Sky Words at Work

Use context and word choice to uncover meaning and tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4 "Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each technical word or phrase whose meaning the passage explains, and circle each figurative comparison. Label each underline with T and each circle with F.

A Night at the Observatory

1. On clear nights, the town's new observatory opens its roof like a slow-moving lid. Inside, a telescope points toward the moon. The telescope's large mirror gathers faint light and directs it to an eyepiece or camera. This process does not make distant objects closer. Instead, it makes their details easier to see. Visitors often whisper when Saturn appears, its bright rings looking like a tiny silver hat balanced in the dark for a moment.

2. Before a viewing session, an astronomer adjusts the telescope's focus. Focus is the setting that makes an image sharp rather than blurry. The astronomer may also check the atmosphere, the layer of gases around Earth. Moving air can bend light slightly, making a star seem to twinkle. To observers, the air may feel calm, yet the sky can still be restless. That word suggests motion that cannot be seen directly but can be noticed in the wavering image.

3. After the lights are dimmed, the observatory becomes a small island of light on the hill. This phrase does not mean the building is surrounded by water. It describes how the bright room stands apart from the dark land. A student at the camera records an exposure, the amount of time the camera collects light. During a long exposure, stars can leave curved trails in a photograph because Earth rotates. The trails turn the sky into a quiet map of motion.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does focus mean in paragraph 2? Which words in the paragraph help you determine its meaning?

2. What does the word restless suggest about the sky in paragraph 2? How does this word choice affect the tone?

3. What does the phrase “a small island of light” mean in paragraph 3? What image does it create?

4. Why does the author call the star trails “a quiet map of motion”?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write 2 or 3 sentences about a place you know. Include one technical word that you explain with context and one figurative phrase, then add one sentence explaining how your figurative phrase shapes the mood.

ANSWER KEY # Sky Words at Work

GRADES K-12 · CCRA.R.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each technical word or phrase whose meaning the passage explains, and circle each figurative comparison. Label each underline with T and each circle with F. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does focus mean in paragraph 2? Which words in the paragraph help you determine its meaning?	**Focus is the setting that makes an image sharp instead of blurry. The words "sharp rather than blurry" explain it.**
2	What does the word restless suggest about the sky in paragraph 2? How does this word choice affect the tone?	**It suggests that the air is moving even when people cannot see the movement. It creates a slightly unsettled, active tone.**
3	What does the phrase "a small island of light" mean in paragraph 3? What image does it create?	**It means the bright observatory stands apart from the dark land. It creates an image of a small, bright place surrounded by darkness.**
4	Why does the author call the star trails "a quiet map of motion"?	**The curved trails show the stars' apparent movement across the sky, like lines on a map. The word "quiet" gives the scene a calm tone.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In the school garden, Lena checked the soil's moisture, the amount of water it held. The new seedlings raised green flags from the dark earth. The phrase "green flags" makes the garden seem hopeful, as if the plants are sending a signal that spring has arrived.

Accept equivalent explanations supported by the passage. For the open task, look for an accurately explained technical term, a nonliteral phrase, and a clear explanation of the phrase's effect on meaning or mood.