Harbor of Choices

Trace how a coastal setting drives action and reveals character.

9.RL.3.B "Explain the relationships between and among particular literary elements of a story or play, including how the setting shapes the plot and characters."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that describe Bellwether's weather, harbor, or tide, circle Mara's choices, and number each place where a setting detail causes an event or influences a choice.

The First Boat

1 At 5:10 each winter morning, Mara crossed the harbor town of Bellwether before school. The streets were still dark, and wind pressed salt spray through the gaps between the fish-market stalls. Her father repaired nets on the pier, so Mara knew the tide schedule better than most adults. On this Monday, however, the harbor bell rang three times, warning that a thick fog had swallowed the channel. From the hill, Mara could barely see the ferry dock. She tightened her coat and hurried there, because her older brother Eli was due home on the first boat.

2 At the dock, a chain blocked the ramp. The harbor master told Mara that no captain would leave until the fog lifted, since rocks waited beyond the breakwater. Mara imagined Eli standing on a deck with no view of shore. Instead of returning to school, she ran to her father's shed. There, she found the hand-crank radio used when storms cut the telephone lines. Her father was asleep after working overnight, but Mara remembered how he had shown her to tune the radio. She sent a message to the ferry office: Eli should stay aboard until daylight.

3 By noon, the fog thinned, but the tide had fallen so far that the ferry could not use the usual dock. The harbor master asked for someone small enough to carry a rope across the muddy flats to a temporary landing. Mara wanted to refuse. Cold mud would ruin her school shoes, and she feared slipping where the water had been. Then she saw her father awake beside the shed, watching her without speaking. Remembering the nets, the tides, and the radio, Mara took the rope. When Eli finally stepped ashore, he laughed at her muddy knees. Mara laughed too, certain that Bellwether had taught her how to act.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the fog create the story's first problem, and how does it affect Mara's actions?

2. How does Bellwether's harbor setting help Mara find a way to communicate with the ferry?

3. Explain how the changing tide shapes the plot near the end of the passage.

4. How does Mara's relationship with her father help reveal her character? Use two details from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence mini-scene set in a specific place. Include at least two setting details that create a problem and shape a character's choice.

ANSWER KEY

Harbor of Choices

GRADE 9 · 9.RL.3.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that describe Bellwether's weather, harbor, or tide, circle Mara's choices, and number each place where a setting detail causes an event or influences a choice. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the fog create the story's first problem, and how does it affect Mara's actions?	**The fog makes the channel unsafe, so the ferry cannot leave and Eli cannot come ashore. Mara goes to the dock, then runs to her father's shed to send a radio message.**
2	How does Bellwether's harbor setting help Mara find a way to communicate with the ferry?	**Because storms can cut telephone lines in the harbor town, Mara's father keeps a hand-crank radio in his shed. Mara knows how to tune it because he taught her.**
3	Explain how the changing tide shapes the plot near the end of the passage.	**The low tide prevents the ferry from using its usual dock. This creates the need for a rope to be carried across the muddy flats to a temporary landing.**
4	How does Mara's relationship with her father help reveal her character? Use two details from the passage.	**Her father's work repairing nets and his teaching about tides and the radio give Mara useful knowledge. She uses that knowledge to send a message and later chooses to carry the rope, showing that she is capable and responsible.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

During a blackout in the apartment tower, Nia climbed twelve flights with a flashlight and a bag of batteries. The dark stairwell and stopped elevator kept her from reaching her grandmother quickly, so she listened for each landing number. When she heard a child crying behind a door, Nia used one battery to light the family's hallway before continuing. The tower's darkness made her trip harder, but it also showed that she could stay calm and help others.

Accept answers that accurately connect a setting condition, such as fog, tide, mud, or the harbor's storm equipment, to an event or choice. For the open response, look for a clear setting-based problem and a character action that responds to it.