Meaning in Place

Analyze how word choices create literal meaning and emotional tone.

8.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 three words or phrases that give the lot or garden a positive or negative feeling, and write + or − beside each one. Underline the phrase that names the plan most directly.

A Garden Takes Root

1 On Saturday mornings, Maya walked past the vacant lot beside the library. Its chain-link fence leaned inward, and wind pushed wrappers against the gate. A cracked sign warned, "No Trespassing." Most people hurried by without looking. Maya, however, noticed sunlight reaching the bare ground and a faucet on the library wall. At a neighborhood meeting, she proposed turning the lot into a garden. Some adults called the idea practical. Others said it was unrealistic because the site had been empty for years.

2 Two weeks later, volunteers cleared trash, repaired the fence, and built raised beds. The city posted a notice calling the plan a "community garden project." Maya's flyer used different language: "Help wake up our sleeping patch of earth." By noon, families had donated seeds, and a hardware store offered wood for a small tool shed. Maya taped the flyer to the library door, where people entering for books could read it. Soon, several neighbors asked when they could help.

3 At the garden's opening, the mayor praised the volunteers for transforming an "eyesore" into a "neighborhood jewel." A year earlier, some residents had complained about the lot's appearance and avoided the sidewalk beside it. Now children carried watering cans through the gate, and neighbors traded basil and tomatoes. Maya chose a third name for the gate: "Second Chance Garden." The new sign stood near the entrance, beside tomato plants and a painted rain barrel. People stopped to read it before walking along the paths.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does the phrase “vacant lot” mean in paragraph 1? Use one detail from the paragraph to support your answer.

2. How do the words “cracked,” “wrappers,” and “No Trespassing” affect the connotation of the lot at the beginning?

3. Compare “community garden project” with “sleeping patch of earth.” Which phrase sounds more formal, and which phrase creates a more imaginative or hopeful feeling? Explain.

4. What do “eyesore” and “neighborhood jewel” suggest about the lot? How does using both phrases emphasize the change?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine an unused bus shelter will become a free book exchange. Write a two-sentence announcement that includes a clear, direct description and a phrase with a positive connotation. Put brackets around your positive-connotation phrase.

ANSWER KEY

Meaning in Place

GRADE 8 · 8.L.V.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle three words or phrases that give the lot or garden a positive or negative feeling, and write + or − beside each one. Underline the phrase that names the plan most directly. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does the phrase "vacant lot" mean in paragraph 1? Use one detail from the paragraph to support your answer.	**It means an empty, unused piece of land. The passage says the site had been empty for years.**
2	How do the words "cracked," "wrappers," and "No Trespassing" affect the connotation of the lot at the beginning?	**They create a negative connotation, suggesting that the lot is neglected, unwelcoming, and unpleasant.**
3	Compare "community garden project" with "sleeping patch of earth." Which phrase sounds more formal, and which phrase creates a more imaginative or hopeful feeling? Explain.	**"Community garden project" sounds more formal and directly names the plan. "Sleeping patch of earth" is more imaginative and hopeful because it suggests the land could be awakened or renewed.**
4	What do "eyesore" and "neighborhood jewel" suggest about the lot? How does using both phrases emphasize the change?	**"Eyesore" suggests something unattractive or bothersome, while "neighborhood jewel" suggests something valuable and admired. The contrast emphasizes the lot's transformation.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The unused bus shelter on Pine Street will become a free book exchange. Visit our [new reading nook] to share a book and find a story.

Accept reasonable explanations of denotative meaning and connotation when students support them with passage details. For Part 3, accept any two-sentence announcement with a direct description and a clearly marked positive phrase that fits the purpose.