Smoke Over London

Use clues, word relationships, and figurative language to uncover meaning.

ELA.11.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 are clarified by nearby clues. Circle one figurative phrase, then number the clue words around each mark that helped you determine its meaning.

London's Deadly Smog

1 On December 5, 1952, a cold spell settled over London. To keep homes warm, residents and businesses burned large amounts of coal. Windless air trapped the smoke close to the ground, while moisture turned it into a thick, yellowish haze. The city did not simply look dim. It seemed to vanish behind a curtain. Buses moved slowly, and some drivers abandoned their cars because they could not see the road. At the time, many Londoners called the polluted air a fog, although it carried soot and sulfur dioxide as well as water droplets.

2 Newspapers later used the word smog, a blend of smoke and fog, to describe the event. The label was accurate, but it could sound almost ordinary. For people who breathed the air, the experience was far from ordinary. Hospitals received thousands of patients with breathing problems, and official records eventually linked the episode to an estimated 4,000 deaths in the following weeks. The smoke did not choose its victims, but older adults, infants, and people with heart or lung conditions were especially vulnerable. In this context, vulnerable means more likely to be harmed, not merely sensitive or easily upset. The haze had become a public-health crisis.

3 Public pressure after the smog helped lead to the Clean Air Act of 1956, which regulated smoke from homes and factories. The law did not erase London's pollution overnight, yet it marked a change in what citizens expected from government and industry. Historians often describe the 1952 smog as a turning point, a phrase that compares history to a road changing direction. That comparison suggests more than a date on a timeline. It presents the disaster as an event that redirected policy and public attention. Today, the episode offers evidence that air pollution can be deadly and that public decisions can reduce risk.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Using details from paragraph 1, what does haze mean as it is used in the passage?

2. What connotation does the phrase “vanish behind a curtain” give to the smog-covered city?

3. How does the word relationship in smog help you determine its meaning?

4. In paragraph 3, what does “erase London's pollution overnight” mean, and what does the phrase suggest about solving pollution problems?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose either victims in paragraph 2 or public pressure in paragraph 3. In exactly two sentences, state its denotative meaning from context, then explain its connotation and cite a phrase from the passage that supports your explanation.

ANSWER KEY

Smoke Over London

GRADE 11 · ELA.11.V.1.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three words or phrases whose meanings are clarified by nearby clues. Circle one figurative phrase, then number the clue words around each mark that helped you determine its meaning. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Using details from paragraph 1, what does haze mean as it is used in the passage?	**A thick, yellowish polluted mist or cloud in the air. Clues include smoke, moisture, soot, sulfur dioxide, and poor visibility.**
2	What connotation does the phrase "vanish behind a curtain" give to the smog-covered city?	**It suggests that the smog formed a concealing barrier, making London seem hidden or cut off.**
3	How does the word relationship in smog help you determine its meaning?	**Smog is a blend of the words smoke and fog, so it means polluted fog made from smoke and moisture.**
4	In paragraph 3, what does "erase London's pollution overnight" mean, and what does the phrase suggest about solving pollution problems?	**It means completely remove London's pollution in a very short time. It suggests that pollution cannot be solved immediately or all at once.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Victims means people harmed or killed by an event. It carries a connotation of helplessness because the passage says, "The smoke did not choose its victims."

Accept equivalent meanings that use accurate passage evidence. For Part 3, accept either selected term when the response has exactly two sentences, gives a context-based denotation, explains a reasonable connotation, and includes a relevant quotation.