Close Reading: excerpt from *A Wrinkle In Time* by Madeleine L’Engle

DIRECTIONS: Read the following passage. While reading, underline, summarize, label, define, and record inferences and other literary devices in the margins. Then, answer the questions on the reverse side completely.

Below them the town was laid out in harsh angular patterns. The houses in the outskirts were all exactly alike, small square boxes painted gray. Each had a small rectangular plot of lawn in front, with a straight line of dull-looking flowers edging the path to the door. Meg had a feeling that if she could count the flowers, there would be exactly the same number for each house. In front of all the houses, children were playing. Some were skipping rope, some were bouncing balls. Meg felt vaguely that something was wrong with their play. It seemed exactly like children playing around any housing development at home, and yet there was something different about it. She looked at Calvin and saw that he too was puzzled.

“Look!” Charles Wallace said suddenly. “They’re skipping and bouncing in rhythm! Everyone’s doing it at exactly the same moment.”

This was so. As the skipping rope hit the pavement, so did the ball. As the rope curved over the head of the jumping child, the child with the ball caught the ball. Down came the ropes. Down came the balls. Over and over again. Up. Down. All in rhythm. All identical. Like the houses. Like the paths. Like the flowers.

Then all the doors of the houses opened simultaneously, and out came women like a row of paper dolls. The print of their dresses was different, but they all gave the appearance of being the same. Each woman stood on the steps of her house. Each clapped. Each child with the ball caught the ball. Each child with the skipping rope folded the rope. Each child turned and walked into the house. The doors clicked shut behind them.

“How can they do it?” Meg asked wonderingly. “We couldn’t do it that way if we tried. What does it mean?”

“Let’s go back.” Calvin’s voice was urgent.


“I don’t know. Anywhere. Back to the hill. Back to Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which. I don’t like this.”

“But they aren’t there. Do you think they’d come to us if we turned back now?”

“I don’t like it,” Calvin said again.

“Come on.” Impatience made Meg squeak. “You know we can’t go back. Mrs. Whatsit said to go into town.” She started on down the street, and the two boys followed her. The houses, all identical, continued, as far as the eye could reach.
Then, all at once, they saw the same thing and stopped to watch. In front of one of the houses stood a little boy with a ball, and he was bouncing it. But he bounced it rather badly with no particular rhythm, sometimes dropping it and running after it with awkward, furtive leaps, sometimes throwing it up into the air and trying to catch it. The door of his house opened and out ran one of the mother figures. She looked wildly up and down the street, saw the children and put her hand to her mouth as though to stifle a scream, grabbed the little boy and rushed indoors with him. The ball dropped from his fingers and rolled out into the street.

1. The author uses short, choppy sentences and repetition during this excerpt. Find text evidence where they are used and explain why the author chose that style of writing. (RL.7.1, RL.7.4)

2. Describe the community shown in this excerpt. How do the mood and tone influence your view of the community? (RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.3)

3. Calvin and Meg react to the activity they see differently. Using text evidence, compare their reactions. How does point of view influence your findings? (RL.7.1, RL.7.4, RL.7.6)