Name _____ Date _____

A Shift in Tone in a Poem: After the Game

Directions: Read the poem carefully, listening for how the speaker sounds from one stanza to the next. Then answer each question, checking every choice against the exact words of the poem.

After the Game

Don't tell me that we almost had them.
The ref was blind, the gym was a furnace,
and Cole, who swore all week he wanted the last shot,
launched a brick that never even touched the rim.

I would have made it, and everybody knows that.
Give me the ball with three seconds left
and I will hit it from the parking lot,
eyes closed, one hand, the way I always do.

So yes, I slammed my locker. Yes, I said
a few things to the coach I won't repeat,
and when the bus pulled up I took the back seat
and put my headphones on and turned them up.

But then I saw Cole through the window,
still in his jersey, sitting on the curb,
his little brother leaning on his shoulder,
both of them staring at the dark gym doors.

And I remembered how, with eight seconds left,
the coach had looked at me, and I had looked away.
Cole only shot because I wouldn't ask for it.
Tomorrow I will tell him that. Tonight, I'll wave.

1. The poem opens with the line "Don't tell me that we almost had them." What attitude toward the loss does this opening line establish?

A. Cheerful pride in how well the team played
B. Calm acceptance of a close loss
C. Quiet sadness for a struggling teammate
D. Defensive irritation, as if the speaker refuses to hear any comfort

2. Which two phrases from "After the Game" show the speaker blaming other people for the team's loss? Select two.

☐ A. "eyes closed, one hand, the way I always do"
☐ B. "launched a brick that never even touched the rim"
☐ C. "The ref was blind"
☐ D. "Tonight, I'll wave."
☐ E. "still in his jersey, sitting on the curb"

3. In the second stanza, the speaker boasts about hitting the shot "from the parking lot" with "eyes closed, one hand, the way I always do." What attitude does this exaggeration reveal?

A. Boastful overconfidence
B. Honest self-doubt
C. Bitter regret
D. Polite modesty

4. The third stanza begins, "So yes, I slammed my locker." The following sentence opens with "Yes" again. What does this repeated "yes" suggest about the speaker's attitude toward what happened after the game?

A. The speaker admits the outburst impatiently, as if answering a complaint, without apologizing.
B. The speaker is calmly agreeing that the coach was right.
C. The speaker has forgotten what was said to the coach.
D. The speaker is apologizing to everyone on the team.

5. In which line of "After the Game" does the speaker's tone begin to change?

A. "and put my headphones on and turned them up."
B. "But then I saw Cole through the window,"
C. "Give me the ball with three seconds left"
D. "Tomorrow I will tell him that. Tonight, I'll wave."

6. Through the bus window, the speaker notices Cole "still in his jersey, sitting on the curb," with "his little brother leaning on his shoulder" beside him. How does this image change the way the speaker sees Cole?

A. Cole now looks like someone who does not care about the loss.
B. Cole now looks like the best player on the team.
C. Cole now looks like someone who is hurting, not someone to blame.
D. Cole now looks like someone who is waiting to start an argument.

7. Near the end of the poem, the speaker remembers that "the coach had looked at me, and I had looked away." How does this memory change the meaning of the speaker's boasting in the second stanza?

A. It shows that the speaker did not see the end of the game.
B. It proves that the speaker really could have made the shot.
C. It shows that the coach never trusted the speaker.
D. It shows that the speaker avoided the very shot the second stanza brags about wanting.

8. The poem's final words are "Tonight, I'll wave." What does this small, specific plan suggest about the speaker's attitude toward Cole?

A. A gentle wish to reconnect with Cole before the harder talk tomorrow
B. A plan to avoid Cole by waving instead of ever talking to him
C. Relief that the basketball season is finally over
D. A sarcastic way of mocking Cole from the bus

9. Early in the poem, the speaker says "Don't tell me"; at the end, the speaker promises "Tomorrow I will tell him that." What does this change in the use of the word "tell" show about the speaker?

A. The speaker still believes that the referee caused the loss.
B. The speaker has moved from refusing to hear the truth to being ready to say it.
C. The speaker wants someone else to explain the loss to Cole.
D. The speaker has decided never to discuss the game again.