Sound Beneath Silence

Analyze sound, imagery, personification, and irony in a civic-change scene.

11.RL.2 "Craft and Style Interpret and analyze how the sound and imagery of poetry support the subject, mood, form, and theme and appeal to the reader's senses. Evaluate how authors use specific word choices, syntax, tone..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three sound or sensory details, circle two examples of personification, and number two statements that say one thing but imply another meaning. Use these marks to track how the writer builds a critical mood about the town's plan.

The Last Elm's Hearing

1. At noon, the council placed the old elm behind a velvet rope, as if it were a witness likely to interrupt. Outside the glass doors, its leaves clicked like small green coins in a dry wind. Commuters hurried past with coffee cups, their faces lit blue by phones. A sign announced: RIVERFRONT RENEWAL, PARKING FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW. Beneath it, the elm's roots lifted the sidewalk into a crooked smile. Mara, who had climbed the tree after school for twelve years, pressed her palm to its bark and felt the rough ridges hold the day's heat.

2. Inside, the developer described the proposed garage as "a clean solution" in a clean, level voice. He promised safer traffic, easier shopping, and a view of the river, once the elm and three older brick storefronts were gone. The council chair nodded solemnly. "We must preserve the character of this town," she said, tapping a folder stamped DEMOLITION PLAN. Mara listened to the soft shuffle of papers, then to a truck coughing at the curb. The room seemed to applaud itself. No one mentioned that the new garage would charge twelve dollars a day.

3. That evening, rain polished the street until the lamps floated in every puddle. Mara returned with a jar of water and poured it slowly at the elm's base, though the storm had already soaked the soil. "There," she whispered, "now it can afford the view." The sentence sounded polite, but her hands shook. Above her, branches scraped the dark with a sound like pencils crossing out a name. By morning, yellow survey flags would circle the trunk. Mara imagined them as tiny warnings, or tiny flames, depending on who was looking.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What mood do the clicking leaves, shuffling papers, and coughing truck create? Explain the contrast between the natural and human-made sounds.

2. The elm is called a "witness," and its roots form a "crooked smile." How does this personification shape the conflict in the passage?

3. Why is the council chair's statement, "We must preserve the character of this town," ironic? State what she says directly and what the passage implies.

4. How do Mara's words, "now it can afford the view," create a sarcastic tone? What viewpoint about the garage project does this wording reveal?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 4 to 6 sentence scene about a familiar place changing. Include one sound image, one example of personification or symbolism, and one ironic or sarcastic statement that reveals your viewpoint. After the scene, add two brief labels explaining how your choices create mood and imply your viewpoint.

ANSWER KEY

Sound Beneath Silence

GRADE 11 · 11.RL.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three sound or sensory details, circle two examples of personification, and number two statements that say one thing but imply another meaning. Use these marks to track how the writer builds a critical mood about the town's plan. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What mood do the clicking leaves, shuffling papers, and coughing truck create? Explain the contrast between the natural and human-made sounds.	**They create an uneasy, restrained mood. The elm's living sounds contrast with the paper shuffling and truck noise, suggesting that impersonal development is closing in on the tree.**
2	The elm is called a "witness," and its roots form a "crooked smile." How does this personification shape the conflict in the passage?	**It gives the elm human-like presence and makes it seem affected by the decision. The conflict becomes more than a building project, because the tree appears to be a silenced participant facing removal.**
3	Why is the council chair's statement, "We must preserve the character of this town," ironic? State what she says directly and what the passage implies.	**She directly says the town should preserve its character. The passage implies the opposite because she supports demolishing the elm and older storefronts that help give the town its character.**
4	How do Mara's words, "now it can afford the view," create a sarcastic tone? What viewpoint about the garage project does this wording reveal?	**Her polite wording is sarcastic because water cannot help the tree "afford" anything. The commercial word "afford" criticizes a project that values parking and profit over the elm and the place it represents.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The library's radiator knocked beneath the quiet tables while movers carried boxes toward the new media lounge. Dust swam in the window light, and the empty shelves stretched their wooden mouths toward the door. "At last, more screens," I said, watching the poetry section disappear into a cart. The principal called the renovation a way to protect reading, although the plan cut the room of books in half. I touched the last worn atlas and heard the radiator answer. Labels: 1. The knocking radiator and the shelves' mouths make the library seem anxious and alive, creating a mournful mood. 2. "At last, more screens" and "protect reading" mean the opposite of what they say, criticizing a plan that removes books.

Accept supported interpretations of the imagery, personification, and symbols if students connect them to the conflict, mood, or viewpoint. For irony and sarcasm, students should distinguish the literal statement from the implied criticism and cite relevant wording.