Label Detective

Use reference clues to sharpen a museum label.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.4c "Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each name of a reference source Elena uses. Circle the exact information each source gives her about sextant, such as its sound, meaning, use, or word history.

The Shipwreck Label

1. At a coastal museum, curator Elena Ruiz prepared labels for a display of objects recovered from a nineteenth-century shipwreck. A brass instrument was listed in an old inventory as a "sextant," but Elena wanted to be precise before printing the label. She opened a general dictionary, which gave the word's pronunciation and identified it as a noun. The entry also defined a sextant as a navigational instrument used to measure angles between celestial objects and the horizon. That meaning fit the device, whose small telescope and movable arm were still visible.

2. Next, Elena consulted a specialized glossary from the museum's maritime collection. Unlike the general dictionary, the glossary explained how a sextant helped sailors calculate a ship's position by measuring the altitude of the sun or a star. It also distinguished the sextant from an astrolabe, an older instrument with a different design and use. The glossary's detailed explanation mattered because visitors might assume every old navigation tool worked the same way. Elena added "maritime navigation" to her notes so that the final label would name both the object and its historical purpose.

3. Finally, Elena used a digital etymology dictionary to investigate the word's history. It traced sextant to the Latin sextans, meaning "one sixth," a name connected to the instrument's arc, which spans one sixth of a circle, or 60 degrees. This origin clarified why the spelling contains x rather than a sound like the first letters of "section." Elena did not place the full history on the short label. Instead, she saved it for a touchscreen feature, where curious visitors could hear the pronunciation, /SEK-stənt/, compare related terms, and see a diagram of the 60-degree arc.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which reference source did Elena use to find the pronunciation of sextant and its part of speech? What part of speech did it identify?

2. What precise information did the maritime glossary add that a general dictionary definition did not provide?

3. What word origin did the etymology dictionary give for sextant, and how does that origin connect to the instrument?

4. If Elena needed to clarify how a sextant differs from an astrolabe, which source from the passage would be most useful? Explain why.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a technical word from a current class text that is not sextant. Consult a general dictionary, a specialized glossary or encyclopedia, and an etymology reference, then write exactly three sentences that name each source type and report useful information from it.

ANSWER KEY

Label Detective

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each name of a reference source Elena uses. Circle the exact information each source gives her about sextant, such as its sound, meaning, use, or word history. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which reference source did Elena use to find the pronunciation of sextant and its part of speech? What part of speech did it identify?	**She used a general dictionary, which identified sextant as a noun.**
2	What precise information did the maritime glossary add that a general dictionary definition did not provide?	**It explained that sailors used a sextant to calculate a ship's position by measuring the altitude of the sun or a star, and it distinguished a sextant from an astrolabe.**
3	What word origin did the etymology dictionary give for sextant, and how does that origin connect to the instrument?	**It traced sextant to the Latin sextans, meaning "one sixth," because the instrument's arc spans one sixth of a circle, or 60 degrees.**
4	If Elena needed to clarify how a sextant differs from an astrolabe, which source from the passage would be most useful? Explain why.	**The specialized maritime glossary would be most useful because it distinguishes the two instruments by their different designs and uses.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A general dictionary lists photosynthesis as a noun and gives its pronunciation as /ˌfoʊtoʊˈsɪnθəsɪs/. A biology glossary defines it as the process in which organisms such as plants use light energy to make sugars from carbon dioxide and water, releasing oxygen. An etymology dictionary traces photo- to Greek phōs, meaning "light," and synthesis to Greek for "putting together."

Accept equivalent descriptions of the three reference sources and accurate paraphrases of the passage. For the open task, accept any verified technical word and accurate information from all three required source types, written in exactly three sentences.