Words Shape Rivers

Track how word choice changes a reader's view of an event.

9.L.V.3 "Meaning & Purpose: Analyze and craft nuanced words and phrases in a variety of texts and for a variety of purposes."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three words or phrases that frame dam removal differently, then number each 1, 2, or 3 to show whether it emphasizes repair, loss, or a technical process.

A River Returns

1 Before 2011, two dams blocked Washington State's Elwha River for nearly a century. The structures supplied electricity, but they also kept salmon from reaching more than sixty miles of upstream habitat. When officials approved dam removal, supporters did not describe the decision as a simple demolition. They called it a "river restoration," a phrase that focused attention on what could return: salmon runs, sediment, and tribal fishing traditions. The phrase also suggested repair, recognizing that the dams had changed a living system rather than merely occupied a place on a map.

2 Yet "restoration" did not mean that everyone experienced the project as a return to an untouched past. Lake Aldwell and Lake Mills had become familiar places for boaters, nearby residents, and businesses. For those people, the word "removal" could sound abrupt, as if valued memories were being erased. Project reports often used the more technical term "decommissioning." That word emphasized planning, safety checks, and the end of a structure's service, not a reckless act of destruction. Each term pointed readers toward a different purpose: honoring loss, explaining a process, or arguing for ecological recovery.

3 After the dams came down, the river carried trapped sediment toward the coast, reshaping beaches and riverbanks. Salmon began returning to stretches of habitat that had been inaccessible for generations. A news report might present these changes with measured verbs such as "increased" and "moved." A tribal leader speaking at the river, however, might choose "returned" or "reconnected," words with cultural weight as well as scientific meaning. Neither approach is automatically more truthful. The best choice depends on audience and purpose. Precise language can report physical change, while resonant language can show why that change matters to people.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the phrase “river restoration” guide readers to view the dam removal differently from “simple demolition”?

2. Compare the effects of “removal” and “decommissioning” in paragraph 2. What does each word emphasize?

3. Why does the author state that restoration was not a return to an “untouched past”?

4. Why might a news report use “increased” and “moved,” while a tribal leader might use “returned” and “reconnected”?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write two or three sentences about a proposed change in your school or community. Use two different terms for the same action, and explain how each term fits a different audience or purpose.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 9 · 9.L.V.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three words or phrases that frame dam removal differently, then number each 1, 2, or 3 to show whether it emphasizes repair, loss, or a technical process. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the phrase "river restoration" guide readers to view the dam removal differently from "simple demolition"?	**"River restoration" emphasizes repair and the return of salmon, sediment, and tribal fishing traditions. "Simple demolition" would focus mainly on tearing down structures.**
2	Compare the effects of "removal" and "decommissioning" in paragraph 2. What does each word emphasize?	**"Removal" can emphasize abrupt loss and erased memories. "Decommissioning" emphasizes a planned, safe process that ends a structure's service.**
3	Why does the author state that restoration was not a return to an "untouched past"?	**The lakes had become meaningful places for boaters, residents, and businesses, so the change involved loss for some people as well as ecological recovery.**
4	Why might a news report use "increased" and "moved," while a tribal leader might use "returned" and "reconnected"?	**A news report may aim to describe physical changes precisely. A tribal leader may also emphasize the cultural importance of the river and salmon.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

For families concerned about traffic, the plan is a "street redesign" that adds protected crossings and slower turns. For students who walk to school, it is a "safer route," because that phrase emphasizes the daily benefit rather than the construction work.

Accept reasonable paraphrases that explain how connotations and audience shape meaning. For Part 3, students should use two distinct terms for one action and connect each term to a clear audience or purpose.