

Wind at the Door

Read a dramatic scene for structure, character, theme, and historical context.

11.RL “The student will use textual evidence to demonstrate comprehension and build knowledge from a variety of grade-level complex literary texts read to include literary nonfiction (including world, British, and American literature).”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number the three bracketed stage directions 1, 2, and 3. Then underline Eli’s final spoken sentence to trace how the scene’s action and conflict change.

The Letter

- ① April 1936, a farm kitchen in the Oklahoma Panhandle. Eli, seventeen, folds a letter offering work at a California cannery. His mother, Mara, mends a flour sack near the stove. [Dust taps the windowpanes; a tin cup trembles on the table.] MARA: Your grandfather said this land could feed a family. ELI: It did, before the grass went under the plow. MARA: You talk as if leaving will make the wind forget us. ELI: No. I talk because it remembers every field we stripped bare. He places the letter beside the cup.
- ② Mara lifts the letter but does not open it. [The wind rises, and Eli braces the kitchen door with his shoulder.] MARA: California is a word on paper. Here, I know the names of every neighbor. ELI: Names do not stop dust from filling their lungs. MARA: And a cannery does not promise dignity. ELI: Neither does watching the garden disappear. He looks toward the window. ELI, aside: I want to be brave enough to stay, but I am more afraid of becoming part of this empty house. Mara hears only the wind and sets the letter down.
- ③ A sudden gust forces the door open. [Catalog pages whirl across the floor; Mara catches a picture of green orchard rows.] MARA: Your father planted shelterbelts after the first storm. He believed roots could hold a place together. ELI: Then let me go long enough to send money for seed. MARA studies the orchard picture. MARA: Take the letter. Do not mistake going for forgetting. Eli picks it up. The wind falls quiet, not defeated, but briefly answered. Outside, brown fields wait beneath a pale spring sky for rain.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

- 1 How do the three bracketed stage directions structure the scene and move the plot from conflict toward a decision?

- 2 What do Eli's dialogue about the plowed grass and his aside reveal about his reasons for leaving?

- 3 Explain how Mara's sentence, "Do not mistake going for forgetting," functions as a turning point in the scene and develops a theme.

- 4 How does the 1936 Oklahoma setting shape the characters' conflict? Use two details from the scene.

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Write a 6-line dramatic scene about a character reconsidering a choice because of the natural setting. Include exactly one bracketed stage direction and one aside, and use the scene to show a relationship between people and place.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Number the three bracketed stage directions 1, 2, and 3. Then underline Eli's final spoken sentence to trace how the scene's action and conflict change. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the three bracketed stage directions structure the scene and move the plot from conflict toward a decision?	The first direction establishes the dust threat, the second intensifies the conflict as Eli holds the door, and the third gives Mara the orchard image that helps her reconsider Eli's departure.
2	What do Eli's dialogue about the plowed grass and his aside reveal about his reasons for leaving?	His dialogue shows that he understands the damaged land and its consequences. His aside reveals that he wants to stay but fears being trapped in an empty, failing home.
3	Explain how Mara's sentence, "Do not mistake going for forgetting," functions as a turning point in the scene and develops a theme.	The sentence changes Mara from resisting Eli's plan to allowing it. It develops the theme that leaving a damaged home for survival does not have to mean abandoning one's connection or responsibility to that place.
4	How does the 1936 Oklahoma setting shape the characters' conflict? Use two details from the scene.	The Dust Bowl setting makes the conflict urgent because dust is filling homes and the garden is disappearing. The California cannery letter offers work, while Mara's mention of neighbors and shelterbelts shows her attachment to the community and land.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

[Rain drums on the roof of a Louisiana boat shed.] NIA: The river took the dock, but I can still leave before dawn.

JOSE: Leaving will not make the water less ours. NIA, aside: I thought escape meant I would never have to listen.

NIA: I will stay tonight and help tie the boats. JOSE: Then bring the rope from the shed.

Accept equivalent interpretations when students support them with specific dialogue, stage directions, or events. For the open task, look for six lines, one bracketed direction, one aside, and a clear connection between setting, choice, and theme.