Words After Fire

Use context and source details to separate literal meaning from loaded language.

ELA.10.V.1.3 "Apply knowledge of context clues, figurative language, word relationships, reference materials, and/or background knowledge to determine the connotative and denotative meaning of words and phrases, appropriate to grade level."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three words or phrases whose meanings depend on context, including one figurative phrase. Circle the nearby clues that help you infer each meaning, then write D or C above each underline to show whether it is mainly denotative or connotative.

Chicago Rebuilds

1 On October 8, 1871, a fire began on Chicago's West Side and spread quickly through a city built largely of wood. Strong winds carried burning embers across streets and the Chicago River. For two days, residents fled as homes, businesses, and public buildings burned. The disaster left more than 100,000 people without homes and destroyed much of the city's central district. In later accounts, survivors often called the fire an "inferno," a word that suggests more than ordinary flames. Their descriptions help readers picture both the heat and the fear of the event.

2 After the flames died, photographers recorded blocks of brick chimneys standing above piles of debris. Newspapers printed maps showing the burned area, while relief groups kept ledgers of food, blankets, and temporary shelter. One headline called the downtown "a wilderness of brick and iron." A ledger, by contrast, listed each damaged address in columns. The two sources served different purposes: the headline drew attention, and the ledger organized aid. When historians compare them, they can separate a reporter's vivid impression from details that can be counted or located.

3 Rebuilding began almost at once. New fire codes encouraged brick and stone construction, and architects helped reshape the business district. By 1893, Chicago hosted the World's Columbian Exposition, an international fair that drew visitors from around the world. Some later writers describe the city as "rising from the ashes." The phrase echoes a phoenix, a bird in ancient stories that lives again after fire. Still, recovery was uneven. Many families relied on donations, crowded housing, or temporary work for months. Reading several kinds of sources gives a fuller account of how a city can be damaged, rebuilt, and remembered.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. In paragraph 1, what does "inferno" mean, and what feeling does the word add to the description of the fire? Use two details from the paragraph as evidence.

2. In paragraph 2, what does the headline phrase "a wilderness of brick and iron" suggest about downtown Chicago? Explain why the phrase is figurative.

3. Which source, the newspaper headline or the relief ledger, would be more useful for finding an exact damaged street address? Explain using the passage.

4. What does "recovery was uneven" mean in paragraph 3? Which details help you determine its meaning?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a different word or phrase from the passage, not one named in the questions. Write exactly two sentences: first state its denotative meaning using context, then explain a connotation or image it adds and quote one clue from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Words After Fire

GRADE 10 · ELA.10.V.1.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three words or phrases whose meanings depend on context, including one figurative phrase. Circle the nearby clues that help you infer each meaning, then write D or C above each underline to show whether it is mainly denotative or connotative. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In paragraph 1, what does "inferno" mean, and what feeling does the word add to the description of the fire? Use two details from the paragraph as evidence.	**It means a huge, intensely burning fire. It adds terror and overwhelming destruction, supported by residents fleeing and homes, businesses, and public buildings burning.**
2	In paragraph 2, what does the headline phrase "a wilderness of brick and iron" suggest about downtown Chicago? Explain why the phrase is figurative.	**It suggests that downtown was a bleak, wrecked expanse of remains. It is figurative because downtown was not a literal wilderness; the paragraph describes chimneys above piles of debris.**
3	Which source, the newspaper headline or the relief ledger, would be more useful for finding an exact damaged street address? Explain using the passage.	**The relief ledger, because it listed each damaged address in columns. The headline used vivid language to draw attention.**
4	What does "recovery was uneven" mean in paragraph 3? Which details help you determine its meaning?	**Recovery did not happen equally or at the same rate for everyone. Many families still relied on donations, crowded housing, or temporary work for months.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In paragraph 3, reshape means to change the form or layout of the business district. It suggests deliberate renewal rather than a quick repair, supported by "New fire codes" and "brick and stone construction."

Accept equivalent meanings when students support them with accurate passage details. For the open response, accept another appropriate passage word or phrase if the response has exactly two sentences, gives a literal meaning, and explains an added association with quoted evidence.