Meaning in Motion

Use word choice to uncover literal meaning, feeling, and purpose.

7.L.V.3 "Meaning & Purpose: Analyze the denotative and connotative meanings of words and phrases and strategically apply those understandings when interpreting and constructing texts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle four words or phrases that carry feelings or associations beyond their dictionary meanings. Next to each circle, write +, -, or M for positive, negative, or mixed feeling.

A Garden Takes Root

1 On the corner of Maple and Third, a vacant lot sat behind a chain-link fence. Broken bottles glittered in the dirt, and weeds pushed through old tires. Neighbors usually hurried past the place. Then Ms. Ortiz opened the gate one morning with a clipboard and a roll of plans. She called the lot a "sleeping space," not a problem. By noon, students, shop owners, and grandparents had gathered beside the fence to study the plans for a community garden.

2 Two weeks later, the lot sounded different. Hammers tapped, shovels scraped, and someone played music from a phone. A raised bed stood where the tires had been, its boards still pale and rough. Jamal pointed to its simple wooden frame and called it "the garden's first backbone." Nearby, Lena painted a sign that read, "Grow Here." She chose bright yellow letters, although the soil below was dark and wet from last night's rain. People stopped at the fence and watched.

3 By late summer, beans curled up strings, and marigolds leaned over the paths. The fence, once a barrier, held a row of hand-painted tiles from the neighborhood children. At the harvest table, Ms. Ortiz did not call the project finished. "This garden has roots now," she said, as families carried home tomatoes and basil. The lot had not changed its address, but it no longer seemed like a place people passed without seeing each day.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does Ms. Ortiz's phrase "sleeping space" suggest about the vacant lot? How is that different from calling it a problem?

2. Jamal calls the wooden frame "the garden's first backbone." What does backbone mean literally, and what does it suggest about the frame?

3. What is the denotative meaning of barrier? What does describing the fence as a barrier suggest about its earlier role?

4. What does Ms. Ortiz most likely mean when she says, "This garden has roots now"? Use one detail from the paragraph to support your answer.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write exactly two sentences about a place at school changing. Use one word with a positive or negative connotation and one nonliteral phrase that helps show how the place changed.

ANSWER KEY

Meaning in Motion

GRADE 7 · 7.L.V.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle four words or phrases that carry feelings or associations beyond their dictionary meanings. Next to each circle, write +, -, or M for positive, negative, or mixed feeling. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does Ms. Ortiz's phrase "sleeping space" suggest about the vacant lot? How is that different from calling it a problem?	**It suggests the lot has unused potential and could become active or useful. Calling it a problem would focus on its negative condition.**
2	Jamal calls the wooden frame "the garden's first backbone." What does backbone mean literally, and what does it suggest about the frame?	**Literally, a backbone supports a body. The phrase suggests that the frame is an important support or beginning for the whole garden.**
3	What is the denotative meaning of barrier? What does describing the fence as a barrier suggest about its earlier role?	**A barrier is something that blocks or separates. It suggests the fence once kept people apart from the lot or kept them out.**
4	What does Ms. Ortiz most likely mean when she says, "This garden has roots now"? Use one detail from the paragraph to support your answer.	**She means the garden is established and connected to the community, not just newly planted. Supporting details include the children's tiles, families taking home food, or the harvest table.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The gloomy hallway felt like a tunnel before the art show. After students hung their paintings, it became a bright river of color.

Accept varied interpretations when students identify a reasonable connotation or nonliteral meaning and support it with passage details. For the writing task, check for exactly two sentences, an intentional positive or negative connotation, and a nonliteral phrase that shows change.