Words Under Pressure

Use context to uncover jokes with double meanings and opposite meanings.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.5a "Interpret figures of speech (e.g. verbal irony, puns) in context."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each phrase that uses a pun or verbal irony. Write P beside a pun and I beside verbal irony, then use the surrounding details to infer what each phrase means.

The Rainy Bridge Contest

1. At 3:30 on Thursday, Maya entered the Riverton Library's makerspace carrying a cardboard model of a bridge. The room was scheduled for the "Build It Strong" contest, but rain had soaked the parking lot and delayed several teams. Mr. Chen, the librarian, handed out dry towels and said, "Welcome to our water-themed engineering festival." Maya laughed because the contest was not supposed to include water. On a table, a sign warned, "Please use cutters carefully. We want sharp ideas, not sharp fingers."

2. By four o'clock, the lights flickered, and the computer-controlled cutter stopped. Mr. Chen looked at the dark room and said, "Perfect timing. Nothing helps a design contest like losing the lights." The outage made building harder, so Maya's team switched to rulers, scissors, and a hand-cranked flashlight. When the flashlight dimmed, Leo said, "This contest is really going downhill," as their bridge model slid off a damp table near the window.

3. The teams finished after the power returned. Judges tested each bridge by adding small bags of sand. Maya's bridge held twelve bags before bending. Leo pointed to the result sheet and said, "Our future is looking up," because their score placed them near the top. Mr. Chen smiled and announced that the contest had been "a smashing success," although only one test bridge had actually broken. Several students laughed as workers carried the broken model to a recycling bin.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Mr. Chen calls the contest a "water-themed engineering festival." Is this a pun or verbal irony? Explain what he means.

2. What are the two meanings of "sharp" in the sign about sharp ideas and sharp fingers?

3. Why is Mr. Chen's statement, "Perfect timing," verbal irony when the lights go out?

4. How does Leo's statement that the contest is "going downhill" work as a pun?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence scene set during a school event. Include one verbal-irony statement and one pun, and make the context clear enough for a reader to infer both meanings.

ANSWER KEY

Words Under Pressure

GRADE 8 · L.8.5a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each phrase that uses a pun or verbal irony. Write P beside a pun and I beside verbal irony, then use the surrounding details to infer what each phrase means. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Mr. Chen calls the contest a "water-themed engineering festival." Is this a pun or verbal irony? Explain what he means.	**Verbal irony. He jokingly refers to the rain and wet parking lot, not an intended water theme for the contest.**
2	What are the two meanings of "sharp" in the sign about sharp ideas and sharp fingers?	**Sharp ideas are clever ideas. Sharp fingers would be fingers cut or injured by the cutters.**
3	Why is Mr. Chen's statement, "Perfect timing," verbal irony when the lights go out?	**He means the timing is bad, because losing the lights makes the design contest harder.**
4	How does Leo's statement that the contest is "going downhill" work as a pun?	**It means the contest seems to be getting worse, and it also refers to the bridge model literally sliding downward off the table.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the rainy field day, the principal looked at the empty track and said, "Perfect weather for a picnic." When the wind lifted Nia's poster from the table, she said, "My presentation is really taking off." The principal meant the weather was miserable, and Nia joked that her poster was flying instead of staying put.

Accept equivalent explanations that identify the intended meaning from the context. For the open task, accept varied events and wording when the response has three sentences, includes both a clear pun and verbal irony, and provides enough context to interpret them.