

# Answer Key: Theme and Author's Craft

**Course:** English II (Grades 9–12) **Subject:** English Language Arts & Reading **For teacher use only** RLA

## How to use this key

Answers are grouped by section and question number. Many items are open-ended; accept any response that shows correct reasoning and cites the story, even if the wording differs. Notes flag where more than one answer is defensible and list common misconceptions to watch for. Paragraph numbers below refer to the bracketed markers [1]–[9] in the story. Estimated grading time: ~6–8 min per packet.

## Start Predict & Warm Up grade for effort · ~2 min

1 Predict the object and the character's role from the title.

Accept any reasonable prediction: the **lantern/lamp/light** will matter most, and the main character keeps, tends, or guards a light (a "keeper," like a lighthouse keeper). Grade for a sensible prediction, not for matching the story exactly.

2 Term warm-up (match the craft term).

"A lit lamp in a window comes to stand for hope and purpose." → **B (symbolism)** — an object standing for a bigger idea.

"We learn a character is loyal because she keeps a promise through storms and fevers." → **C (characterization)** — showing what a character is like.

"The idea that we must let go of the past to keep serving the living." → **A (theme)** — a message about life.

All three correct = full credit; grade for reasonable effort on this warm-up.

## Build Read the Story ~1 min

3 The grandmother's request in paragraph [2].

From **paragraph [2]**: the grandmother pressed the **brass lantern** into Nadia's hands and asked her to **keep the light burning** — she said, "**Someone out there is always looking for a light. Don't let it go out.**" Accept any answer that names the promise to keep the light lit and references that instruction.

## Apply Analyze the Story ~3 min

4 Trace how the theme develops.

**Beginning ([1]–[3]):** Nadia sees the light as a **duty or promise owed to her dead grandmother** — a habit she keeps alone, feeling heavier and emptier as the harbor empties and she doubts anyone is watching.

**Turning point ([4]–[7]):** the lost girl followed the light down the cliff road; Nadia realizes the girl "had not needed Nadia's grief... only the flame" — the light is for **the living, not a debt to the dead**.

**Theme (one sentence):** accept any accurate statement of the message, e.g., "We must let go of the past — even our grief — to keep the promise that truly matters: serving whoever comes next." Also acceptable: "A promise is

kept not by clinging to the dead but by giving light to the living." **Reject a bare topic** ("grief," "promises," "lighthouses") — the theme must say something *about* life.

5 Characterization with evidence (Nadia is dynamic).

**Early detail:** e.g., paragraph [3] — "Each dusk she climbed the ninety-seven steps feeling heavier... the flame smaller against the enormous dark," or [7] "a duty owed to the dead — a debt she paid alone." Shows her task feels like a lonely burden.

**Late detail:** paragraph [8] she moves the lantern to her kitchen window "where... any traveler could see it," or [9] she climbs "feeling, for the first time in eleven years, strangely light."

**Change:** full credit if the student pairs a valid early detail and late detail (each with a paragraph number) and explains that Nadia shifts from a **grieving, burdened keeper of a private debt** to someone who keeps the light **for others / for the living**, and feels lighter for it.

6 Identify the craft element (symbolism) and its effect.

**What the light symbolizes:** the lantern/light stands for **purpose, hope, and care for others** — and, by the end, a promise kept for the living rather than a debt paid to the dead. Early on it also carries the weight of **grief and duty**.

**Effect:** because the light is a symbol, Nadia's inner change is made **visible and physical** — moving the lamp to a window travelers can see shows her new understanding without the author stating it directly. The symbol lets the theme be *shown*, making it more powerful and memorable.

Full credit for naming what the light stands for **and** explaining that the symbol carries/develops the theme (shows change, avoids a flat "moral").

7 Best evidence for the theme.

**7a — B.** "It had been about keeping something alight for whoever came next — and letting the rest of them go." This directly states both halves of the theme: **serving the living** and **letting go of the past**.

Why the others are weaker: **A** and **D** are setting/plot details; **C** shows Nadia's burden but not the resolution/theme.

**7b:** accept any sentence explaining that B captures the story's message about letting go and serving the living, while the others are background or a single feeling.

## Explain Analytical Response on Theme (Q8) ~2–3 min

8 C-E-R response — state the theme, prove it with two details, reason.

This is **analysis, not summary**. A strong response states a theme (Claim), supports it with **two** details or quotations (Evidence, with paragraph numbers), and explains how each develops the theme (Reasoning). **Model response:**

"The theme of 'The Lantern Keeper' is that we must let go of the past to keep the promises that truly matter to the living. At first, Nadia treats the light as a debt to her dead grandmother — 'a duty owed to the dead... a debt she paid alone' (paragraph [7]) — and climbing to light it leaves her feeling 'heavier' ([3]). But when a lost girl says, 'it's the only light out here' ([6]), Nadia sees that 'the girl... had not needed Nadia's grief... only the flame' ([7]). By moving the lantern to a window 'any traveler could see' ([8]), she keeps the promise for the living instead of the dead. Together these details show that the promise was never about grief — it was about giving light to whoever comes next, which is why Nadia finally feels 'strangely light' ([9])."

Full credit for: (a) a clear **theme statement** (the Claim), (b) **two** specific details or quotations with paragraph numbers (Evidence), and (c) **reasoning that connects each to the theme** — not just naming them. A response that only retells the plot has *summarized, not analyzed*; score it low on reasoning.

9 (**Block period only**) Analyze how the symbol shapes the theme.

The added paragraph should track the **lantern/light as a symbol** across the story and tie it to the theme. **Model paragraph:**

"The lantern is the author's central symbol, and its meaning shifts to carry the theme. At the start the light stands for a **debt to the dead**: Nadia keeps it 'in the cold, to a grandmother who could no longer see it' ([7]), so it feels like a burden ([3]). After the girl follows it down the cliff road, the same flame comes to stand for **care for the living** — Nadia moves it where 'any traveler could see it' ([8]). Because the author shows this shift through the object rather than stating the lesson outright, the theme lands more powerfully: we *watch* Nadia change when she moves the light, and the final pun on 'strangely light' ([9]) fuses the symbol with her relief."

Full credit for a paragraph that (a) explains what the symbol means early vs. late and (b) argues that the shifting symbol develops/strengthens the theme, citing at least one paragraph.

## Response scoring rubric (3 points, Q8)

| Score | Claim (theme)                                        | Evidence (two details)                                                  | Reasoning (how it develops the theme)                               |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3     | Clear theme statement about life (not just a topic). | Two specific details or quotations, each tied to the correct paragraph. | Explains <i>how</i> each detail develops the theme — true analysis. |
| 2     | Theme present but vague, or stated as a near-topic.  | One solid detail, or two with a minor error or vague location.          | Some reasoning, but partly slips into retelling.                    |
| 1     | Only a topic ("grief," "promises"); no real theme.   | Evidence vague, off-topic, or not from the story.                       | Plot summary only; no link to theme.                                |
| 0     | No claim / off-task.                                 | No evidence.                                                            | No reasoning.                                                       |

## Close ACE ~1 min

ACE Articulate / Connect / Extend.

**Articulate:** accept any accurate one-sentence restatement of the theme (letting go of the past to keep the light for the living).

**Connect:** the clearest change moment is **paragraph [7]** (Nadia realizes the girl needed the flame, not her grief) or **[8]** (she moves the lantern for travelers). Accept either with a valid reason.

**Extend:** "light" is a **pun / double meaning** — Nadia feels physically **light** (not heavy, since [3] she felt "heavier") and is also carrying the **light/lantern**. The author ends on it to show her burden of grief has lifted. Accept any answer that names both meanings and links to her relief.

## Watch Common misconceptions

- **Topic vs. theme.** Students often write a topic ("grief," "promises," "lighthouses") instead of a theme. A theme is a full statement *about life* ("keeping a promise means understanding who it was really for"). Push for a sentence, not a word.
- **Summary vs. analysis.** On Q8 students may retell the plot instead of proving the theme. Analysis states the theme and explains how details build it; summary just says what happens. Require a claim plus reasoning.
- **Symbol = the literal object.** On Q6 some students say the light "symbolizes a lamp." A symbol stands for a *bigger idea* (purpose, hope, caring for the living). Anchor them: what does the object *mean* beyond itself?
- **Static vs. dynamic character.** On Q5 students may describe Nadia without showing change. A dynamic character is different by the end; require an early detail *and* a late one that contrast.
- **Missing the shift in the symbol.** Strong answers note the light *changes meaning* (debt to the dead → light for the living). Crediting only one meaning misses how the craft develops the theme.

## Teacher follow-up based on likely errors

If many students write a topic instead of a theme, run a 5-minute mini-lesson contrasting a topic word ("promises") with a theme sentence ("a promise can trap us until we understand what it was really for"). If Q6 symbol answers stay literal, sort a few lines aloud by what the lantern *means* at that point in the story. The Q4, Q5, and Q6 items quickly reveal who can trace theme, track a dynamic character, and read a symbol; the Q8 response — and, on block days, the Q9 craft paragraph — show who can state a theme and defend it with evidence and reasoning.

HS\_ENG2\_ThemeCraft\_01 — Theme and Author's Craft in Fiction Teacher Answer Key