Signal in the Fog

Track how style builds a suspenseful tone and narrator voice.

8.RL.2.B "Analyze how the elements of an author's style (e.g., dialogue, sentence structure and word choices) are used to influence and develop tone and voice."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three word choices that make the setting feel unsettling. Circle each line of dialogue and number the sentence fragments or very short sentences that heighten tension.

The Ferry Dock

1 By the time Mara reached the old ferry dock, the river had swallowed the moon. Fog pressed against the pilings and curled through the broken rails. She told herself that the light across the water was only a boat lamp, but it blinked once, twice, then vanished. "Hello?" Mara called. Her voice slipped into the gray air and came back smaller. She tightened her grip on the brass key in her pocket and stepped onto the dock.

2 At the end, a small bell trembled beside a locked gate. Mara stopped. The bell rang again, though no wind moved the fog. "That is not funny," she said, trying to sound annoyed instead of afraid. From beneath the boards came a scrape, slow and careful. Scrape. Pause. Scrape. Mara looked toward shore, where the town windows glowed like distant coins. Then the gate clicked open by itself. A cold drop struck her wrist. She did not move.

3 Inside the gate stood a narrow shed with its door ajar. Mara could leave. She knew that. Yet the key in her pocket felt warm now, almost alive, and the blinking light had returned behind the shed's dusty window. "I came for answers," she whispered. This time, something answered. A low hum rose from the river, and every bell along the dock began to ring. Mara lifted the key. The shed door swung wide, revealing stairs descending into darkness.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What tone do the phrases “the river had swallowed the moon” and “Fog pressed against the pilings” create? Explain how these word choices affect the mood.

2. How does Mara's dialogue develop her voice from the first paragraph to the third paragraph? Use two of her spoken lines in your answer.

3. What is the effect of the short sentences and fragments, “Scrape. Pause. Scrape.”?

4. How do the words “slipped” and “smaller” describe Mara's voice when she calls out? What do they reveal about her feelings?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence suspense scene with a cautious but determined narrator. Include one line of dialogue, one sentence fragment, and at least two precise word choices that build tension.

ANSWER KEY

Signal in the Fog

GRADE 8 · 8.RL.2.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three word choices that make the setting feel unsettling. Circle each line of dialogue and number the sentence fragments or very short sentences that heighten tension. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What tone do the phrases "the river had swallowed the moon" and "Fog pressed against the pilings" create? Explain how these word choices affect the mood.	**They create an ominous, tense tone. "Swallowed" and "pressed" make the river and fog seem threatening and powerful.**
2	How does Mara's dialogue develop her voice from the first paragraph to the third paragraph? Use two of her spoken lines in your answer.	**Her voice shifts from uncertain to more determined. "Hello?" sounds hesitant, while "I came for answers" shows that she is choosing to face the mystery.**
3	What is the effect of the short sentences and fragments, "Scrape. Pause. Scrape."?	**The clipped structure slows the moment and imitates the repeated sound under the boards, building suspense.**
4	How do the words "slipped" and "smaller" describe Mara's voice when she calls out? What do they reveal about her feelings?	**The words make her voice seem weak and fading. They reveal that Mara is frightened, even though she is trying to continue.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the empty train platform, I held the map beneath the yellow station light. Rain tapped the roof, quick and nervous. "The museum cannot be far," I said, although my boots had begun to shake. No turning back. I followed the muddy arrows beyond the tracks, choosing each careful step as if the darkness were listening.

Accept answers that connect specific dialogue, sentence structure, or word choices to a reasonable explanation of tone or Mara's voice. For the writing task, look for five sentences, dialogue, a fragment, precise language, and a cautious yet determined narrator.