

Light in the Stairwell

Analyze how poetic craft creates mood and develops a message.

9.RL.2.A “Analyze the use of rhyme, rhythm, sound, imagery, and other literary devices in poetry to convey a message and elicit a reader’s emotions.”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two images or comparisons, circle repeated words or sound patterns, and number one place where the mood changes so you can explain how the poem moves the reader from fear toward connection.

During the Blackout

- ① At midnight, the power fails, and our apartment building holds its breath. Elevators hush. Hallway bulbs blink once, then vanish. Outside, the city usually rattles with buses and brakes, but now rain taps the windows: tick, tick, tick. My little brother grips a flashlight as if it were a lighthouse. Its narrow beam slides across the ceiling, making the familiar room feel deep and strange. In the dark, every small sound grows taller, and I listen for the next bright thing that might return soon.
- ② Then a door opens downstairs, and Mrs. Alvarez calls, “Neighbors, come share the stairs.” Her voice is warm, a match struck against the cold. We gather on the landing with candles in jars, careful hands cupped around each flame. Someone brings oranges, bright as pocket suns. Someone else tells a joke, and laughter rises, falls, then rises again. The rain keeps its steady beat, but our voices answer it: low and slow, low and slow. For an hour, the building is not a stack of locked rooms. It is a small boat, carrying us together through the black water.
- ③ Near dawn, a transformer hums, then the lamps bloom one by one. Gold spills over the floorboards, softening the corners where shadows hid. My brother cheers, yet no one rushes back behind a closed door. Mrs. Alvarez passes the last orange around, and its sharp scent wakes the stairwell. The city begins again, clang and hiss, clang and hiss, but I hear it differently. Darkness did not make us fearless. It showed us that fear can loosen when people make light for one another. As daylight fills the windows, the building exhales.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

- 1 What effect does the repeated sound “tick, tick, tick” have in the first paragraph? Explain how it helps create the speaker’s emotion.

- 2 Choose one comparison from the poem, such as the flashlight as a lighthouse or the building as a boat. What does the comparison help you imagine, and how does it support the poem’s message?

- 3 How does the repeated phrase “low and slow” affect the rhythm of the second paragraph? What does that rhythm suggest about the neighbors?

- 4 How do the sound images change from “tick, tick, tick” to “clang and hiss”? What emotional change does this shift show?

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Write a 6 to 8 line poem about people responding to a sudden change, such as a canceled game or a blocked road. Use one repeated sound or phrase and one vivid image or comparison, then write two sentences explaining how those choices convey a message and emotion.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline two images or comparisons, circle repeated words or sound patterns, and number one place where the mood changes so you can explain how the poem moves the reader from fear toward connection. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What effect does the repeated sound “tick, tick, tick” have in the first paragraph? Explain how it helps create the speaker’s emotion.	The repeated rain sound makes the silence feel sharper and more noticeable. It helps create tension and unease in the dark building.
2	Choose one comparison from the poem, such as the flashlight as a lighthouse or the building as a boat. What does the comparison help you imagine, and how does it support the poem’s message?	The building as a small boat helps the reader imagine the neighbors traveling through danger together. It supports the message that people can help one another through fear.
3	How does the repeated phrase “low and slow” affect the rhythm of the second paragraph? What does that rhythm suggest about the neighbors?	The phrase creates a calm, steady rhythm. It suggests that the neighbors are answering the rain together and becoming calmer as a group.
4	How do the sound images change from “tick, tick, tick” to “clang and hiss”? What emotional change does this shift show?	The first sound pattern is quiet and tense during the blackout, while “clang and hiss” shows the city returning to life. The shift shows the speaker moving from fear to a changed, more hopeful awareness.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Rain drums, drum-drums, on the gym roof. Our game ends before the first whistle. Players and parents crowd the doorway, a flock of wet crows sharing towels. Then someone starts a clapping beat, and the gray afternoon learns to sing. The repeated “drum-drums” and clapping beat make the rain feel active, then turn its sound into a shared rhythm. The comparison to wet crows adds discomfort, while the singing image shows the group becoming hopeful.

Accept equivalent explanations that accurately connect a quoted or named device to an emotion, image, or message in the poem. For the open response, look for 6 to 8 lines, a clear repeated sound or phrase, a vivid image or comparison, and two sentences that explain their effects.