Structure: How a Scene or Stanza Builds the Whole

Name: _____	Date: _____	Score: _____ / 10

Quick Review

Every sentence, paragraph, scene, or stanza is a building block. Ask: what JOB does this piece do for the whole? Does it set the scene, introduce a problem, raise the stakes, slow things down, or turn the story in a new direction?

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Last Train Out of Cedar Junction

The Cedar Junction station, on the last night anyone would ever buy a ticket from it, smelled the way it had always smelled: of metal, old paper, and the lemon polish the night clerk used on the wooden counters. The board above the platform listed only one train — the 11:42 to Springfield — and beneath the listing, in chalk that someone had begun and not finished, were the words "Final service." June stood at the counter holding her grandfather's pocket watch in her palm. The watch said 11:09. The clerk, who had worked at Cedar Junction for forty-one years, watched her without saying anything at all.

June had come to Cedar Junction to do one thing: hand the watch to its real owner. Her grandfather, who had died in March, had bought the watch from a stranger at this station in 1962, and the stranger, sixty years later, had finally written to ask for it back. The letter was in June's coat pocket. So was a return address in Springfield. So was the photograph the stranger had enclosed — a black-and-white picture of a much younger man in a soldier's coat, holding the same watch.

At 11:21, an old man came through the station doors with a leather suitcase, sat down on the bench across from the counter, and did not look at June. For three full minutes she watched him without moving, comparing his face to the photograph in her pocket. The face was the same face, but sixty years older — the way her grandfather's face had been at the end. June walked over to the bench. She did not say hello. She held the watch out on her open hand, and the old man closed his eyes for a long time before he reached for it.

After the watch had changed hands, neither of them spoke for almost a minute. Then the man cleared his throat and said, "He kept it running." June said, "Every Sunday. He used the same little key." The old man nodded once and tucked the watch into his coat, against his chest, and at 11:42 exactly the last train out of Cedar Junction pulled into the platform with a long, slow sigh. June watched the man climb aboard. The clerk watched the train pull away. After it was gone, June set the photograph face-down on the counter, because she did not need it anymore, and walked out into the cold.

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Use the passage to answer each question. Each question is about how a SPECIFIC piece of the text fits into the whole.

1. What is the MAIN job of paragraph 1 in the story?

A. It explains exactly how a railway station is built and maintained.

B. It sets a quiet, ending mood and establishes the time, place, and watch — the three things the whole story depends on.

C. It introduces the old man who will receive the watch later in the story.

D. It argues that small-town train stations should be saved from closing.

2. What is the MAIN job of paragraph 2?

A. It slows the action so the reader can rest after an exciting opening.

B. It introduces a new character who will block June from completing her task.

C. It gives the BACKSTORY: why June is at the station and why this exchange matters.

D. It changes the setting from Cedar Junction to a different town.

3. Why is the SHIFT from paragraph 2 to paragraph 3 effective?

A. It moves from past explanation back to the present moment, returning us to the station just in time for the man to arrive.

B. It introduces a brand-new character who has nothing to do with June.

C. It abandons the watch as a topic and never returns to it.

D. It explains the rules of the railway company in detail.

4. What is the MOST IMPORTANT job of paragraph 3 in the structure of the story?

A. It delivers the CLIMAX — the moment June and the stranger meet and the watch changes hands.

B. It introduces a romantic subplot between June and the clerk.

C. It explains how trains work in 1962.

D. It begins a flashback to June's grandfather's funeral in March.

5. What job does paragraph 4 do for the WHOLE story?

A. It is a long pause that adds nothing because the climax has already happened.

B. It resolves the story by showing the small exchange of words, the train's arrival, and June letting the photograph go.

C. It begins a new plot about the clerk's career at Cedar Junction.

D. It introduces a stranger who tries to steal the watch back.

6. Look at this sentence at the end of paragraph 1: "The watch said 11:09." Why does the writer place this detail right HERE in the structure?

A. To prove that the watch is broken and needs to be repaired.

B. To explain to the reader how a pocket watch is wound.

C. To start a clock for the reader — the rest of the story will arrive on a schedule (11:21, 11:42), creating quiet tension.

D. To show that June is impatient and wants to leave the station immediately.

7. Look at the LAST sentence of the passage: "After it was gone, June set the photograph face-down on the counter, because she did not need it anymore, and walked out into the cold." Why does this sentence work well as the LAST sentence?

A. It opens a new mystery the story has not yet introduced.

B. It releases the object that began as a tool of identification — completing the structural arc from carrying objects (watch, letter, photograph) to letting go of them.

C. It reveals a surprise twist that completely changes the story.

D. It returns the story to the year 1962 and ends in flashback.

8. Which sentence BEST describes the OVERALL structure of the passage?

A. A long argument followed by a short story example.

B. A scene set in the present, a flashback for context, a climactic meeting, and a quiet resolution.

C. Four parallel scenes set in four different towns.

D. A scene that repeats itself with small changes each time.

9. Choose ONE paragraph in the passage. In 2-3 sentences, explain the JOB that paragraph does for the whole story. Use one specific detail from that paragraph in your answer.

_____

_____

10. Imagine the writer had moved paragraph 2 (the backstory about the watch and the letter) to the very END of the story instead of putting it second. Explain ONE thing the story would LOSE by that change. Use a specific detail to support your answer.

_____

_____

Answer Keys

1	A	**B**	C	D	6	A	B	**C**	D
2	A	B	**C**	D	7	A	**B**	C	D
3	**A**	B	C	D	8	A	**B**	C	D
4	**A**	B	C	D	9	See below			
5	A	**B**	C	D	10	See below			

Explanations

1. B	"Final service" + the watch in June's palm + the silent clerk = mood, time, place, and the central object — exactly what paragraph 1 must set up. A is too literal (no construction is described); C is wrong (the old man does not appear until paragraph 3); D is a position-statement the story never argues.
2. C	Paragraph 2 reaches back to 1962 and explains the letter, the photograph, and the purpose — the backstory that makes paragraph 3's wordless exchange land. A is wrong (the opening is not action); B is wrong (no blocker appears); D is wrong (the setting does not move).
3. A	Paragraph 2 is backstory; paragraph 3 returns to the clock (11:21) and the doors — a clean shift from explanation back to action. B reverses the meaning (the man is the WHOLE point); C contradicts the rest of the story; D adds rules the text never mentions.
4. A	Every earlier paragraph points at this exchange — the wordless hand-off IS the climax. B invents a subplot; C invents technical content; D reverses the time direction (paragraph 2 already covered the past).
5. B	Paragraph 4 closes every thread — the few words spoken, the 11:42 arriving on time, and June setting the photograph face-down because she is finished. A is wrong (the resolution adds meaning, not nothing); C is a side character given a story he does not get; D invents an antagonist.
6. C	Once the reader sees 11:09, every later time stamp (11:21, 11:42) builds tension on that ticking spine — a structural choice, not just a detail. A contradicts "He kept it running" later; B is too literal; D adds a feeling the text never gives June.
7. B	June arrives carrying three objects; she leaves carrying none — letting go of the photograph closes a structural circle that started in paragraph 2. A is wrong (no new mystery); C is wrong (no twist — the reveal already happened); D is wrong (the ending stays in the present, in the cold).
8. B	Paragraphs 1–4 do exactly those four jobs in order — present setup, backstory, climax, resolution. A is wrong (no argument); C is wrong (one location); D is wrong (no repetition).
9.	**Answer:** Strong answers name the job AND quote a specific detail. Examples: Paragraph 1 establishes mood and setup ("Final service" + watch saying 11:09); Paragraph 2 provides backstory (the 1962 purchase, the letter, the photograph in June's coat pocket); Paragraph 3 delivers the climactic exchange (June holding the watch out on her open hand, the old man closing his eyes); Paragraph 4 resolves the story (the few spoken words, the train at 11:42, the photograph set face-down). NOT acceptable: answers that summarize the paragraph without naming its STRUCTURAL job; answers that pick a paragraph but quote a detail from a different paragraph; answers with no specific detail. Job names to consider: "sets the scene," "gives backstory," "raises stakes," "delivers the climax," "resolves the story."

10.	**Answer:** Strong answers explain that without the early backstory, the wordless exchange in paragraph 3 would not LAND — readers would not yet know why June is offering the watch, who the man is, or why "the face was the same face, but sixty years older." The recognition moment depends on the photograph and the letter the reader learned about in paragraph 2. Acceptable variations: tension on the times (11:09 → 11:42) would not feel meaningful without knowing what June is waiting to do; the line "He kept it running" in paragraph 4 would feel small instead of large without the 1962 history. NOT acceptable: answers that just say "it would be confusing" without naming what becomes confusing; answers that argue the order does not matter. Ask what paragraph 3 or 4 needs the reader to ALREADY KNOW to feel like a real meeting instead of a random scene.

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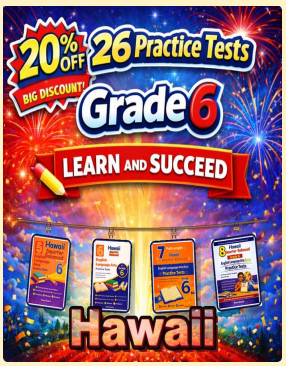

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