Clues in the Ice

Use nearby details and sentence structure to infer precise word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.4a "Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the words provisional, anomaly, poignant, and discard. For each word, circle at least two nearby clues and write a brief meaning in the margin.

Records Beneath the Snow

1 In 1912, the expedition led by Robert Falcon Scott reached the South Pole only to find that Roald Amundsen had arrived weeks earlier. The team's discovery was disappointing, but its scientific records remained valuable. On the return journey, Scott wrote observations about weather, supplies, and the men's health. Historians treat some of these notes as provisional because they were made under exhausting conditions, with limited instruments and no chance to compare measurements later. Researchers use the notes carefully, alongside maps, photographs, and records from other expeditions.

2 Nearly a century later, scientists examining Antarctic ice cores noticed an anomaly in a layer formed around 1816. Most nearby layers held small amounts of sulfate, a substance often left by volcanic eruptions, yet this layer contained an unusually large concentration. The odd result did not lead researchers to discard the core. Instead, they checked samples from Greenland and compared the dates with reports of the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia. The evidence suggested that material from the eruption had traveled through the atmosphere and settled over distant polar regions.

3 Such evidence changes more than a chart of chemical measurements. It can make a brief journal entry poignant. In 1816, people in parts of Europe and North America described summer snow, failed crops, and food shortages. At the time, they could not know that a distant eruption had helped disrupt global climate patterns. When modern readers place those accounts beside the ice-core data, individual complaints about cold fields gain a larger significance. The records connect private hardship to an event occurring thousands of miles away and show why scientists combine physical samples with human documents.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does provisional most nearly mean in paragraph 1? Cite two context clues that support your inference.

2. What does anomaly most nearly mean in paragraph 2? Explain how the surrounding details lead you to that meaning.

3. What does poignant most nearly mean in paragraph 3? Use the events described around the word to support your answer.

4. What does discard mean in paragraph 2? How does the sentence beginning with “Instead” help you infer its meaning?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write three sentences about a real or imagined investigation. Include one challenging word whose meaning readers can infer from context, add at least two clues around it, and then explain what the word means.

Clues in the Ice

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the words provisional, anomaly, poignant, and discard. For each word, circle at least two nearby clues and write a brief meaning in the margin. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does provisional most nearly mean in paragraph 1? Cite two context clues that support your inference.	**Provisional means tentative or not fully settled. Supporting clues include that the notes were made under exhausting conditions, with limited instruments, and could not be compared with later measurements.**
2	What does anomaly most nearly mean in paragraph 2? Explain how the surrounding details lead you to that meaning.	**Anomaly means an unusual result or departure from the normal pattern. Nearby layers had small sulfate amounts, but this layer had an unusually large concentration and is called an odd result.**
3	What does poignant most nearly mean in paragraph 3? Use the events described around the word to support your answer.	**Poignant means deeply affecting or emotionally moving. The journal accounts describe summer snow, failed crops, food shortages, and private hardship connected to a distant disaster.**
4	What does discard mean in paragraph 2? How does the sentence beginning with "Instead" help you infer its meaning?	**Discard means throw away or reject. Researchers did not discard the core because they kept it, checked other samples, and investigated the unusual result.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The museum's claim that the ship visited Havana was corroborated by a newly found customs record. The record listed the ship's name and the same date recorded in the captain's log. Corroborated means supported or confirmed because the matching record provides evidence for the claim.

Accept reasonable synonyms when the student's explanation is supported by surrounding details. In Part 3, the target word should be inferable from context rather than directly defined in the first sentence.