Beyond the Headlines

Read context clues in a historical letter.

9.P.ST.1 "Context: Develop and apply knowledge of key components of context such as background information, geographic location, cultural influences, time period, and contemporary events when interpreting and constructing texts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show background, location, culture, time, or events, then label each one with B, L, C, T, or E in the margin. These context clues help you interpret the writer's words.

A Letter From Block 14

(1) March 18, 1943, Manzanar War Relocation Center, California. Snow still brightened the Sierra Nevada peaks beyond the fence when I carried Mother's letter to the camp post office. Before the war, our family ran a small grocery in Los Angeles. After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States forced many people of Japanese ancestry from West Coast homes into camps. Here, wind pushed sand through the cracks of our barrack. I wrote to my cousin in Chicago that the mountains looked beautiful, but the guard tower beside them changed what beauty meant.

(2) Life in the camp did not erase the habits we carried with us. At the community hall, teenagers practiced swing steps for Saturday's dance, while Auntie folded paper cranes for a church fundraiser. At breakfast, Father read a newspaper report about United States troops fighting in North Africa. Then he set down the paper and studied the government loyalty questionnaire that camp residents had been asked to complete. Some neighbors argued that the questions were unfair because their families were confined behind fences. Others hoped answers showing loyalty might help them leave for work or school. I listened, realizing that the war reached our table even before the mail arrived.

(3) Chicago sounded distant in my cousin's letters. She described crowded streetcars, a factory job, and an apartment without a curfew bell. Her words made me notice details I had accepted, the numbered block on our address, the dust on my shoes, and the soldiers at the gate. I did not want my cousin to pity us, so I also described Mother's tomatoes growing in a tin can. Still, I ended my letter with a request: "When you read the news about the war, remember that we are here." The sentence was not about family. It was my way of asking someone beyond Manzanar to see what the headlines left out.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What two details explain the family's life before and after they were forced to Manzanar?

2. How does the geographic setting change the meaning of the writer's description of the mountains as beautiful?

3. Identify two cultural details from the community hall. What do those details show about camp life?

4. How do World War II and the loyalty questionnaire help explain the writer's final request to remember the people in Manzanar?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Using only details from the passage, write a four-sentence historical note to print beside this letter. Include the wartime setting, one geographic detail, one cultural detail, and an explanation of how an event or condition changes the meaning of the letter.

ANSWER KEY

Beyond the Headlines

GRADE 9 · 9.P.ST.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that show background, location, culture, time, or events, then label each one with B, L, C, T, or E in the margin. These context clues help you interpret the writer's words. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What two details explain the family's life before and after they were forced to Manzanar?	**Before the war, the family ran a small grocery in Los Angeles. At Manzanar, they lived in a barrack where wind pushed sand through cracks.**
2	How does the geographic setting change the meaning of the writer's description of the mountains as beautiful?	**The Sierra Nevada mountains are beside a fence and guard tower, so their beauty is connected to the writer's confinement and lack of freedom.**
3	Identify two cultural details from the community hall. What do those details show about camp life?	**Teenagers practice swing steps, and Auntie folds paper cranes. These details show that residents continued community activities and traditions while living in the camp.**
4	How do World War II and the loyalty questionnaire help explain the writer's final request to remember the people in Manzanar?	**The war led to the confinement of Japanese Americans, and the questionnaire shows that wartime policies affected residents directly. The writer wants readers to see experiences that war headlines may leave out.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

This letter was written at Manzanar War Relocation Center in California during World War II. The Sierra Nevada mountains and the fence show that the setting could look beautiful while still limiting the writer's freedom. Swing dancing and paper-crane folding show that camp residents maintained and blended community traditions. Because the United States had confined Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor and was asking residents to complete loyalty questionnaires, the writer wants readers of war news to notice lives missing from headlines.

Accept equivalent responses that use accurate passage evidence and explain how context affects meaning. For the historical note, accept four sentences that include all four required context elements and make a supported interpretation.