



THE MASK ROOM

Chapter 1: The Party's Over

The opening chapter of **The Mask Room**, a Scaremoor middle grade horror novel, as a 930-word reading passage. It ends on a cliffhanger, so students finish wanting the next page.

WHAT'S INSIDE

1. The passage, with numbered paragraphs for citing evidence
2. 6 multiple-choice questions
3. Words in context and the author's similes
4. Two written responses and a prediction
5. Answer key

HOW TO USE IT

- Students read on their own or with a partner (about 10 minutes), then answer the questions.
- Every question names the paragraph to look back at.
- For grade 3, read it aloud and do the questions together.
- About 40 minutes in all. No prep.

WANT TO KEEP READING?

The Mask Room is book 6 of the Scaremoor series, for ages 8–12, in paperback and on Kindle. Find it at scaremoor.com or on Amazon (amazon.com/dp/B0FMQF5L3H). Every Scaremoor book is a standalone story, and every one is spooky but safe for school.





THE MASK ROOM

Chapter 1: The Party's Over

Name: _____

Date: _____

- 1 I'm crouched in the corner of the Crestwood gym, peeling a smashed piece of candy corn off the floor with the edge of a laminated sign.
- 2 Kiko's halfway out the doors already.
- 3 "We're still doing pizza, right?" I ask without looking up.
- 4 She pauses. Not for long. Just long enough for me to know what's coming.
- 5 "Jake's mom said the car's full."
- 6 I don't say anything. I just scrape harder.
- 7 Kiko swings her glowstick around her wrist. "We're only going for a little bit. I'll text you?"
- 8 She doesn't wait for my answer. Just bolts through the double doors, shouting something to Cam and Tasha that gets them all laughing.
- 9 The doors bang shut behind her.
- 10 And that's it.
- 11 The music's off. The lights are on. And I'm the only one left.
- 12 Unless you count the soggy cupcakes, the balloon scraps, and a fog machine that keeps coughing up sad little puffs.
- 13 I tug the garbage bag open again and dump in a whole table's worth of paper plates. A plastic eyeball bounces once and rolls under the bleachers. I leave it.
- 14 Being helpful is supposed to make people like you. That's what my mom says. "Show up. Pitch in. People notice." But the only thing people noticed tonight was that I had tape stuck to my elbow for half the dance and that my costume wasn't really a costume. (It was just a hoodie. With cat ears. I panicked, okay?)
- 15 And maybe the fact that I danced with the mascot. Which, apparently, was hilarious.
- 16 To them.
- 17 The gym smells like fruit punch and sweat, and the floor's still tacky in places from spilled soda. I find a chunk of caramel under one of the folding chairs and use the back of a plastic knife to pry it loose.
- 18 There's a whole crew for cleanup. Or there was *supposed* to be. But the minute they announced the music was over and the lights came on, everyone scattered like spilled Skittles. Except me.

- 19 I stayed.
- 20 Because maybe staying would make me useful. And maybe being useful would make me matter.
- 21 But all it really makes me is sticky.
- 22 Mr. Delaney appears out of nowhere like he always does, mop in one hand, plastic tub of cleaning supplies in the other. He's the kind of old that could be sixty or a hundred, depending on the hallway lighting. Tonight he smells like Windex and wintergreen gum.
- 23 He doesn't say hi. Just surveys the wreckage like he's planning a funeral for the floor wax.
- 24 "Back in my day," he mutters, "Halloween was real."
- 25 I blink at him. "This wasn't real?"
- 26 He snorts. "This was glitter and Bluetooth speakers. We had scare. We had *substance*. Then they locked it all up."
- 27 "Locked *what* up?"
- 28 He leans into his mop handle. "Closet backstage. You'll know it if you find it."
- 29 That should be the end of the conversation.
- 30 Except it's *not*.
- 31 He pauses. Looks me right in the eye.
- 32 "Don't."
- 33 Then he turns and wheels his bucket out the side door. The door swings shut behind him with a soft *clunk*.
- 34 I stand there for a full minute, holding a lopsided skeleton decoration that someone stepped on.
- 35 Closet backstage?
- 36 What kind of janitor cryptically warns you about an off-limits room *and expects you to ignore it?*
- 37 I wander back toward the table where the snack bowls used to be. A lone plastic spider rests in the middle of the orange tablecloth. I pick it up, turn it over in my hand. One of the legs is bent.
- 38 Behind me, the fog machine lets out another weak hiss.
- 39 I toss the spider in the trash and wipe my hands on my jeans. The gym is too quiet now.
- 40 I glance toward the stage. The curtain is mostly closed, swaying gently like someone brushed past it. But that's impossible. The gym is empty. I would've heard someone.
- 41 Wouldn't I?
- 42 I try to go back to cleaning. Really, I do. But every five seconds I'm looking at the curtain. Imagining it moving more than it should. Imagining what's behind it.

- 43 I tell myself it's dumb.
- 44 I tell myself I don't care.
- 45 I tell myself, *Be normal, Natalie. Don't make it weird.*
- 46 But then the lights overhead flicker.
- 47 Just once.
- 48 A soft, electrical twitch that nobody else would've noticed.
- 49 If anyone else were here.
- 50 I suck in a breath and drop the trash bag by the bleachers. My sneakers squeak as I cross the gym, each step louder than I expect. The fog machine gives one final hiss behind me, like it's sighing. Like it knows.
- 51 I stop at the edge of the stage and look up.
- 52 The curtain looms above me—velvet, navy, frayed at the bottom. It's never looked this tall before. Or this dark. Or this *quiet*.
- 53 Something about it feels... heavy. Like it's holding back more than props and paint cans.
- 54 And I swear, *swear*, I hear something shift.
- 55 A tiny noise.
- 56 A creak.
- 57 Not loud.
- 58 Not close.
- 59 But definitely *behind* the curtain.
- 60 I take a step up the stairs, just one, and the wood groans beneath my shoe.
- 61 Then I stop.
- 62 Because if I go back there—if I peek behind that curtain—then whatever this is... becomes real.
- 63 And part of me wants to turn around. Be smart. Be safe.
- 64 But another part of me?
- 65 The part that's tired of being invisible, of being left behind, of always waiting for someone else to invite me?
- 66 That part steps closer.
- 67 I reach out.
- 68 And then the curtain moves—just slightly—like someone on the other side just let go.



THE MASK ROOM

Look back at the passage. Each question tells you which paragraph to check.

Name: _____

Date: _____

PART A: WHAT HAPPENED?

Circle the best answer.

1. Why is Natalie still in the gym after the dance? (paragraph 19)

- A. She is waiting for her ride.
- B. She stayed to clean up.
- C. She lost her phone.
- D. She has detention.

2. Why doesn't Natalie go for pizza with Kiko? (paragraph 5)

- A. Jake's mom said the car was full.
- B. She doesn't like pizza.
- C. Her mom said no.
- D. She has homework.

3. What was Natalie's costume? (paragraph 14)

- A. A witch hat
- B. A mascot suit
- C. A skeleton costume
- D. Just a hoodie with cat ears

4. Where does Mr. Delaney say the real Halloween was locked up? (paragraph 28)

- A. In the principal's office
- B. Under the bleachers
- C. In a closet backstage
- D. In the basement

5. What one word does Mr. Delaney say to Natalie before he leaves? (paragraph 32)

- A. "Don't."
- B. "Run."
- C. "Goodnight."
- D. "Listen."

6. What happens at the very end of the chapter? (paragraph 68)

- A. The lights go out.
- B. Kiko comes back.
- C. The fog machine turns on.
- D. The curtain moves, like someone on the other side let go.





THE MASK ROOM

PART B: WORDS IN CONTEXT

Find each word in its paragraph. Use the words around it to figure out what it means.

7. **tacky** (paragraph 17) means:

8. **cryptically** (paragraph 36) means:

9. **frayed** (paragraph 52) means:

PART C: THE AUTHOR'S SIMILES

A simile compares two things using *like* or *as*. Explain what each one means.

10. *"But the minute they announced the music was over and the lights came on, everyone scattered like spilled Skittles."* (paragraph 18)

11. *"Just surveys the wreckage like he's planning a funeral for the floor wax."* (paragraph 23)





THE MASK ROOM

PART D: THINK IT THROUGH

Answer in complete sentences. Name the paragraph your evidence comes from.

12. Why does Natalie stay to clean up? What does that tell you about her? Use evidence.

13. What makes Natalie walk toward the curtain? Use two details.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The chapter ends with “And then the curtain moves—just slightly—like someone on the other side just let go.” What do you think is behind the curtain? Use two clues.





THE MASK ROOM

Look back at the passage. Each question tells you which paragraph to check.

PART A: WHAT HAPPENED?

Circle the best answer.

1. Why is Natalie still in the gym after the dance? (paragraph 19)

- A. She is waiting for her ride.
- B. *She stayed to clean up. ✓*
- C. She lost her phone.
- D. She has detention.

2. Why doesn't Natalie go for pizza with Kiko? (paragraph 5)

- A. *Jake's mom said the car was full. ✓*
- B. She doesn't like pizza.
- C. Her mom said no.
- D. She has homework.

3. What was Natalie's costume? (paragraph 14)

- A. A witch hat
- B. A mascot suit
- C. A skeleton costume
- D. *Just a hoodie with cat ears ✓*

4. Where does Mr. Delaney say the real Halloween was locked up? (paragraph 28)

- A. In the principal's office
- B. Under the bleachers
- C. *In a closet backstage ✓*
- D. In the basement

5. What one word does Mr. Delaney say to Natalie before he leaves? (paragraph 32)

- A. *"Don't." ✓*
- B. "Run."
- C. "Goodnight."
- D. "Listen."

6. What happens at the very end of the chapter? (paragraph 68)

- A. The lights go out.
- B. Kiko comes back.
- C. The fog machine turns on.
- D. *The curtain moves, like someone on the other side let go. ✓*





THE MASK ROOM

PART B: WORDS IN CONTEXT

Find each word in its paragraph. Use the words around it to figure out what it means.

7. **tacky** (paragraph 17) means:

a little sticky

8. **cryptically** (paragraph 36) means:

in a mysterious way that's hard to understand

9. **frayed** (paragraph 52) means:

worn out into loose threads at the edge

PART C: THE AUTHOR'S SIMILES

A simile compares two things using *like* or *as*. Explain what each one means.

10. "But the minute they announced the music was over and the lights came on, everyone scattered like spilled Skittles." (paragraph 18)

Everyone ran off fast in every direction.

11. "Just surveys the wreckage like he's planning a funeral for the floor wax." (paragraph 23)

Mr. Delaney looks at the mess with a gloomy, serious face.





THE MASK ROOM

PART D: THINK IT THROUGH

Answer in complete sentences. Name the paragraph your evidence comes from.

12. Why does Natalie stay to clean up? What does that tell you about her? Use evidence.

She hopes being useful will make her matter (20); her mom says pitching in makes people notice you (14). It shows she feels left out and invisible and wants to belong (65).

13. What makes Natalie walk toward the curtain? Use two details.

Any two: Mr. Delaney's mysterious warning makes her curious (28–36); the curtain sways like someone brushed past it (40); the lights flicker (46); she hears a creak behind it (54–59); she is tired of being invisible and left behind (65).

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The chapter ends with “And then the curtain moves—just slightly—like someone on the other side just let go.” What do you think is behind the curtain? Use two clues.

Answers will vary. Strong predictions use clues such as Mr. Delaney's closet backstage (28), his warning “Don’t” (32), or the creak behind the curtain (54–59).

