Words at Work

Use context and word relationships to infer precise meanings.

ELA.9.V.1 "Finding Meaning"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three words or phrases whose meanings you can infer from context. Circle the nearby words that help you infer each meaning, then draw an arrow from each word to its clues.

Restoring a Prairie Shoreline

1 On a windy Saturday, volunteers gathered at Chicago's Burnham Wildlife Corridor, a narrow stretch of native habitat beside Lake Michigan. Their task was not to plant a manicured garden, but to restore a prairie, an ecosystem once common in the region. The ground looked sparse after winter, yet hidden seeds and deep roots remained alive beneath the soil. Ecologist Maya Thompson explained that native grasses can be resilient, or able to recover after drought, fire, and seasonal change. Restoring them helps insects, birds, and people share a healthier shoreline.

2 Before work began, Thompson asked students to notice the difference between weeds and invasive plants. A weed is simply a plant growing where someone does not want it, she said. An invasive plant is a nonnative species that spreads quickly and can displace native organisms. The distinction mattered when the group removed garlic mustard. If its seeds were allowed to disperse, or scatter widely, the plant could claim more space each year. Volunteers cut the stems before the plants formed seed pods, then carried the pieces away rather than leaving them in a pile.

3 At the end of the day, the corridor did not look dramatic. Small patches of bare earth showed where garlic mustard had grown, and young prairie plants were easy to miss. Still, Thompson called the work a long-term investment. Prairie roots can extend several feet underground, helping soil absorb water during storms. As the native plants mature, they will provide pollen and shelter for wildlife. Thompson said the volunteers were building a legacy, meaning something valuable passed on to future people. Their effort would not transform the shoreline overnight, but it could change what thrives there for decades.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does sparse mean as it describes the ground in paragraph 1? Which nearby detail helps you infer that meaning?

2. How is an invasive plant different from a weed, according to paragraph 2?

3. What does disperse mean in paragraph 2? What words in the sentence directly support your answer?

4. What does legacy mean in paragraph 3? How does the word valuable affect the meaning of legacy in this passage?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write two sentences about a community project. Use one precise word whose meaning a reader can infer from nearby details, but do not define the word directly.

ANSWER KEY

Words at Work

GRADE 9 · ELA.9.V.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three words or phrases whose meanings you can infer from context. Circle the nearby words that help you infer each meaning, then draw an arrow from each word to its clues. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does sparse mean as it describes the ground in paragraph 1? Which nearby detail helps you infer that meaning?	**Sparse means thinly covered or having few plants. The detail that seeds and roots were hidden beneath the soil suggests that little was visible above ground.**
2	How is an invasive plant different from a weed, according to paragraph 2?	**A weed is any plant growing where it is unwanted. An invasive plant is a nonnative species that spreads quickly and can displace native organisms.**
3	What does disperse mean in paragraph 2? What words in the sentence directly support your answer?	**Disperse means scatter or spread widely. The words "or scatter widely" directly support the meaning.**
4	What does legacy mean in paragraph 3? How does the word valuable affect the meaning of legacy in this passage?	**Legacy means something passed on to future people. The word valuable gives legacy a positive meaning.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Neighbors repaired the deteriorated footbridge, replacing its splintered boards and rusted rails. By Saturday, walkers could cross the creek safely again.

Accept reasonable meanings supported by nearby context, even if students use different wording. For Part 3, accept two sentences that include a precise word and enough context for a reader to infer its meaning without a direct definition.