Name _____ Date _____

Varying Syntax for Effect: Fragments, Inversions and Short Sentences

Directions: Read the personal essay. Some questions ask you to identify the syntactic structure a sentence uses; others ask what a structural choice accomplishes, and the essay states that answer nearby.

Playing in the Dark

I play second violin, which means that I spend most concerts counting rests and watching other people's bows. Our spring concert had been rehearsed for four months, through a winter of snow days and broken strings and a conductor who stopped us every eight bars to fix the same crescendo, and by the night of the performance I believed that nothing could surprise us anymore. Parents filled the front rows with their phones ready and grandparents settled into the back, while younger siblings squirmed in between, kicking the seats in front of them as the house lights dimmed and Ms. Delgado raised her baton. Then the lights went out.

Every light in the building failed at once: the stage lights, the hallway lamps and the glow of the soundboard. Total darkness. For a moment the only sound was the uneasy rustle of two hundred people shifting anxiously in their seats. Ms. Delgado did not lower her baton, though none of us could see it. Somewhere behind me, a percussionist dropped a mallet, and the clatter seemed to go on forever.

Out of the dark came the sound of a single cello. Before any of us could see who was playing, we could hear that it was Priya, picking up the melody at exactly the bar where we had stopped. One by one, the rest of us found our places by ear. The violas came in first and the basses after them, and the first violins, who had been sitting closest to the cello all along, joined last.

Up went the phones in the audience, first a few and then hundreds, until the auditorium glowed like a field of fireflies. Two hundred screens, held high. The audience began to sing along, quietly at first, then louder, the parents in the front rows and the grandparents in the back, a small boy standing on his seat to conduct.

What do you do when the music is still going and the lights are not? You keep playing. You trust the person beside you, you listen harder than you have ever listened and you let the room fill in whatever you cannot see.

When the lights finally flickered back on, after eleven minutes of darkness, after a final chord that none of us had seen Ms. Delgado conduct and after a silence long enough to make us wonder whether we had imagined the whole thing, the audience rose to its feet. We had never played better. Not one wrong note. We had never played blind before, either. Ms. Delgado says she still does not know how we stayed together, but I think we simply refused to stop listening.

1. The first paragraph ends with the sentence "Then the lights went out." Which syntactic choice does this sentence demonstrate?

A. Inverted order: the verb comes before the subject it goes with

B. A fragment: an incomplete sentence used on purpose for emphasis

C. A rhetorical question: a question asked for effect, not an answer

D. A short complete sentence placed right after longer sentences

2. According to the sentence that immediately follows it, what does "Then the lights went out." describe?

A. The audience growing restless during a long piece

B. A blackout that the stage crew had planned in advance

C. The lights dimming slowly over several minutes

D. Every light in the building failing all at once

3. Which syntactic choice does "Total darkness." illustrate in this passage?

A. Inverted order: the verb comes before the subject it goes with

B. A fragment: an incomplete sentence used on purpose for emphasis

C. A short complete sentence placed right after longer sentences

D. A rhetorical question: a question asked for effect, not an answer

4. Which syntactic choice does the sentence "Out of the dark came the sound of a single cello." illustrate?

A. A rhetorical question: a question asked for effect, not an answer

B. A fragment: an incomplete sentence used on purpose for emphasis

C. A cumulative sentence: a main clause first, then phrases of detail

D. Inverted order: the verb comes before the subject it goes with

5. The essay says, "Out of the dark came the sound of a single cello." Which experience described in the next sentence does that word order echo?

A. The cello was much louder than all of the other instruments onstage.

B. The cellist hoped that no one in the hall would learn who had played.

C. The players heard the cello before they could see who was playing.

D. The cello part had been recorded weeks before the concert began.

6. Which syntactic choice does this sentence show?

"The audience began to sing along, quietly at first, then louder, the parents in the front rows and the grandparents in the back, a small boy standing on his seat to conduct."

A. A cumulative sentence: a main clause first, then phrases of detail

B. A fragment: an incomplete sentence used on purpose for emphasis

C. Inverted order: the verb comes before the subject it goes with

D. A periodic sentence: the main clause is held until the very end

7. How would you classify the structure of this sentence from the final paragraph?

"When the lights finally flickered back on, after eleven minutes of darkness, after a final chord that none of us had seen Ms. Delgado conduct and after a silence long enough to make us wonder whether we had imagined the whole thing, the audience rose to its feet."

A. A periodic sentence: the main clause is held until the very end

B. A cumulative sentence: a main clause first, then phrases of detail

C. A rhetorical question: a question asked for effect, not an answer

D. A fragment: an incomplete sentence used on purpose for emphasis

8. Which two of these quotations from the essay are intentional fragments rather than grammatically complete sentences?

☐ A. "Two hundred screens, held high."

☐ B. "We had never played better."

☐ C. "Not one wrong note."

☐ D. "One by one, the rest of us found our places by ear."

☐ E. "You keep playing."

9. The writer asks, "What do you do when the music is still going and the lights are not?" What does this rhetorical question set up?

A. A doubt about whether the concert really happened the way it is told

B. The lesson stated next: keep playing and trust the person beside you

C. A complaint that the school never repaired its auditorium lights

D. A request for readers to send the orchestra their own advice

10. Suppose the writer had written *A small boy stood on the seat in the third row.* Which revision uses inverted order, putting the boy at the end of the sentence?

A. A small boy stood, smiling, on the seat in the third row.

B. On the seat in the third row stood a small boy.

C. A small boy, on the seat in the third row.

D. Was a small boy standing on the seat in the third row?