented along one edge. Mara laughed, surprised by how loud it sounded. Outside the stage door, the hallway's bright lights looked ordinary again, and the air smelled of floor cleaner. Still, she carried the little lantern carefully, as if its warm glow had followed her offstage.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does comparing the audience to a shaken jar of bees shape your sense of what Mara hears before the curtain opens?

2. What does the phrase "pressed against her throat like a stone" show about Mara's experience of waiting to speak?

3. Choose two details from the second paragraph that make Mara's stumble vivid. Explain what each detail adds to the moment.

4. Compare the audience's sound before the curtain opens with the sound of applause at the end. How do the two comparisons help show a change in Mara's feelings?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write one paragraph of 70 to 95 words about a character facing a small, unexpected problem in a place other than a theater. Use two precise sensory details and one original comparison to show how the character's feelings change.

ANSWER KEY

Before the Curtain

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-10.W.3.d

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three precise sensory details and circle two figurative phrases in the passage. Use your marks to track how Mara's feelings change. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does comparing the audience to a shaken jar of bees shape your sense of what Mara hears before the curtain opens?	**The comparison makes the audience sound restless and overwhelming, showing why Mara feels uneasy.**
2	What does the phrase "pressed against her throat like a stone" show about Mara's experience of waiting to speak?	**It makes her fear feel heavy and physical, as though speaking will be difficult.**
3	Choose two details from the second paragraph that make Mara's stumble vivid. Explain what each detail adds to the moment.	**"Her shoe caught the edge of a loose board" shows exactly what makes her stumble. "Its paper sides shivered" makes the swinging lantern's movement visible and heightens the tension.**
4	Compare the audience's sound before the curtain opens with the sound of applause at the end. How do the two comparisons help show a change in Mara's feelings?	**The shaken jar of bees makes the audience sound unsettling. Applause like rain on a tin roof sounds full and lively, reflecting Mara's relief after the performance.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the crowded bus stop, Nia reached for her ticket and found only a torn pocket. Cold rain slipped beneath her collar, and the bus's brakes hissed at the curb. Her thoughts scattered like buttons spilled across a sidewalk. Then she spotted the ticket caught in the seam of her backpack. She pulled it free as the doors folded open. The driver's warm greeting met her over the smell of wet pavement, and her shoulders loosened. She stepped aboard, holding the ticket firmly between two fingers.

Accept other passage-supported interpretations that explain how specific language affects the scene. For the writing task, look for a clear shift in feeling conveyed through precise sensory details and an original comparison.