Beyond the Drain

Trace how one word changes the scope of an argument.

11-12.RC.14 "Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a nonfiction text, including figurative, connotative, denotative, and technical meanings..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle each use of *capacity* and number the circles in reading order. Underline a nearby detail that helps you understand what the word means at that point.

What a Drain Can Carry

(1) Picture a September cloudburst outside a neighborhood school. Water gathers around the curb. A paper cup spins in the brown current while students step over puddles on their way home. The storm drain has a capacity: a limit to how much water its pipes can carry in a given time. But leaves cover the opening, so even less water can get inside. On a city plan, capacity might look like a number. On this street, it looks like soaked shoes, a late bus, and a parent lifting a child over the curb.

(2) Clearing leaves would restore the opening, but it would not make heavy rain disappear. Pavement around the school sends water toward the same low corner, concentrating runoff where the drain must take it in. In this setting, capacity is partly an engineering measurement and partly a test of maintenance: a wide pipe does little good if its entrance is blocked. A city can post a number for the pipe, but that number cannot tell a student whether tomorrow's walk will be dry. Keeping the inlet clear takes workers, schedules, and money, not just concrete.

(3) Now stretch the word beyond the drain. A neighborhood's capacity to handle storms includes who can report a blocked inlet, who receives a warning, and who has time to respond. This is not a quantity an engineer can read from a pipe diagram. It is a shared ability, unevenly distributed when some residents lack a reliable way to contact the city. The shift in meaning matters: if capacity means only what a pipe can carry, flooded shoes look like a plumbing problem. If it also means what a community can do, the water at the curb becomes a question about whose concerns get heard.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What is the technical meaning of *capacity* in paragraph 1? Which detail shows why the drain might take in less water than that limit?

2. What do the soaked shoes, late bus, and parent lifting a child add to the feeling of the word *capacity* in paragraph 1?

3. How does paragraph 2 expand the meaning of *capacity* beyond a pipe's measurement? Use two details from the paragraph.

4. What figurative meaning does *capacity* gain in paragraph 3? How does that meaning change the author's point about a flooded street?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75 to 100 word paragraph about school buses used in an evacuation. Use *capacity* first for the number of passengers a bus can safely carry and later for the school's broader ability to help people leave; show how the shift changes what matters.

ANSWER KEY

Beyond the Drain

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.RC.14

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle each use of *capacity* and number the circles in reading order. Underline a nearby detail that helps you understand what the word means at that point. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What is the technical meaning of *capacity* in paragraph 1? Which detail shows why the drain might take in less water than that limit?	**It is the limit on how much water the pipes can carry in a given time. Leaves covering the opening keep water from entering.**
2	What do the soaked shoes, late bus, and parent lifting a child add to the feeling of the word *capacity* in paragraph 1?	**They make a numerical limit feel urgent and personal by showing how poor drainage disrupts people's daily lives.**
3	How does paragraph 2 expand the meaning of *capacity* beyond a pipe's measurement? Use two details from the paragraph.	**It also depends on maintenance. The inlet can be blocked even when the pipe is wide, and keeping it clear requires workers, schedules, and money.**
4	What figurative meaning does *capacity* gain in paragraph 3? How does that meaning change the author's point about a flooded street?	**It becomes a neighborhood's shared ability to prepare and respond. The flood is then a question about whose concerns are heard, not just how much water a pipe carries.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

During an evacuation, a bus's capacity is the number of passengers it can safely carry, not the number who might squeeze into the aisle. That limit matters when a school decides how many buses to request. Yet the school's capacity to get everyone to safety also depends on clear instructions, accessible transportation, and a plan for students who need extra help. The first meaning counts seats; the second asks whether the plan works for every person. A full fleet is not enough if anyone is left waiting.

Accept answers that distinguish a measurable limit from the practical or shared ability to respond. For the open task, the two uses of *capacity* should be clear, and the paragraph should be 75 to 100 words.