Words in the Garden

Notice comparisons, word relationships, and shades of meaning.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.5 "Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline phrases that compare unlike things or give human actions to nonhuman things. Circle nearby words whose meanings are related but not exactly the same, so you can notice their different shades of meaning.

A Courtyard Habitat

1 At dawn, volunteers entered the school courtyard with trowels and seed packets. The empty planting beds looked like brown quilts waiting for color. Maya loosened the soil while Mr. Ortiz measured spaces for milkweed, a plant monarch caterpillars eat. Near the fence, a hose coughed and sputtered before releasing a thin stream. The group worked quietly at first, but the courtyard slowly woke, trading its dusty silence for the scrape of tools and the peppery scent of wet earth.

2 By noon, several students had become fiercely protective of the new plants. When a soccer ball rolled toward a young milkweed stem, Jamal lunged to stop it, then sighed with relief. "The stem is fragile, not helpless," he said, straightening the label beside it. His words changed the mood. Instead of treating the garden as a delicate decoration, the students began to see it as a small habitat, a shelter where insects could feed, rest, and grow.

3 Two weeks later, the milkweed leaves carried tiny monarch eggs, each smaller than a grain of rice. The discovery did not make the courtyard wild or untamed. It made the space more alive, as if the garden had opened a door to a larger journey. Students spoke in hushed voices near the beds, careful not to disturb the visitors. Beyond the fence, traffic roared, but inside the courtyard, the new habitat felt like a green pause in the middle of the city.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does the comparison of the planting beds to "brown quilts waiting for color" suggest about how the beds looked before planting?

2. What human action is given to the hose in paragraph 1? What does this wording suggest about the water starting to flow?

3. Jamal calls the milkweed stem "fragile, not helpless." How do the meanings of fragile and helpless differ in this context?

4. How are the words wild and untamed related in paragraph 3? What extra idea does untamed add?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write three sentences describing a familiar place during a change, such as rain beginning or a bus arriving. Include one simile or metaphor and two related words that show different degrees of feeling or action.

ANSWER KEY

Words in the Garden

GRADE 8 · L.8.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline phrases that compare unlike things or give human actions to nonhuman things. Circle nearby words whose meanings are related but not exactly the same, so you can notice their different shades of meaning. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does the comparison of the planting beds to "brown quilts waiting for color" suggest about how the beds looked before planting?	**The beds looked like flat, brown sections and were ready to be filled with colorful plants.**
2	What human action is given to the hose in paragraph 1? What does this wording suggest about the water starting to flow?	**The hose "coughed and sputtered." It suggests that the water began flowing unevenly and in short bursts.**
3	Jamal calls the milkweed stem "fragile, not helpless." How do the meanings of fragile and helpless differ in this context?	**Fragile means easily damaged. Helpless means unable to survive or do anything without help; Jamal suggests the plant needs care but can still support life in the habitat.**
4	How are the words wild and untamed related in paragraph 3? What extra idea does untamed add?	**They are near synonyms. Untamed adds the idea of not being controlled or managed by people.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the bus stop, rain tapped the shelter roof like impatient fingers. The crowd was uneasy, not panicked, as the delayed bus failed to appear. When it arrived, the yellow bus cut through the gray morning.

Accept interpretations of figurative language that are supported by the passage. For Part 3, accept any three-sentence description containing a clear simile or metaphor and two related words with meaningfully different degrees or shades of meaning.