Words on Watch

Evaluate how figurative language shapes danger, mood, and meaning.

ELA.12.R.3.1 "Evaluate an author's use of figurative language."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each figurative expression in the passage. Then circle one underlined expression in each paragraph that most strongly shapes how you understand the situation.

The Lookout Log

(1) Before dawn, Lena climbed the hill to the old fire lookout, carrying a thermos and a radio log. Below her, the valley was a bowl of ink, but a thin band of orange lay along the eastern ridge. The tower's windows caught that light and blinked like watchful eyes. Inside, the radio hissed, a small animal hiding in the walls. Lena wrote the wind speed, checked the map, and listened. The ordinary tasks steadied her, yet the dark beyond the glass felt enormous, as if the forest had drawn one long breath and refused to release it. She knew that clear notes could guide crews long after sunrise.

(2) Near noon, a dry thunderstorm stacked gray towers over the western peaks. Lightning stitched the clouds, and minutes later, a lookout south of Lena reported a smoke column. On the horizon, it rose like a dark question mark, narrow at first and then widening in the wind. Lena did not call it a fire in her log until she confirmed the location. Still, the phrase matched what she saw, a warning that seemed to ask who would answer. She relayed coordinates to dispatch, while the column climbed higher and turned the blue sky bruised purple.

(3) By evening, aircraft had traced the fire's edge, and crews were moving toward the ridge. Lena remained at the radio, translating the landscape into bearings, distances, and weather reports. The fire was not a monster, she reminded herself, nor was it a villain with intentions. It was heat, fuel, oxygen, and wind, governed by conditions that people could measure and change. Yet when flames crowned a line of pines, they ran across the slope like a torch passed from tree to tree. That comparison made the danger immediate without pretending that the fire could choose its path. Lena kept writing, because accurate language could become action.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the phrase “a bowl of ink” shape the setting in paragraph 1, and how does the orange band alter that image?

2. Why is the smoke column compared to “a dark question mark” instead of being described only as rising smoke?

3. What effect does the phrase “bruised purple” have on the tone of paragraph 2?

4. How does paragraph 3 use the rejection of “monster” and “villain” to change the meaning of the torch comparison?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence description of a real or imagined high-stakes situation. Use two different kinds of figurative language, then explain in the final sentence how one comparison helps readers understand the situation without making a false literal claim.

ANSWER KEY

Words on Watch

GRADE 12 · ELA.12.R.3.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each figurative expression in the passage. Then circle one underlined expression in each paragraph that most strongly shapes how you understand the situation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the phrase "a bowl of ink" shape the setting in paragraph 1, and how does the orange band alter that image?	**It makes the valley seem nearly black and enclosed. The orange band provides a narrow sign of approaching daylight.**
2	Why is the smoke column compared to "a dark question mark" instead of being described only as rising smoke?	**The comparison suggests both its shape and the uncertainty it creates. It presents the smoke as a warning that demands a response.**
3	What effect does the phrase "bruised purple" have on the tone of paragraph 2?	**It creates an ominous, injured tone, making the changing sky seem threatening and connected to the fire's danger.**
4	How does paragraph 3 use the rejection of "monster" and "villain" to change the meaning of the torch comparison?	**It makes clear that the torch comparison shows the fire's rapid spread, not a fire with intentions. The passage keeps the danger vivid while stressing that fire follows measurable conditions.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

During the blackout, the hospital corridor held its breath as backup lights flickered on. Monitors chirped like impatient birds, cutting through the dark. Nurses moved from room to room with a steadiness that anchored frightened families. Comparing the monitors to birds highlights their urgent, sharp sounds without claiming that the machines are alive.

Accept defensible evaluations that identify a figurative expression and explain its effect on mood, danger, uncertainty, or the reader's understanding. For the open response, accept varied situations if it has four sentences, includes two forms of figurative language, and accurately evaluates one comparison.