Words Shape Water

Use context and word choice to uncover meaning.

ELA.8.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 five words or phrases that create a feeling beyond their basic dictionary meanings. Number a nearby context clue for each one to show what helped you infer its meaning.

A Creek in Transition

1 At the edge of Millstone Park, a small creek slips from a concrete tunnel and bends behind a row of warehouses. For decades, rain from nearby roofs and streets rushed into the creek, carrying oil, litter, and loose soil. During heavy storms, the channel became a muddy ribbon that clawed at its banks. Neighbors called it a ditch, a label that made the waterway sound disposable. Yet maps from the 1800s show that the creek once supported fish, insects, and wetland plants.

2 To change that pattern, restoration crews removed sections of pavement and built shallow basins beside the channel. These basins hold stormwater briefly, allowing some water to soak into the ground instead of surging downstream. Workers also planted native sedges and shrubs. Their roots act like a net, gripping soil during rain. The project did not turn the creek into a wilderness overnight. It gave the stream more room to rise safely and reduced the sediment that clouds its water after storms.

3 People who monitor urban streams often compare notes over seasons rather than days. After planting, they may look for clearer water, insects living along the edges, and plants surviving dry weeks. A return of these signs can be a small victory, not proof that every problem has vanished. The creek still receives runoff from streets, and its recovery remains fragile. Still, calling it only a ditch ignores its role as a living corridor that links soil, water, plants, and nearby residents.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. In paragraph 1, what does clawed mean as it describes the channel? Which nearby details help you infer its meaning?

2. What is the denotative meaning of disposable in paragraph 1? What connotation does the word give to the label ditch?

3. In paragraph 2, the roots act like a net. What do the roots and a net have in common in this comparison?

4. What does fragile mean in paragraph 3? Use a context clue from the paragraph to support your answer.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write two sentences about an overlooked place in or near your school. Use one connotative word and one figurative comparison. Underline each choice and add a short margin note explaining its meaning or effect.

ANSWER KEY # Words Shape Water

GRADE 8 · ELA.8.V.1.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline five words or phrases that create a feeling beyond their basic dictionary meanings. Number a nearby context clue for each one to show what helped you infer its meaning. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In paragraph 1, what does clawed mean as it describes the channel? Which nearby details help you infer its meaning?	**Clawed means scraped away or eroded the banks. The details about heavy storms and a muddy ribbon support this meaning.**
2	What is the denotative meaning of disposable in paragraph 1? What connotation does the word give to the label ditch?	**Disposable means able to be thrown away. It makes the creek seem unimportant or not worth caring for.**
3	In paragraph 2, the roots act like a net. What do the roots and a net have in common in this comparison?	**Both hold or catch something in place. The roots grip the soil so rain does not wash it away as easily.**
4	What does fragile mean in paragraph 3? Use a context clue from the paragraph to support your answer.	**Fragile means easily harmed or not yet secure. The creek still receives runoff from streets, and not every problem has vanished.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The neglected courtyard felt _forgotten_ and uncared for. Its cracked fountain was a _sleeping giant_.

forgotten = neglected; sleeping giant = a large fountain that is still. Accept reasonable inferences when students connect a word or phrase to accurate context from the passage. For the open task, accept varied topics if the response includes two sentences, a connotative word, a figurative comparison, and accurate notes.