Name _____ Date _____

Imagery and Mood in a Poem: Tidewater

Directions: Read the poem carefully, more than once if possible, and notice how its images change from stanza to stanza. Then answer each question, checking every choice against the exact words of the poem.

Tidewater

At low tide the river leaves the town,
sliding back from the pilings, brown and slow,
and the fishing boats slump over in the mud
like workers too tired to make it home.

The marsh breathes out its smell of salt and rot.
A heron stands so still it could be a post,
while crabs scrawl their small complaints across the flats
and gulls quarrel over what the water left.

On the porches, no one says very much.
The afternoon hangs heavy as wet rope,
and even the flag outside the bait shop droops,
as if it, too, were waiting to be told.

Then, near evening, something in the channel turns.
A thin, bright edge of water finds the reeds,
fills the footprints, lifts the leaning hulls,
and sets the tied-up rowboats knocking at the dock.

The heron opens like a folded map and goes.
The flag shakes out its colors in the wind,
and all along the shore the porch lights come on
and double in the water coming in.

1. In the first stanza of "Tidewater," the fishing boats "slump over in the mud" and are compared to "workers too tired to make it home." What mood does this comparison help to establish at the opening of the poem?

A. A tense, threatening sense of danger
B. A peaceful, restful calm
C. A weary, exhausted heaviness
D. A cheerful feeling of satisfaction after work

2. Which two details from "Tidewater" most clearly indicate that the people of this town earn their living from the water? Select two.

☐ A. the reeds ☐ B. the porches ☐ C. the bait shop
☐ D. the heron ☐ E. the fishing boats

3. The second stanza opens with the line "The marsh breathes out its smell of salt and rot." How does the word "rot" affect the reader's impression of the town at low tide?

A. It warns that the marsh is dangerous for people to walk on.
B. It indicates that the season has turned to autumn.
C. It adds a sense of decay, making the uncovered marsh seem stale and unpleasant.
D. It makes the marsh seem fresh and full of new life.

4. In the second stanza, the crabs scrawl "small complaints" across the flats while the gulls "quarrel over what the water left." What do these particular word choices contribute to the mood?

A. A deep and frightening violence
B. A peaceful, orderly calm
C. A petty, grumbling irritation
D. A playful, cheerful energy

5. In the third stanza, what does the simile "The afternoon hangs heavy as wet rope" suggest about the way time feels to the people of the town?

A. It drags, feeling slow and burdensome.
B. It passes quickly, like rope sliding through a hand.
C. It is busy with ropes to tie and chores to finish.
D. It brings a rainstorm that soaks the entire town.

6. The flag outside the bait shop droops "as if it, too, were waiting to be told." What does the word "too" suggest in this line?

A. The flag is not the only thing waiting, so the whole town seems to be holding still.
B. The flag is about to be taken down for the night.
C. The flag is the only thing in town that is waiting.
D. The flag is about to be lifted by a rising wind.

7. The fourth stanza begins with the line "Then, near evening, something in the channel turns." How does the shift in imagery in this stanza change the poem's mood?

A. Images of the town give way to the open sea, and the mood turns lonely.
B. Images of light give way to darkness, and the mood turns frightening.
C. The images remain much the same, and so does the mood.
D. Images of stillness give way to moving water and light, and the heavy mood begins to lift.

8. Read this line from the final stanza: "The heron opens like a folded map and goes." What does the simile help the reader to visualize?

A. The heron's folded wings spreading wide as it takes off
B. The heron folding itself up to sleep
C. The heron studying the marsh to find its way home
D. The heron standing perfectly still among the reeds

9. The boats, the heron and the flag each appear before the tide turns and again after it returns. What is the effect of bringing these images back near the end of the poem?

A. It shows that nothing in the town has really changed.
B. It suggests that the speaker is dreaming the same scene twice.
C. It lets readers see the same things transformed, which sharpens the change in mood.
D. It introduces new characters for the end of the poem.

10. The poem ends as the porch lights "double in the water coming in." What is the effect of concluding "Tidewater" with this particular image?

A. It closes by showing that the town has gone to sleep.
B. It closes with the speaker leaving the town for good.
C. It closes on warmth and fullness, as the returning water shines with the town's lights.
D. It closes with a warning that the water will flood the town.