

Harbor's Quiet Echo

Analyze how sound, imagery, and line structure shape a poem's meaning.

11.RL.2.A "Interpret and analyze how the sound and imagery of poetry support the subject, mood, form, and theme and appeal to the reader's senses."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two sound details and circle two sensory images. Number the three moments when the speaker's mood shifts, then use your marks to trace how the poem's short lines and repeated sounds develop its idea about absence.

At the Empty Dock

- ① Before dawn, the harbor holds its breath. Ropes tap the masts, tap, tap, against the docks. A buoy tolls once, then lets the dark water close. Salt lifts from the pilings and settles on my lips. Along the pier, fish crates shine with a thin skin of frost. I carry Father's empty thermos past the locked bait shop, listening for the engine that will not return. Each small sound widens the silence, as if the bay were a room waiting for a door to open.
- ② At first light, gulls tear white circles through the gray. Their cries scrape the sky, sharp as hooks. The tide slides under the boards with a hush, hush, pulling strands of seaweed through the cracks. I remember his hands smelling of diesel and oranges, the orange peel curling beside the wheel. Now a ferry enters the channel, low and blue, and its horn rolls over the roofs like thunder. For one bright moment, every window on the shore catches fire in the cold glass, then dims again to gray.
- ③ By noon, the dock has filled with ordinary work. Boots thud, carts rattle, and gulls argue over scales. Still, the missing engine beats beneath these noises. I set the thermos on a bollard warmed by sun and watch its silver lid reflect a broken strip of sea. The short lines stop and start like footsteps at the edge, while repeated taps and hushes keep time with waiting. When I finally leave, the harbor is loud, but the space beside me rings clearer than any nearby bell.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

- 1 Which two sounds in the first stanza create the quiet, expectant mood? Explain how they affect the silence.

- 2 How does the image of the father's hands smelling of "diesel and oranges" develop the poem's subject?

- 3 How does the poem's three-stanza movement from before dawn to noon support its theme?

- 4 Explain the contrast between the loud harbor at the end and the "space beside me" that rings "clearer than any nearby bell."

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Write a 6 to 8 line free-verse poem about waiting for a person or place. Include at least two sound details and two sensory images, then write exactly two sentences explaining how one sound and one image create mood and support a theme.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline two sound details and circle two sensory images. Number the three moments when the speaker's mood shifts, then use your marks to trace how the poem's short lines and repeated sounds develop its idea about absence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which two sounds in the first stanza create the quiet, expectant mood? Explain how they affect the silence.	The ropes that “tap, tap” and the buoy that “tolls once” are small, isolated sounds. They make the surrounding silence feel wider and emphasize the speaker's waiting.
2	How does the image of the father's hands smelling of “diesel and oranges” develop the poem's subject?	The smell recalls the absent father through a specific sensory memory. It makes the speaker's wait at the harbor personal rather than merely describing a place.
3	How does the poem's three-stanza movement from before dawn to noon support its theme?	Time moves from dawn to noon, but the speaker's sense of absence remains. The progression shows that ordinary activity and passing time do not end the waiting.
4	Explain the contrast between the loud harbor at the end and the “space beside me” that rings “clearer than any nearby bell.”	Although the harbor is full of noise, the speaker notices the absent person's place most strongly. The contrast supports the theme that grief or absence can overpower surrounding activity.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Rain needles the library windows. The return slot clacks, clacks, in the empty hall. Dust tastes dry on my tongue. A radiator hisses beside the blue chair. Your scarf, rough wool, hangs on its hook. I turn each page, waiting for the door. The clacking return slot makes the room feel impatient and lonely. The rough scarf makes the missing person seem close, supporting the theme that objects can preserve absence.

Accept supported interpretations of mood and theme, including loneliness, anticipation, grief, or enduring absence. For the open task, check for 6 to 8 lines, two sound details, two sensory images, and exactly two analytical sentences that connect choices to mood and theme.