

Compass at Dusk

Track how hidden motives and ordered clues build tension in a dramatic scene.

12.RL.1 "Key Ideas and Plot Details Analyze the development of universal themes (e.g., loss of innocence, coming of age, relationship with nature) prevalent in British literature (e.g., short stories, poems, plays, novels, essays...)"

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number five plot turns that build tension, then circle two lines that show a character pulled between competing goals. Use your markings to trace how choices and clues shape the scene.

The Signal House

- ① Rain taps the windows of a coastal signal house in 1887. Mara Vale, keeper's daughter, spreads a map beside the lamp. "The railway surveyors will blast the cliff by spring," she says. "If Father refuses to sell, they will build around us and leave this harbor to die." Elian, her brother, enters carrying a soaked gull with a broken wing. He sets it near the fire and reads the survey notice. While Mara bends over the map, he says quietly, "She calls it rescue, but the cliff has kept our family safe longer than any company." Outside, a horn sounds from the arriving train.
- ② At the door, their father's old coat hangs empty, although his boat should have returned before dusk. Mara folds the notice into her pocket. She admits that the railway agent promised money for medicine, then insists she has not agreed to anything. Elian lifts the gull, whose wing trembles against his palm. "Money could save him," he says, "but the blasting could ruin every nest on the headland." Mara moves toward the telephone, then stops when the horn sounds again, closer now. A knock follows. The agent enters, holding their father's brass compass. "He asked me to bring this," she says, "and to tell you he is delayed."
- ③ The agent places a contract beside the map and says the company needs an answer before the tide turns. Mara reaches for pen, but notices sand caught in the compass hinge. Their father never carried compass ashore when he sailed. Elian realizes the agent has come from the beach, not the train, and asks why she hid that fact. She answers that she found the boat drifting below the cliff. For a breath, Mara grips the pen as if signing could purchase certainty. Then she tears the contract in half and sends Elian to light the warning beacon. The gull beats its injured wing against the window as the horn fades.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How does Mara’s final choice develop a theme about the relationship between people and nature? Use two details from the scene.

2 How does the order of clues about the compass create tension and surprise?

3 What conflicting motivations does Elian express, and how do his actions advance the plot?

4 What does Elian’s quiet statement about the cliff let the audience understand before Mara makes her decision?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a 90 to 120 word final stage moment for a different coastal conflict. Include a character choosing between two important goals, a brief comment the audience can hear but another character cannot, and an ending detail that creates surprise or tension.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Number five plot turns that build tension, then circle two lines that show a character pulled between competing goals. Use your markings to trace how choices and clues shape the scene. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does Mara's final choice develop a theme about the relationship between people and nature? Use two details from the scene.	Mara first considers signing because the money could provide medicine, but she tears up the contract and orders Elian to light the beacon. Her choice places her father's safety and the threatened coast above the railway company's offer.
2	How does the order of clues about the compass create tension and surprise?	The agent's arrival with the compass first suggests that the father is merely delayed. Sand in its hinge, followed by the fact that he never carried it ashore, leads to the alarming revelation that his boat is drifting below the cliff.
3	What conflicting motivations does Elian express, and how do his actions advance the plot?	Elian recognizes that the railway money could save his father, but he also wants to protect the headland and its nesting birds. His suspicion of the agent exposes the danger, and he then lights the warning beacon.
4	What does Elian's quiet statement about the cliff let the audience understand before Mara makes her decision?	It reveals Elian's distrust of the company and his deep attachment to the cliff. This knowledge makes Mara's possible decision to sign feel more tense.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

On the pier, Nessa holds the eviction notice while her grandfather coils a rope. "The landlord will repair the roof if I sign," she says. He points to the flooded cottages across the bay. "Then our neighbors lose their boats." As he faces the sea, Nessa turns toward the darkened seats. "I want him warm, and I want them safe. Why must one promise cost the other?" A bell rings offshore. Grandfather finds a child's scarf tied to the rope, although no child sailed with him. Nessa drops the pen and runs to light the harbor lamp. Behind her, the bell rings twice more.

Accept responses that connect Mara's choice to protection of people, place, or nature and support claims with accurate details. For the open task, accept varied conflicts if the response includes all required dramatic and plot elements within the stated length.