Tidy Words, Empty Streets

Analyze how language exposes the gap between public promises and private consequences.

12.RL.2 "Craft and Style Evaluate how the use of figurative language in poetry and prose contributes to the reader's understanding of the subject, form, mood, and theme..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline figurative language and loaded diction, circle sarcastic, ironic, or understated statements, and number places where words imply more than they directly say, so you can trace how the passage creates its critical mood.

The Last Route

1 At six o'clock, Mara stood beneath the courthouse clock as rain stitched the empty square into gray cloth. Across the street, the council chamber glowed like an aquarium, bright and sealed against the weather. Inside, officials debated whether to close the last overnight bus route. Mara's father drove that route, carrying nurses, dishwashers, and students home after midnight. A banner over the entrance promised, "Transit for Every Neighbor." Mara watched a nurse step from a puddle-filled curb into traffic and thought the banner had chosen a curious definition of every.

2 When Councilman Vale announced that the cut would "streamline mobility," his polished voice floated above the room like a paper boat, neat until it met water. Mara raised her hand. "So the people who work while you sleep will be streamlined into walking?" she asked. Vale smiled. "We have posted a map." The map showed a blue line ending three miles from the hospital. Applause tapped politely around the chamber. Mara almost admired the plan's efficiency: it removed the bus, then asked riders to perform the missing service with their own feet.

3 After the vote, Mara followed her father to the depot. The buses crouched in their bays, their windows dark as shut eyes. He folded his route card and said the decision was "a little inconvenient." His hands, stained with engine oil, shook once before he put them in his pockets. Outside, the rain had stopped, but the square still held its cold shine. Mara imagined the official banner sagging over the entrance, each gold letter drinking water. By morning, the chamber would call the meeting orderly. The city, she understood, had learned how to make abandonment sound tidy.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the images of rain "stitched" into cloth and the council chamber "like an aquarium" shape the mood and the reader's view of the council members?

2. What is implied when Mara thinks the banner has "a curious definition of every"? Explain the irony between the banner's direct statement and the situation outside.

3. Why is Mara's question about workers being "streamlined into walking" sarcastic? What criticism does the sarcasm communicate?

4. Analyze the understatement in the father's phrase "a little inconvenient" and the final words "abandonment sound tidy." How do these choices develop the passage's tone and theme?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write exactly three sentences, 55 to 75 words total, about a public decision that harms people while sounding helpful. Include one figurative comparison, one sarcastic statement or understatement, and diction that creates a critical or bleak tone.

ANSWER KEY

Tidy Words, Empty Streets

GRADE 12 · 12.RL.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline figurative language and loaded diction, circle sarcastic, ironic, or understated statements, and number places where words imply more than they directly say, so you can trace how the passage creates its critical mood. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the images of rain "stitched" into cloth and the council chamber "like an aquarium" shape the mood and the reader's view of the council members?	**The images create a cold, enclosed mood. The rain-stitching image makes the square seem bleak, while the aquarium comparison presents council members as visible but sealed off from the people affected by their decision.**
2	What is implied when Mara thinks the banner has "a curious definition of every"? Explain the irony between the banner's direct statement and the situation outside.	**The banner directly promises transit for every neighbor, but Mara implies that overnight workers are being excluded. The promise is ironic because a nurse must step into traffic while the council considers ending the route.**
3	Why is Mara's question about workers being "streamlined into walking" sarcastic? What criticism does the sarcasm communicate?	**Mara uses "streamlined" sarcastically because closing the bus does not make travel easier. Her question criticizes officials for presenting a harmful service cut as efficient while shifting the burden onto riders.**
4	Analyze the understatement in the father's phrase "a little inconvenient" and the final words "abandonment sound tidy." How do these choices develop the passage's tone and theme?	**Calling the loss of the route "a little inconvenient" understates its serious effect on workers. "Abandonment" and "tidy" create a bitter, critical tone and develop the theme that official language can hide public neglect.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

When the school board locked the library at four, the building became a lighthouse with its lamp extinguished. "At least the new hours make access wonderfully simple," Jordan said, watching students press their faces to the glass. The notice called the change efficient, but its clipped, cheerful language made the loss feel colder, suggesting that convenience mattered more than the people left outside.

Accept varied interpretations when students support them with accurate language from the passage. For Part 3, confirm that the response has exactly three sentences, contains 55 to 75 words, and uses all three required craft choices.