Patterns at the Station

Explain how Gestalt principles shape what travelers see.

SS24.P.7c "Explain perception in terms of Gestalt principles and concepts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each of the four station details that shows how people organize what they see, then circle the visual clue that makes each pattern possible.

What Travelers See

1 At a crowded train station, your eyes receive far more detail than you can track at once. Perception is not a simple copy of that input. Your brain organizes visual information into meaningful patterns, often before you notice the organizing. Gestalt psychology studies how people perceive whole forms and relationships among their parts. One principle, figure-ground, describes how a shape becomes the focus while surrounding details seem to recede. For instance, a dark tree trunk can stand out against pale snow. On the station wall, a black arrow is easy to pick out against a plain white sign, even with people walking nearby.

2 Other principles help explain why separate marks can seem to belong together. Proximity makes nearby items appear grouped, even if nothing connects them. Think of three coins on one side of a desk and three on the other. Similarity makes items that share a visual feature seem related, such as matching blue folders mixed among red folders. At the station, the departure board puts short gaps between times for the same platform and wider gaps before the next platform. Farther down the hall, volunteers wear identical striped vests, though they stand apart in a crowd. These patterns help travelers sort what they see.

3 Closure helps explain another kind of pattern making. When a familiar outline has gaps, the mind can fill in the missing parts and perceive a whole shape. Four separated corners printed on paper, for example, may suggest a square whose sides are not drawn. At the station, a poster shows a bicycle wheel with several small breaks in its rim. Travelers still see a round wheel rather than unrelated curved pieces. This does not mean the missing ink has appeared on the paper. It means perception uses the visible pieces to form a likely whole. A different arrangement of the same pieces might suggest a different shape.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does figure-ground explain why the station arrow stands out? Refer to both the arrow and its background.

2. Explain how proximity affects the way travelers read the departure board.

3. Which Gestalt principle helps travelers recognize the volunteers as a group even when they stand apart? Explain your choice.

4. Why do travelers see a round wheel on the poster despite the breaks in its rim? Name the principle and explain what the mind does.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent an everyday scene that shows two different Gestalt principles from the passage. In 4 to 5 sentences, describe the visual details and explain how each principle shapes what a person perceives.

ANSWER KEY

Patterns at the Station

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.P.7c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each of the four station details that shows how people organize what they see, then circle the visual clue that makes each pattern possible. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does figure-ground explain why the station arrow stands out? Refer to both the arrow and its background.	**The black arrow becomes the focus, or figure, against the plain white sign, which serves as the background.**
2	Explain how proximity affects the way travelers read the departure board.	**Times separated by short gaps appear grouped under one platform. A wider gap makes the next platform's times seem like a separate group.**
3	Which Gestalt principle helps travelers recognize the volunteers as a group even when they stand apart? Explain your choice.	**Similarity. Their identical striped vests make them appear related despite the distance between them.**
4	Why do travelers see a round wheel on the poster despite the breaks in its rim? Name the principle and explain what the mind does.	**Closure. The mind uses the visible curved pieces to perceive a complete rim despite the missing sections.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At a market, jars are arranged in two clusters with a wide space between them. Proximity makes each cluster look like a separate group. Some jars in both clusters have green lids, while the others have white lids. Similarity makes the green-lidded jars look related even across the gap.

Accept explanations that accurately connect a visible detail to the named principle. For the open task, both principles must explain perceptions in the student's invented scene.