

Tone, Diction & Rhetorical Devices

Course: English IV (Grades 9–12) **Subject:** English Language Arts & Reading **Time:** ~50-min period, or a ~90-min block (adds deeper analysis of syntax) **Work mode:** Independent · pencil only RLA

Start Here

This is a **close-reading task**. You will read an original reflective nonfiction passage, then analyze **how the writer's word choices create a tone** — the writer's attitude toward the subject — and how **rhetorical devices** (such as imagery, parallelism, and metaphor) shape the reader's experience. You will work with a pencil only; you do **not** need a computer or any device. Every question can be answered **from the passage itself** — the evidence is on the page. When you are asked to explain, write in complete sentences, and always name the **paragraph** you are drawing from. If a question is hard, skip it, keep going, and come back. Reading the passage quietly aloud to yourself is allowed and encouraged — you will often *hear* the tone before you can name it.

Start Predict & Warm Up 5 min

Look only at the title and the first sentence of the passage before you read the rest.

1The passage is titled "**The Long Shift**." Its first sentence is: "**My grandmother's hands were a map I read every summer without knowing it.**" From the title and this first line alone, **predict the writer's attitude** toward the grandmother — is it likely to be cold, admiring, angry, indifferent? What in the wording makes you say so?

2**Craft-term warm-up.** Match each craft term to what it describes. Write the letter (A, B, or C) on each blank.

A. tone — the writer's attitude toward the subject, shown through word choice · **B. diction** — the specific words a writer chooses · **C. imagery** — language that appeals to the five senses

___ Choosing "weathered" instead of "old" to describe a pair of hands.

___ The overall feeling of quiet respect that runs through a piece of writing.

___ "The kitchen smelled of scorched coffee and lemon soap."

Build Read Closely 12 min

Words to know (for close reading of craft)

tone

the writer's attitude toward the subject or audience, revealed through word choice and detail.

diction

the writer's specific choice of words (formal or casual, harsh or gentle, plain or ornate).

connotation

the feelings or associations a word carries beyond its dictionary meaning (e.g., "thrifty" vs. "cheap").

imagery

descriptive language that appeals to the senses — sight, sound, smell, taste, touch.

syntax

the way words and phrases are arranged into sentences (short and clipped, or long and flowing).

"The Long Shift" — an original reflective essay

[1] My grandmother's hands were a map I read every summer without knowing it. The knuckles rose like worn hills; thin rivers of vein ran beneath skin gone soft and pale as old paper. She had pressed dough, wrung mops, and buttoned forty years of other people's coats with those hands, and by the time I was old enough to notice, they had settled into a permanent, patient curve, as if still holding something I could not see.

[2] She worked the long shift at the hospital laundry, from four in the afternoon until midnight. I remember the smell of her when she came home: bleach and steam and, under it, the faint sweetness of the peppermints she kept in her coat pocket for the walk. She did not complain. She did not sigh. She hung her coat on the same nail, set the kettle on the same burner, and asked me, every single night, what I had learned that day.

[3] I did not understand then what those hours cost her. I understood only that the light in the kitchen was warm, that the tea was strong, and that she listened to my small reports of fractions and spelling words as though they were the news of the world. She made my ordinary day feel important. She made me feel important. That, I see now, was its own kind of work — quieter than the laundry, and harder.

[4] There was a dignity in how she moved through her tiredness. She did not perform her exhaustion for sympathy, and she did not hide it to seem strong. She simply carried it, the way she carried the heavy laundry carts, the way she carried me when I was small: without announcement, without asking whether the load was fair. To carry a thing without complaint is not the same as not feeling its weight. I know that now.

[5] On the last night before I left for school, she pressed a folded twenty-dollar bill into my palm and closed my fingers over it with both of her hands. "For books," she said, though we both knew it was for far more than books. Her hands were warm and dry and certain. I have spent years trying to earn the confidence she placed in that small, deliberate gesture — the trust that I would go, and learn, and become someone worth the long shift.

[6] She is gone now, and the map of her hands is gone with her. But I find that I have learned it by heart. When I am tired, when the work is dull and the hour is late, I think of the same nail, the same kettle, the same steady question about what I have learned. And I set my own shoulders and go on. Some inheritances are not money; they are a way of standing in the world. Hers was the quiet, unhurried courage of the long shift, and it is the richest thing I own.

3In paragraph [2], the writer lists three things the grandmother did each night ("She hung her coat... set the kettle... and asked me... what I had learned"). Copy one specific detail from that paragraph that shows her steady, uncomplaining routine.

Apply Analyze the Craft 20 min

Every answer in this section is in the passage. Point to the paragraph in your head before you write.

4**Name the tone.** In one word or a short phrase, name the writer's overall **tone** — the attitude toward the grandmother. (Think: how does the writer seem to *feel* about her?)

5**Find the diction that creates it.** Copy **two** specific words or short phrases from the passage whose **word choice** helps create the tone you named in #4. For each, name the paragraph and, in a few words, explain the feeling it carries (its connotation).

Word/phrase #1 — paragraph # — feeling it carries

Word/phrase #2 — paragraph # — feeling it carries

6**Analyze one rhetorical device.** The passage uses several devices, including **imagery** ("bleach and steam"), an extended **metaphor** (the grandmother's hands as "a map"), and **parallelism** ("the same nail, the same kettle, the

same steady question"). Choose **one** device, name it, quote where it appears (with the paragraph #), and explain its **effect** — what it makes the reader see or feel, and how it supports the tone.

Device + quotation + paragraph #

Effect (what it makes the reader see/feel + how it supports the tone)

7Track a shift in tone. The tone does not stay exactly the same from start to finish. Paragraphs [1]–[4] mostly **remember and describe**; paragraph [6] turns toward the present and the writer's own life. Describe how the tone **shifts** by the final paragraph, and quote one word or phrase from [6] that signals the change.

How the tone shifts by paragraph [6]

Word/phrase from [6] that signals the shift

8Which word choice best signals the tone? The tone toward the grandmother is one of quiet admiration and respect. Which of the following word choices from the passage **best signals** that tone? Fill in the circle for ONE choice.

- "the long shift at the hospital laundry, from four in the afternoon until midnight"
- "the quiet, unhurried courage of the long shift, and it is the richest thing I own"
- "She hung her coat on the same nail, set the kettle on the same burner"
- "a folded twenty-dollar bill into my palm"

8b. In one sentence, explain why the word choice you chose signals the tone more strongly than the others.

Explain Close-Reading Response 10–15 min

Question 9. Write a **close-reading response** that explains **how the writer creates the tone** of "The Long Shift." Do not summarize the story — **analyze the craft**. State the tone (and what the passage ultimately means), then support your claim by discussing **specific diction** and **one rhetorical device**, explaining *how each one* builds the tone. Use the C-E-R frame below and name the paragraph for each piece you cite.

Sentence stems you may use: "The tone of the passage is ____, and it suggests that..." · "The writer's word choice — for example, ____ in paragraph ____ — creates this tone because it carries a feeling of..." · "The writer also uses ____ (a device) in paragraph ____; its effect is to ____, which deepens the ____ tone." · "Together, these choices show the writer's attitude of..."

Claim (the tone and what the passage means)

Evidence (specific diction + one rhetorical device, each with paragraph #)

Reasoning (how each word choice and the device create/deepen the tone)

Block period only (~90-min class): Analyze how syntax and structure reinforce the tone.

Question 10. Look at how the sentences themselves are built. Paragraph [2] uses short, plain, repeated sentence openings ("She did not complain. She did not sigh."); paragraph [1] uses one long, flowing sentence full of images. **Explain how the syntax — the length and arrangement of the sentences — and the overall structure (moving from the remembered past to the present in [6]) reinforce the passage's tone.** Quote at least one example and name the paragraph. Write your analysis on the lines below.

Close ACE Wrap-Up 5 min

Articulate

Name the passage's **tone** in your own words, in one sentence, as if telling a friend how the writer feels about the grandmother.

Connect

Name the **one word choice or device** you think does the **most** to create that tone, and point to the paragraph.

Extend

If the writer changed the tone to **bitter or resentful**, name **one word** in the passage they would have to swap out, and what they might replace it with.

Continue Early Finisher optional

If you finish early (no new materials needed):

Rewrite a paragraph in a new tone. On the back of this page, take paragraph [2] and rewrite it so that the tone becomes **cold and resentful** instead of warm and admiring. Change only the **word choices** (diction) — keep the same events. Then underline the three words you changed that did the most work to shift the tone.

Turn in: Hand in this whole packet with your name, class period, and date filled in. Make sure questions 1–9 and the ACE box are answered. Question 10 (syntax/structure) is for block periods; the early-finisher rewrite is optional — turn either in if you did it.

HS_ENG4_ToneDiction_01 — Tone, Diction & Rhetorical Devices Student Packet