

An illustration of a water tower in the background, a chain-link fence in the middle ground, and a gate to the water tower's base in the foreground. The gate is locked with a large padlock and chain. There are orange traffic cones, a blue barrel, and a metal bucket in the foreground. A pencil lies on the ground near the gate. The scene is set in a utility area with some plants and a building in the background.

The Locked Water Tower

The Focused Reading Series by Lessons with Mr. B

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Instructor Guide

The Focused Reading Series

Band D (Grades 6-8)

Estimated time: 25-40 min

Standards Alignment

RL.6.1, RL.6.3, RL.6.10, RL.7.1, RL.7.3, RL.7.10, RL.8.1, RL.8.3, RL.8.10, W.6-8.1, W.6-8.2, L.6.4, L.7.4, L.8.4

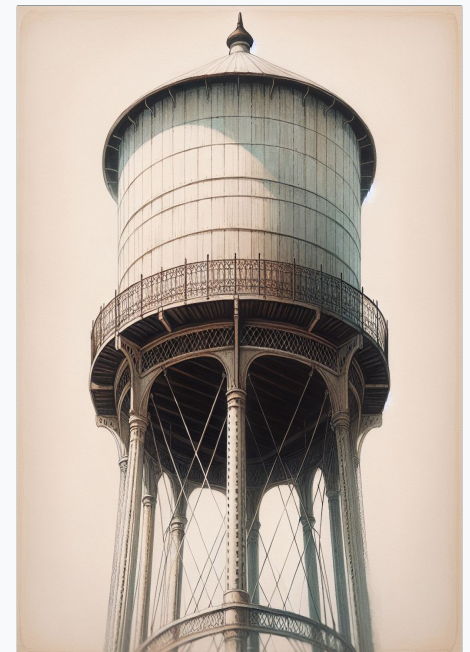
What This Builds

- Reading stamina and comprehension
- Evidence based thinking
- Structured short writing
- Vocabulary in context

How to Run and Monitor

- Read independently or aloud, then complete the worksheet
- Students should use details from the text for every answer
- Use the answer key to check evidence and accuracy quickly
- Watch for clearer evidence use and stronger writing over time

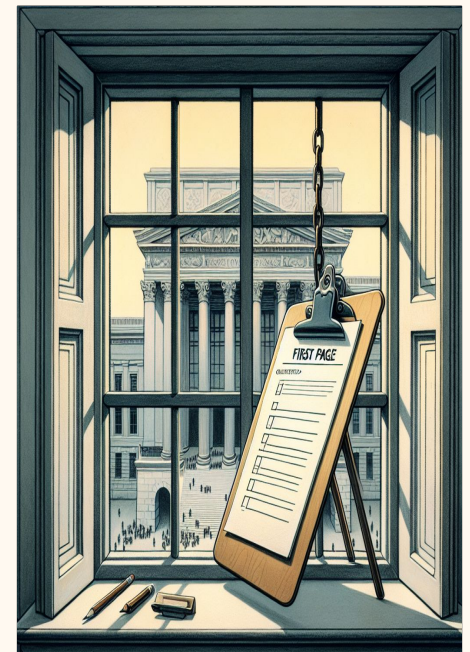
The new fence appeared overnight, wrapped around the old water tower like a warning. Bright plastic ties held it tight to metal posts. Mira stopped at the sidewalk and stared up. The tower had been part of the town's skyline her whole life, a pale cylinder on rusted legs, crowned with a railing that looked too thin to trust. Now it looked smaller somehow, like it had been officially moved into the past.



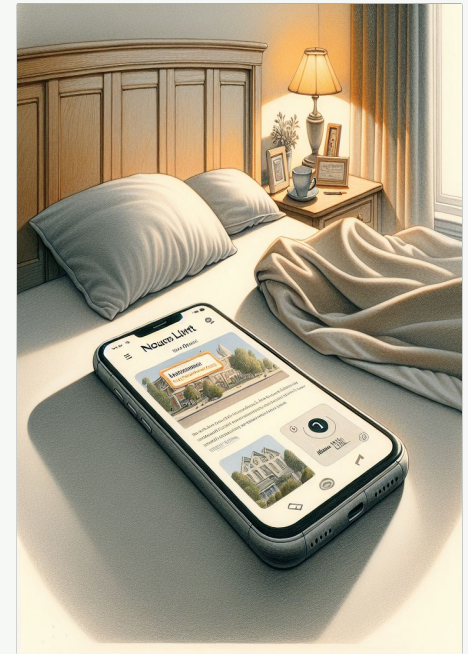
Eli came up behind her on his bike and tapped the brake hard. “No way,” he said, squinting at the fence. “They’re finally tearing it down.” Mira didn’t answer. She was looking at the new padlock on the gate, the fresh chain, the clean footprints in the dirt. The tower had been ignored for years. People didn’t suddenly lock things they weren’t worried about.



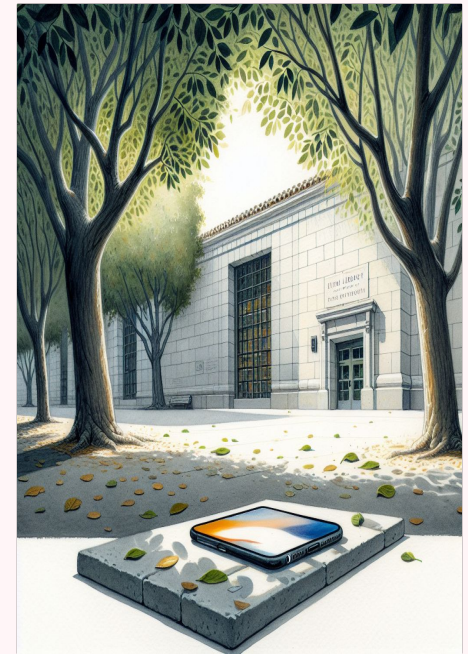
On their walk home, Mira took the long route that passed the public works building. She didn't say why. Eli followed anyway, swinging his bike by the handlebars. In the gravel lot, a dump truck sat near a stack of orange cones. Beside it, a clipboard hung from a hook inside a window. Mira couldn't read anything from the sidewalk, but she could see the top page was new, crisp, and blank except for a few thick lines.



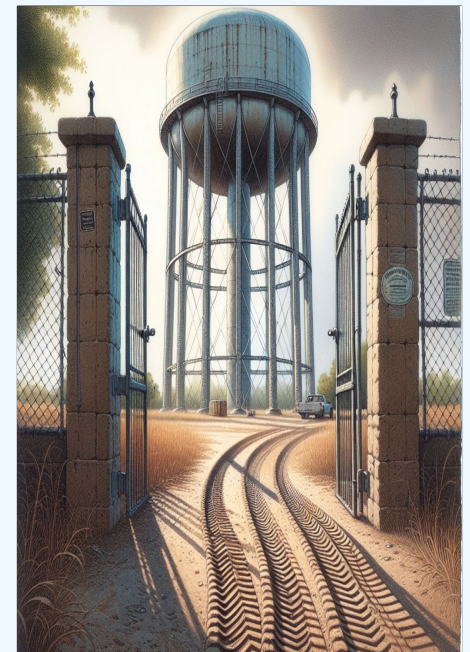
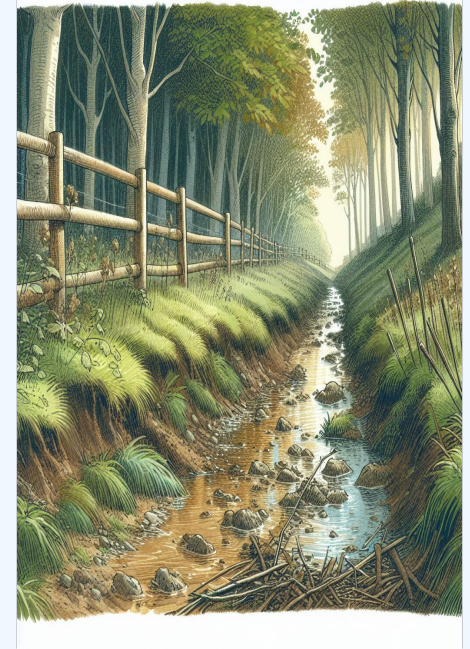
That night, Mira searched the town website on her phone. She didn't find much, just a short announcement about "scheduled maintenance and removal." What she did find was a date that didn't make sense. The announcement said the inspection was completed last Friday. But the file name at the bottom ended with a date two weeks in the future. Mira took a screenshot and stared at it until the glow of the screen made her eyes ache.



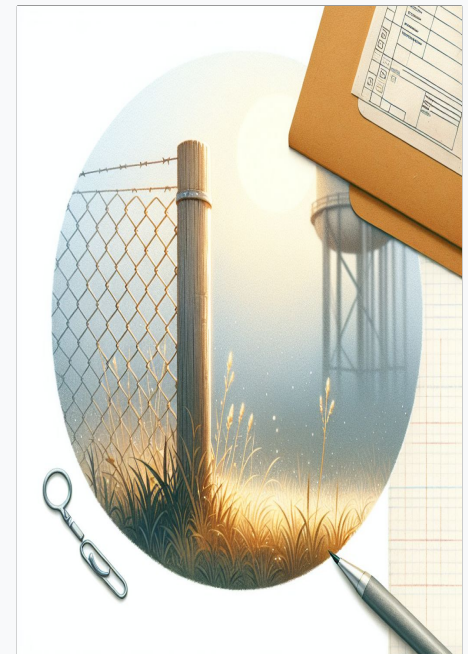
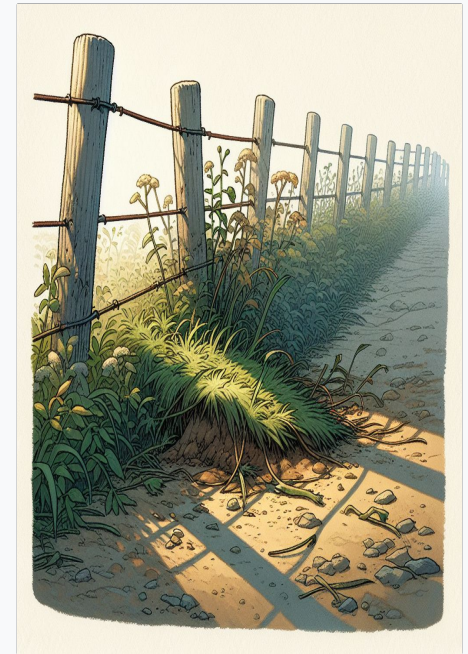
The next afternoon, Eli met her behind the library where the trees blocked the street view. “So,” he said, “what’s the plan?” Mira held up her phone. “Someone posted something early,” she said. “Or they backdated it.” Eli leaned closer. “Either way, that’s weird.” He glanced toward the water tower, barely visible between rooftops. “We’re going, aren’t we?” Mira didn’t answer, but she didn’t say no.



They approached from the woods, where the ground dipped into a shallow drainage channel. The fence line ran along the edge of tall weeds. Up close, the tower smelled like warm metal and old rain. Eli crouched near the gate. “Chain’s new,” he whispered. Mira pointed at the dirt just inside the fence. A set of tire tracks curved toward the base of the tower, deep enough to be recent. “That’s not a dump truck,” Eli said. “Those are narrower.”



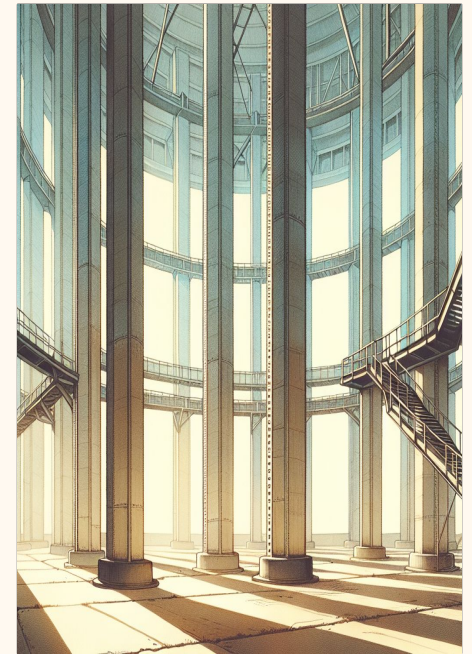
Mira scanned the ground. Near one fence post, the weeds were crushed flat, not like wind had done it, but like a person had slid through. “Someone’s been here since the fence went up,” she said. Eli ran his fingers over the metal post and pulled his hand back. “Still warm,” he murmured, then frowned. “It’s not even hot out.” Mira felt the same tug of unease she had felt when she saw the file date. Something here was active.



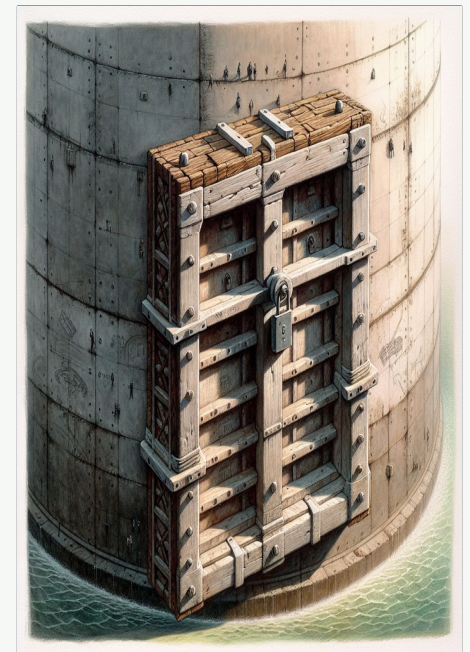
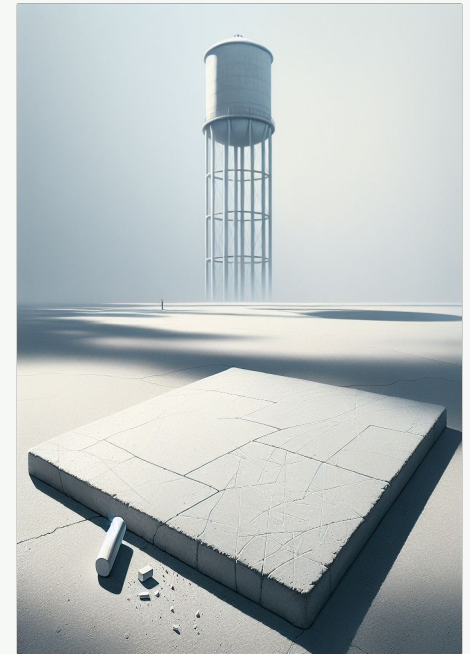
They didn't climb the fence. Mira wasn't willing to leave that kind of proof behind. Instead, Eli walked the perimeter until he found a spot where the chain-link sagged away from the ground. Someone had pushed the bottom edge up just enough to slip under. Eli looked at Mira. "It's an invitation," he said. Mira swallowed. "Or a trap." Eli held the fence up with both hands. "We go in and we go out. No drama."



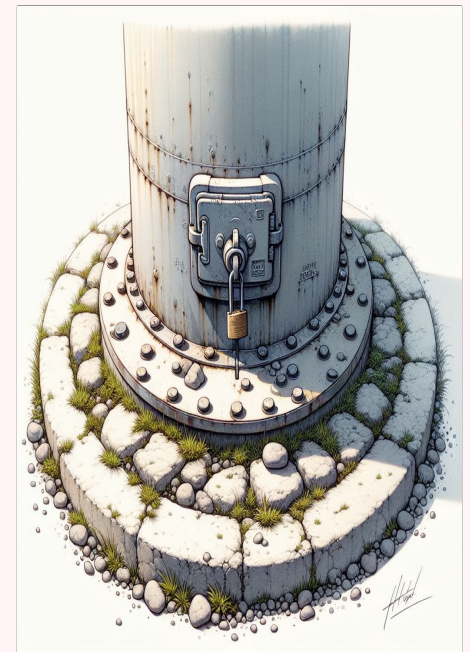
Inside, the air felt different, quieter, like the fence blocked more than sound. The tower's legs rose around them, four thick beams bolted into concrete pads. A ladder ran up one leg, its rungs spaced evenly, with rust stains streaking down like old tears. Mira knelt near the concrete base and saw chalk marks that looked new. Not childish scribbles. Measured lines. Short arrows. A clean X.



Eli traced the chalk with one finger. “Somebody mapped something,” he said. Mira looked for more and found it: another set of marks on the opposite pad, then another. The marks formed a loose pattern that pointed toward a hatch at the base of the tower, half-hidden behind a support beam. The hatch was metal, square, and sealed with a smaller lock than the one on the gate. Eli exhaled softly. “That lock wasn’t there last month.”



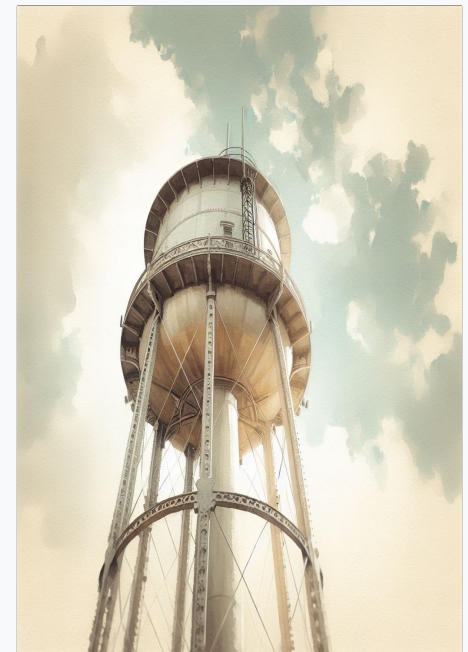
Mira stood still, listening. The woods beyond the fence were quiet, but somewhere farther off, a car door slammed. She felt the sudden urge to leave before the world noticed them. Eli didn't move away from the hatch. Instead, he leaned closer and inspected the lock. "This is cheap," he said, almost offended. "Like someone wanted it locked, but not permanently." Mira's throat tightened. "That's worse," she said.



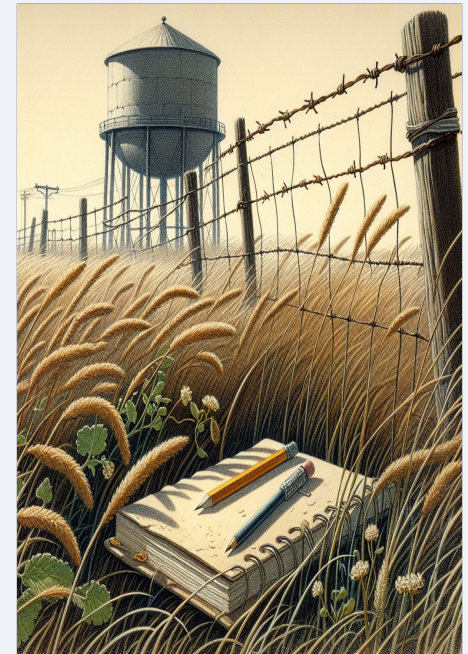
Eli didn't pick the lock. He didn't have tools, and Mira would have stopped him anyway. Instead, he examined the hinges. "If it was opened recently," he said, "there'll be scratches." Mira watched as he angled his head, following the seam. "Look," Eli whispered. Along the edge, the metal was rubbed shiny, as if the hatch had been pried open and shut again. Mira took another screenshot, then a photo. "We're not imagining it," she said.



They backed away from the hatch and searched around the base of the tower. Behind a support beam, Mira spotted something wedged between a bolt plate and the concrete: a small waterproof notebook, the kind hikers used in rain. It was dark green, with no label. Mira didn't open it. She held it like it might bite. Eli's voice dropped. "Someone hid that. Recently." Mira looked up at the tower. The railing at the top caught the light like a thin line of teeth.



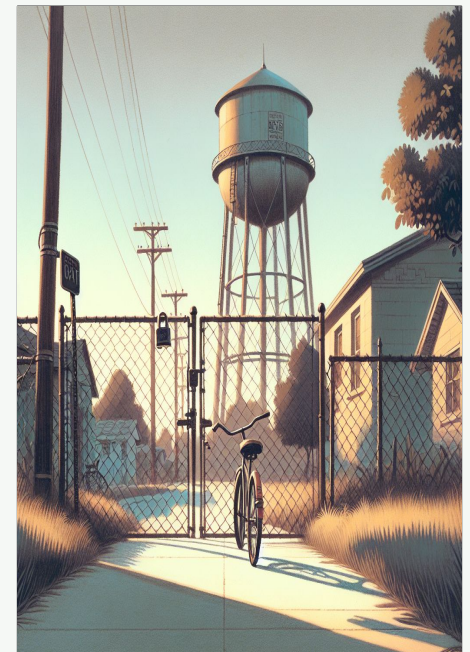
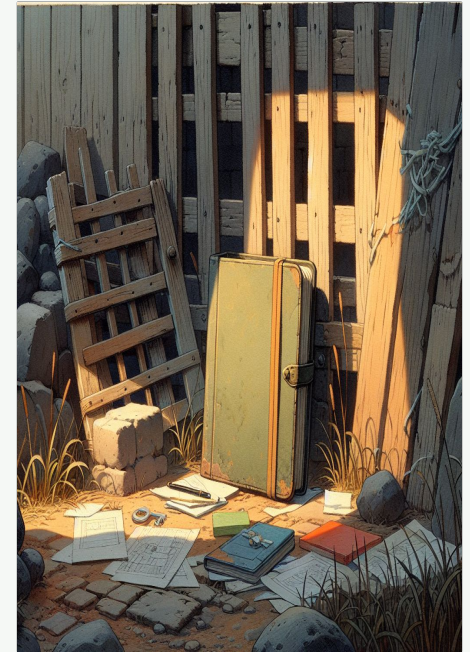
They moved back to the fence line before opening the notebook. Mira crouched low, using her body to block the view from the road. She flipped the cover. Inside were tight columns of numbers, short words, and hand-drawn symbols. No titles. No logos. Just notes. Some pages had small diagrams of the tower base, like a map made by someone who didn't want to waste ink. Mira turned one page and froze. A line was circled hard enough to tear the paper.



Eli leaned in. “What is it?” Mira didn’t answer right away. She didn’t fully understand it, but she understood the feeling of it. The circled line wasn’t an accident. It was a warning to the person who wrote it, or a reminder of something that should have been handled. Mira took photos of every page, careful to keep her hands steady. Eli watched the woods. “We should put it back,” he said. “If someone comes looking...”



They returned the notebook to its hiding place exactly as they found it, then slipped under the fence and pulled the sagging edge down again. On the walk home, neither of them spoke much. The town looked normal: parked cars, sprinklers, a dog barking behind a fence. But Mira felt like normal was just a layer. The next morning, she biked past the tower before school. The fence was still there, but the gate lock was different. Newer. Heavier. Mira kept riding, but the screenshot on her phone felt like weight in her pocket.



Student Worksheet

Band D

STUDENT NAME: _____ **DATE:** _____

SECTION 1: PROVE IT

Instruction: Use details and direct evidence from the text to support your answers.

1. What detail from the story shows that something changed suddenly in the environment?
2. Find a quote that shows how the new fence was placed around something important.

SECTION 2: WHAT CHANGED

Instruction: Describe how something changed from the beginning to the end of the story.

3. Explain what was different about the area around the old water tower by the end of the story.

SECTION 3: THINK DEEPER

Instruction: Explain your thinking using clues from the story.

4. Why might the fence be described as "like a warning"?

SECTION 4: QUICK BUILD WRITING

Instruction: Write 2 to 3 complete sentences using clear details from the story.

5. Describe what happened when the new fence appeared and how it affected the area.

Answer Key

Band D

SECTION 1: PROVE IT

1. "The new fence appeared overnight, wrapped around the old water tower like a warning."
2. "The new fence appeared overnight, wrapped around the old water tower like a warning."

SECTION 2: WHAT CHANGED

3. At the end of the story, the area around the old water tower had a new fence wrapped around it, which was not there before.

ANSWER KEY

SECTION 3: THINK DEEPER

4. The fence might be described as "like a warning" because it was put up suddenly and could be meant to keep people away or signal danger.

SECTION 4: QUICK BUILD WRITING

5. The new fence appeared overnight and surrounded the old water tower, changing the area by making it seem closed off and possibly warning people to stay away.