

English Skill Builder Set A – Reading Comprehension (Extended)

Instructions: Read the passage carefully and answer all 25 questions that follow. Questions include multiple-choice (MC) and short-answer (SA). Base your answers strictly on the information and tone of the passage.

Passage:

The Memory of Light by Katherine Vega

The house at the end of Alder Lane had stood empty for years. To most, it was just a sagging silhouette, its eaves caved in like tired eyelids, its shutters hanging at odd angles like broken limbs. But to Mira, the house was alive—not with ghosts or mystery, but with memory.

She first noticed it on the morning her grandfather died. The sky had worn an unrelenting grey, and the silence in their home was a hollow, gaping thing. Mira had wandered down Alder Lane that day, tugged by something she couldn't name. The house had seemed to lean slightly toward her, as though acknowledging her grief.

From then on, she visited often. Each time, she noticed something new: the delicate etchings on the brass doorknob, the spiderweb cracks in the upstairs windowpane, the way the ivy refused to grow over a small square beside the front step. She never went inside. It wasn't fear that kept her out—it was reverence. The house seemed to demand distance, like a stranger in mourning.

As Mira grew older, her visits became less frequent but no less meaningful. On days when her parents fought or when school felt unbearable, she would find herself sitting across the street, notebook in hand, sketching the angles of the roof or scribbling stories of who might have lived there before the shutters sagged and the garden surrendered to weeds.

One April, the house was sold. Mira saw the sign one rainy morning—a red and white announcement staked into the lawn like a warning. She felt a pang she didn't expect, a sense of trespass.

The new owners wasted no time. Within weeks, the overgrown hedges were trimmed into polite shapes, the broken shutters replaced, the front porch painted a blinding white. Mira watched, day by day, as the house's quiet dignity was peeled away, replaced by cheerful symmetry and newness. She hated it.

The first time she saw the new owners—a couple with bright clothes and louder laughter—she nearly turned away. But something held her. She watched them bring in boxes, heard them call to each other from different rooms. They painted the walls lemon yellow. They planted tulips.

One afternoon, a boy about her age appeared. He looked awkward, like a misplaced bookmark in a story already half-finished. Mira didn't mean to speak to him, but he noticed her watching.

"You used to come here a lot," he said, not unkindly.

She nodded. "It mattered to me."

He didn't laugh, just looked at the house, then back at her. "It still does. Want to see what we found in the attic?"

Inside, the air smelled like lemon soap and new wood. The furniture gleamed. But some things remained: the doorknob still bore its delicate engravings. The ivy still avoided that one square by the step. In the attic, he showed her a box of letters, yellowed with age, bound with ribbon. They read them in silence. The words inside spoke of longing, of oceans crossed and promises kept.

"They loved each other," Mira said softly.

"Looks like it," the boy agreed.

She left that day feeling something new: not the ache of memory, but the warmth of it.

Questions:

1. (MC) What does the house at the end of Alder Lane most symbolize for Mira?
A) A haunted memory
B) A place of fear
C) A living repository of emotion
D) A forgotten part of the neighborhood
2. (SA) What initial event draws Mira to the house, and how does this establish its emotional significance for her?
3. (MC) Which of the following best describes the tone of the passage?
A) Humorous and light-hearted
B) Reflective and poignant
C) Bitter and sarcastic
D) Detached and journalistic
4. (MC) Why does Mira choose not to enter the house initially?
A) She fears it is haunted
B) It is locked and inaccessible
C) She believes it deserves respectful distance
D) She wants to avoid being caught trespassing
5. (SA) Explain the symbolic importance of the ivy refusing to grow over a square beside the front step.

6. (MC) What literary device is used in the description: "its eaves caved in like tired eyelids"?
- A) Simile
 - B) Metaphor
 - C) Personification
 - D) Hyperbole
7. (MC) How does the house change after the new owners arrive?
- A) It is torn down and rebuilt
 - B) It becomes a modern apartment
 - C) It is repainted and redecorated
 - D) It is abandoned again
8. (SA) Describe Mira's reaction to the renovation of the house. What does this reveal about her character?
9. (MC) What does the attic box of letters most likely represent in the context of the story?
- A) The boy's secret life
 - B) A connection to the house's past
 - C) Evidence of a crime
 - D) Random junk left by the previous owners
10. (MC) Which sentence best illustrates Mira's changing perception of the house?
- A) "She hated it."
 - B) "She never went inside."
 - C) "She left that day feeling something new."
 - D) "It mattered to me."
11. (SA) Why is Mira's sketching and writing about the house significant?
12. (MC) The boy in the story can be best described as:
- A) Nosy and arrogant
 - B) Friendly and observant
 - C) Cold and indifferent
 - D) Awkward and dismissive
13. (MC) What theme is most prominent in this passage?
- A) Adventure and discovery
 - B) Isolation and alienation
 - C) Memory and transformation
 - D) Competition and rivalry
14. (SA) What effect does the discovery of the letters have on Mira?

15. (MC) What might the author be suggesting about the relationship between people and places?
- A) People destroy the value of places
 - B) Places are static while people change
 - C) Emotional connections can transcend physical changes
 - D) Places are meaningless without documentation
16. (MC) What kind of narrative point of view is used in this passage?
- A) First-person
 - B) Second-person
 - C) Third-person limited
 - D) Omniscient narrator
17. (SA) How does Mira's relationship to the house evolve from childhood to adolescence?
18. (MC) Which line contains a metaphor?
- A) "The shutters hanging at odd angles like broken limbs."
 - B) "The sky had worn an unrelenting grey."
 - C) "Notebook in hand, sketching the angles of the roof."
 - D) "Like a misplaced bookmark in a story."
19. (MC) The attic letters most directly serve to:
- A) Show the boy's knowledge of history
 - B) Introduce a new conflict
 - C) Add depth to the house's past
 - D) Reveal the house was haunted
20. (SA) Why is the final line of the story important?
21. (MC) The contrast between the old house and the renovation serves to highlight:
- A) The economic value of renovation
 - B) The superficiality of appearances
 - C) The erasure of emotional history
 - D) The importance of interior design
22. (SA) What might the boy's offer to show the attic signify in terms of bridging the past and present?
23. (MC) The phrase "like a stranger in mourning" refers to:
- A) The boy's reaction to Mira
 - B) The ivy on the wall
 - C) The house's quiet solemnity
 - D) Mira's fear of entering

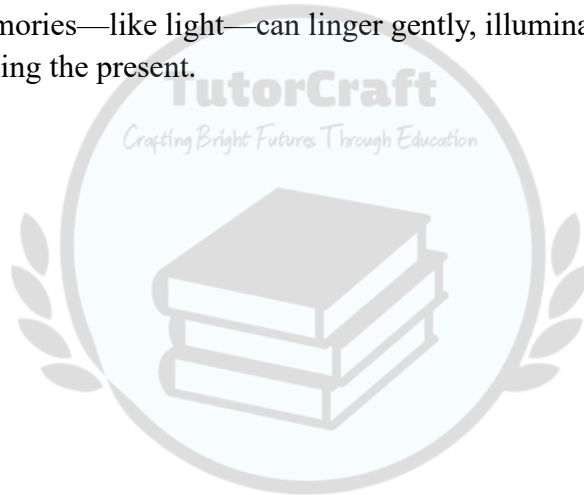
24. (MC) What is implied by the boy being described as a "misplaced bookmark"?
- A) He is curious and talkative
 - B) He does not belong in the house
 - C) He feels uncertain in his role
 - D) He is rude to Mira
25. (SA) Reflect on the title "The Memory of Light." What layers of meaning does it carry in relation to the story?
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Answer Key – English Skill Builder Set A

1. C) A living repository of emotion
2. Her grandfather's death; it marks the house as a vessel of comfort and quiet reflection during grief.
3. B) Reflective and poignant
4. C) She believes it deserves respectful distance
5. It suggests a preserved or sacred spot, hinting at a past memory or marking that resists time and nature.
6. A) Simile
7. C) It is repainted and redecorated
8. She feels a sense of violation and loss, showing her deep emotional sensitivity and connection to memory.
9. B) A connection to the house's past
10. C) "She left that day feeling something new."
11. It shows her emotional processing through creativity and her attempt to preserve what the house represents.
12. B) Friendly and observant
13. C) Memory and transformation
14. They give her peace and a sense of shared human connection, helping her move from grief to warmth.
15. C) Emotional connections can transcend physical changes
16. C) Third-person limited

17. As a child, she finds solace in it; as a teen, it becomes a symbol of identity and creative refuge.
18. B) "The sky had worn an unrelenting grey."
19. C) Add depth to the house's past
20. It signals Mira's emotional shift—from clinging to the past to embracing its memory as a source of comfort.
21. C) The erasure of emotional history
22. It represents a willingness to share and blend memory with present experience, opening new emotional doors.
23. C) The house's quiet solemnity
24. C) He feels uncertain in his role
25. It suggests that memories—like light—can linger gently, illuminating past emotions without overwhelming the present.

End of Answer Key



English Skill Builder Set B – Reading Comprehension (Extended)

Instructions: Read the following passage carefully and answer all 25 questions that follow. Include both multiple-choice (MC) and short-answer (SA) responses. Base your answers only on the passage content.

Passage:

The Cartographer's Gift by Eliza Stone

To most, maps are mere tools—charts to navigate terrain, to measure and conquer space. But to Anya Morales, maps were something far more intimate: they were memory stitched in ink, fragments of home preserved on parchment.

Her grandfather, Emilio, had been a cartographer in Argentina before political upheaval had exiled him to the north. He never complained of the cold, but Anya often saw him tracing invisible routes on his knee with one finger, his eyes distant. She remembered the thick leather-bound atlas he carried with reverence, the pages worn soft at the corners, edges frayed like an old flag. Each page, he told her, was a poem.

Growing up in Vancouver, Anya's own relationship to place had been fragmented. Her parents worked long hours. She had no siblings. Their apartment changed nearly every year, each rental cheaper and smaller than the last. Her only consistency was the soft shuffle of Emilio's slippers and the smell of tea and cedar that lingered in his maps.

He taught her to draw contour lines, to shade for elevation, to trace coastlines so carefully it felt like breathing. When he died, she was sixteen. She did not cry at his funeral. Instead, she went home and pinned his atlas above her desk. Then she picked up a pencil.

She sketched endlessly. Not realistic maps, but maps of emotions, of days and moments. The way the kitchen felt when her mother burned the toast again. The outline of a silent argument. A scale diagram of laughter over dinner. She titled them like songs: *Map of Being Forgotten*, *Topography of Sunday Afternoons*, *Isobar of Loneliness*. Her sketchbooks filled slowly. She showed no one.

Years later, she found herself in an art class at university, sleep-deprived and unsure of her major. When the professor asked them to submit something "honest and spatial," she turned in a watercolor called *Relief Map of Missing Grandfathers*. It showed nothing but a single winding path across a wash of muted browns and greens, ending in an empty blue field.

Her professor had not said much. But two weeks later, he handed her a list of art schools and grants.

Now, at twenty-nine, Anya stood at the edge of her first gallery showing. She felt nauseous. Strangers leaned in, tilting heads at *Emotional Currents, 1997–2009*. A child pointed to *Fault Lines of Farewell*. An elderly woman touched the frame of *Migration Patterns (After Emilio)* and whispered something inaudible.

Anya stayed near the back. She didn't know what she expected. Validation? Closure? Applause? But none of that arrived. Instead, she watched a teenage girl examine *Chronology of Forgetting* for a long time, then quietly wipe a tear. And somehow, that was enough.

She never stopped mapping.

Questions:

1. (MC) What do maps symbolize for Anya in the passage?
 - A) Geographic orientation
 - B) Scientific accuracy
 - C) Emotional and personal memory
 - D) Professional ambition
2. (SA) Describe Anya's relationship with her grandfather and how it shaped her artistic perspective.
3. (MC) What is the tone of the passage?
 - A) Detached and analytical
 - B) Reverent and introspective
 - C) Bitter and resentful
 - D) Satirical and ironic
4. (MC) What was Anya's emotional reaction to her grandfather's death?
 - A) She wept uncontrollably
 - B) She refused to acknowledge it
 - C) She mourned by turning to art
 - D) She moved to Argentina
5. (SA) How does Anya's map-making evolve from childhood to adulthood?
6. (MC) What literary device is used in the phrase: "Each page, he told her, was a poem"?
 - A) Hyperbole
 - B) Simile
 - C) Personification
 - D) Metaphor
7. (MC) Anya's first major artwork in university was titled:
 - A) *Migration Patterns*

- B) *Relief Map of Missing Grandfathers*
- C) *Topography of Sunday Afternoons*
- D) *Chronology of Forgetting*

8. (SA) What significance does the gallery scene hold in the arc of Anya's journey?
9. (MC) Why does Anya remain near the back during her gallery showing?
 - A) She was uninvited and nervous
 - B) She preferred observing reactions to receiving praise
 - C) She wanted to sell artwork quietly
 - D) She felt her work was incomplete
10. (MC) Which of the following best describes Emilio's impact on Anya?
 - A) He made her fear change
 - B) He grounded her with emotional and creative tools
 - C) He pressured her into cartography
 - D) He discouraged her emotions
11. (SA) Explain how Anya's map titles reflect her emotional state and worldview.
12. (MC) The professor's response to Anya's art can best be described as:
 - A) Harsh and dismissive
 - B) Formal and critical
 - C) Quietly affirming
 - D) Indifferent
13. (MC) Which theme is most prominent in the story?
 - A) Revenge and forgiveness
 - B) Survival and betrayal
 - C) Memory and creative expression
 - D) Fame and sacrifice
14. (SA) What is the role of sensory imagery (smell, texture, color) in shaping the narrative?
15. (MC) What feeling is conveyed by the title *Fault Lines of Farewell*?
 - A) Anger
 - B) Guilt
 - C) Fragility and grief
 - D) Adventure
16. (MC) The phrase "maps of emotions, of days and moments" is an example of:
 - A) Technical jargon
 - B) Symbolic abstraction
 - C) Sarcasm
 - D) Plot twist

17. (SA) How does the teenage girl's reaction at the gallery affect Anya?
18. (MC) What does *Migration Patterns (After Emilio)* likely represent?
- A) Animal behavior
 - B) Political exile and legacy
 - C) Cartographic mistake
 - D) Anya's move to a new city
19. (MC) Which line best expresses the passage's central message?
- A) "She never stopped mapping."
 - B) "Each rental cheaper and smaller than the last."
 - C) "She showed no one."
 - D) "She felt nauseous."
20. (SA) Why might Anya consider the map-making process more than just art?
21. (MC) Anya's work is described as "honest and spatial." What does this reveal about her art?
- A) It is technically precise
 - B) It is deeply personal and symbolic
 - C) It is meant to criticize politics
 - D) It is geographically accurate
22. (SA) In what ways does the passage explore generational inheritance?
23. (MC) The phrase "edges frayed like an old flag" serves to:
- A) Show Emilio was in the military
 - B) Indicate wear and historical pride
 - C) Reveal the book was never opened
 - D) Suggest nationalism
24. (MC) Which of the following best describes Anya's emotional growth?
- A) From grief to suppression
 - B) From neglect to confusion
 - C) From detachment to quiet confidence
 - D) From ambition to failure
25. (SA) Reflect on the dual meaning of the title *The Cartographer's Gift*. What might it represent?

Answer Key – English Skill Builder Set B

1. C) Emotional and personal memory

2. Emilio taught Anya both the technical and emotional value of maps, embedding in her a sense of creative storytelling and reverence for place.
3. B) Reverent and introspective
4. C) She mourned by turning to art
5. As a child, Anya learned cartographic skills from her grandfather; as she matured, she transformed maps into emotional expressions, capturing feelings instead of geography.
6. D) Metaphor
7. B) *Relief Map of Missing Grandfathers*
8. It marks the culmination of her emotional and creative journey—a moment of quiet recognition rather than external validation.
9. B) She preferred observing reactions to receiving praise
10. B) He grounded her with emotional and creative tools
11. Her map titles reflect internal landscapes and emotional narratives, showing how she translates memory and experience into visual form.
12. C) Quietly affirming
13. C) Memory and creative expression
14. These sensory details deepen the emotional realism, anchoring memory in tangible sensations like scent and texture.
15. C) Fragility and grief
16. B) Symbolic abstraction
17. The girl's tear validates Anya's work as meaningful and relatable, providing the emotional closure she didn't know she needed.
18. B) Political exile and legacy
19. A) "She never stopped mapping."
20. It is a form of emotional mapping and memory preservation, connecting her deeply to self and heritage.
21. B) It is deeply personal and symbolic
22. The passage explores how skills, values, and emotional legacies pass from Emilio to Anya, shaping her identity and art.
23. B) Indicate wear and historical pride

24. C) From detachment to quiet confidence

25. It refers both to Emilio's literal skill as a cartographer and the emotional legacy he left Anya—the ability to map memory and meaning.

End of Answer Key



English Skill Builder Set C – Reading Comprehension (Extended)

Instructions: Read the following passage carefully and answer all 25 questions. This set contains both multiple-choice (MC) and short-answer (SA) questions that test inference, theme, character insight, and author’s craft. Base answers only on the passage.

Passage:

Letters from the Platform by Noah Erskine

Every weekday at precisely 4:56 p.m., Sam Ellis stood on Platform 3 of the Newton commuter station, briefcase in hand, eyes fixed on the far end of the track. To the casual observer, he looked like any other worn-down office worker waiting for the 5:01 train to take him home. But Sam’s eyes always searched for something else—something more.

The platform itself was unremarkable: chipped yellow paint at the edge, a battered vending machine offering tepid soda, a faded sign warning commuters to “Stand Behind the Line.” Yet to Sam, it was sacred ground. For over a year now, he had stood in the same spot, rain or shine, sleet or scorching sun, watching trains pull in and out with mechanical regularity. What he waited for, however, never arrived in steel or steam. He waited for a glimpse of her.

She was never there on purpose. In fact, Sam doubted she ever noticed him. She only appeared some Thursdays, always on the 4:53 from Bellwood, stepping out with a weathered canvas bag, a slight limp in her left foot, and a book clutched tightly in her hand. She would walk briskly to the stairs, never looking up, always gone in less than 30 seconds.

Sam had never spoken to her. He didn’t know her name, her job, or what made her laugh. All he knew was that something about her presence felt like the missing punctuation in his otherwise monotone life.

He began writing letters.

They were never mailed. Some were torn up the moment he finished writing. Others were folded carefully and stored in the second drawer of his desk. In them, he told her things he couldn’t say out loud: that her hair reminded him of October evenings, that he noticed how she always wore her left glove slightly crooked, that on days she didn’t appear, the sky seemed heavier.

By the end of the year, there were over fifty letters. Each one addressed to “The Girl on the 4:53.”

One evening, the train stalled just outside the station. Commuters groaned. Sam waited, heart drumming, eyes scanning. She stepped off, finally, with her usual limping pace and book in hand. But this time, she hesitated at the bottom of the stairs. For a split second, she turned.

Their eyes met.

It was no more than a glance. Then she was gone.

The next day, Sam returned to Platform 3. This time, he held a sealed envelope. Inside it: the last letter he'd ever write. He placed it beneath the vending machine, weighed it down with a coin.

She never came that day.

Nor the next.

Weeks passed. Sam no longer waited.

Then, one afternoon, returning late from a meeting, he passed through Newton station by chance. A cleaner was sweeping the far corner. A girl, much younger, was reading a novel by the bench. And there, taped beside the vending machine, was a worn envelope. On it: his handwriting.

It had been opened.

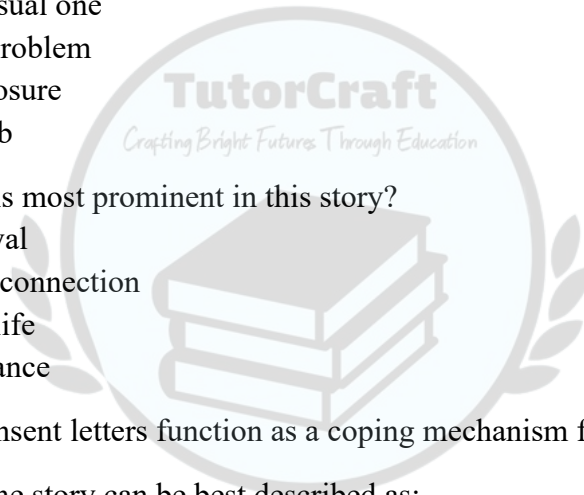
Next to it, in unfamiliar print, was a note: "I read every one. Thank you."

Sam smiled. And for the first time in months, took a different train.

Questions:

1. (MC) What is the primary function of Platform 3 in the story?
 - A) A symbol of Sam's routine
 - B) A backdrop for dramatic events
 - C) A literal train stop only
 - D) A dangerous setting for conflict
2. (SA) Describe Sam's emotional journey over the course of the story.
3. (MC) What does the "Girl on the 4:53" represent to Sam?
 - A) A missed job opportunity
 - B) A fantasy of what life could be
 - C) A threat to his routine
 - D) A casual commuter
4. (MC) The letters Sam writes are best understood as:
 - A) Confessions of guilt
 - B) Observations about public life
 - C) Private emotional expressions
 - D) Professional reports
5. (SA) Why is the glance between Sam and the girl a pivotal moment?

6. (MC) What literary device is used in “something about her presence felt like the missing punctuation”?
- A) Metaphor
 - B) Hyperbole
 - C) Allusion
 - D) Irony
7. (MC) What does Sam’s choice to leave the envelope signify?
- A) He is letting go of routine
 - B) He is asking her out indirectly
 - C) He expects her to reply
 - D) He is preparing to leave the city
8. (SA) What does the final note suggest about the girl’s perspective?
9. (MC) Why does the story end with Sam taking a different train?
- A) He missed his usual one
 - B) He is fleeing a problem
 - C) He has found closure
 - D) He has a new job
10. (MC) What theme is most prominent in this story?
- A) Romantic betrayal
 - B) Hope and silent connection
 - C) Chaos in urban life
 - D) Loss and vengeance
11. (SA) How do the unsent letters function as a coping mechanism for Sam?
12. (MC) The tone of the story can be best described as:
- A) Sardonic
 - B) Melancholic yet tender
 - C) Sarcastic
 - D) Frantic
13. (MC) What role does time play in the structure and meaning of the story?
- A) It emphasizes randomness
 - B) It creates a chaotic rhythm
 - C) It establishes ritual and longing
 - D) It distorts reality
14. (SA) Why do you think Sam never approached the girl directly?
15. (MC) The unopened letters represent:
- A) Rejection



- B) Hidden hope
 - C) Bureaucracy
 - D) Time wasted
16. (MC) Which line best expresses the story's emotional climax?
- A) "Then she was gone."
 - B) "He placed it beneath the vending machine..."
 - C) "Their eyes met."
 - D) "Commuters groaned."
17. (SA) Analyze the symbolism of the vending machine in the story.
18. (MC) The girl's limp and crooked glove likely indicate:
- A) Physical trauma
 - B) Lack of self-awareness
 - C) Visual motifs for Sam's focus on details
 - D) Unreliability
19. (MC) Why is Sam described as taking a different train at the end?
- A) To create ambiguity
 - B) To signal emotional movement
 - C) To introduce new characters
 - D) To break from public transport
20. (SA) What is the significance of the unopened envelope being taped publicly?
21. (MC) The use of capital letters in "The Girl on the 4:53" implies:
- A) Legal documentation
 - B) Personification and importance
 - C) Government records
 - D) Misuse of grammar
22. (MC) The weather and time motifs in the story reinforce:
- A) Comedic tone
 - B) Danger
 - C) Sam's routine and anticipation
 - D) An impending disaster
23. (SA) What message might the author be conveying about unspoken emotional connections?
24. (MC) The cleaner, the girl with the novel, and the taped note all serve to:
- A) Add comic relief
 - B) Emphasize chaos

- C) Show life has moved on
- D) Create dramatic tension

25. (SA) Reflect on the story title “Letters from the Platform.” What layers of meaning does it carry?

Answer Key – English Skill Builder Set C

1. A) A symbol of Sam’s routine
2. Sam moves from quiet longing and emotional isolation to a moment of human connection and eventual closure.
3. B) A fantasy of what life could be
4. C) Private emotional expressions
5. It marks the first and only moment of acknowledged connection between them, validating Sam’s emotions.
6. A) Metaphor
7. A) He is letting go of routine
8. She not only noticed the letters but read and appreciated them, suggesting unspoken emotional understanding.
9. C) He has found closure
10. B) Hope and silent connection
11. They allow Sam to process feelings he cannot express openly, giving form to longing without confrontation.
12. B) Melancholic yet tender
13. C) It establishes ritual and longing
14. He fears disrupting the purity of his feelings, or fears rejection; writing allows him safe emotional expression.
15. B) Hidden hope
16. C) “Their eyes met.”
17. The vending machine represents the mundane backdrop against which Sam stages his quiet, vulnerable act of leaving the letter.
18. C) Visual motifs for Sam’s focus on details

- 19. B) To signal emotional movement
- 20. It symbolizes emotional vulnerability brought into the open and mutual recognition without words.
- 21. B) Personification and importance
- 22. C) Sam's routine and anticipation
- 23. That even unspoken or unnoticed feelings can have meaning, and silent gestures may still connect people.
- 24. C) Show life has moved on
- 25. The title references both the literal act of writing letters while waiting and the metaphorical platform of emotional pause and transit.

End of Answer Key

