

# Seven Seconds

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Read the text carefully and answer every question clearly.

When the audience began laughing, Mara counted to three and switched off the stage lights. In the darkness below her booth, Leo was still kneeling beside his open suitcase. His final line, the one they had rehearsed for weeks, never came.

The instruction in Mara's folder was clear: lights out three seconds after the suitcase touches the floor. During rehearsals, Leo had always delivered the line within that time. Nobody had expected the sight of his carefully packed collection of identical slippers to produce such a long laugh.

After the performance, Mara waited beside the lighting desk. She had joined the college production because she liked work that could be checked: cable labels, numbered switches, instructions in a folder. Downstairs, people were congratulating the actors.

The director climbed into the booth and asked what had happened. Mara showed her the instruction.

'You followed it,' the director said. She looked towards the empty stage. 'We lost the line, though.'

Mara couldn't tell whether this was criticism or simply a description. She began explaining that Leo had paused, but stopped when he appeared at the bottom of the ladder.

'I could hear them laughing,' he said. 'I thought I had time to wait.'

For the next performance, they agreed that Mara would watch him rather than count. Once the laughter ended, he would speak; she would fade the lights when he closed the suitcase.

That evening, the laugh lasted seven seconds. Through the booth window, Mara saw Leo shift his weight and almost begin. She kept her hand beside the switch. He waited, spoke, and closed the lid.

Afterwards, she wrote seven beside the old instruction. Then she rubbed it out. In the margin, she

drew a small suitcase with its lid open. She left room underneath for another note.

## Comprehension questions

1. What exact timing instruction did Mara follow during the first performance?

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2. What action by Leo became Mara's signal to fade the lights during the next performance?

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## Reflection questions

1. How does Mara's reason for joining the production help explain her response to the missed line? Use details from the story.

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2. What do Mara's and Leo's accounts reveal about why the first ending failed? Consider the information each person was relying on.

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3. How might you interpret Mara's decision to erase the number seven and draw an open suitcase? Support your interpretation with the second performance.

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## Opinion questions

**1.** Was Mara's decision to follow the written timing reasonable during the first performance? Explain your judgement using the rehearsal details.

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**2.** Would a more direct response from the director have helped Mara after the mistake? Explain what you would have wanted the director to say.

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**3.** Before the next performance, would you prioritise testing the ending with a small audience or rehearsing the new suitcase signal? Justify your choice.

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**4.** Would you keep the old timing instruction visible in the folder or cross it out completely? Explain your preference in relation to Mara's role.

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**5.** If you were Leo, would you feel comfortable relying on Mara to watch for the suitcase closing? Explain your answer using their conversation and the second performance.

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