What Counts as Clean

Trace how a writer builds an argument.

8.RC "Students analyze the author's technique, structure, main ideas, purpose, and perspective in grade-level fiction and nonfiction text, using textual evidence to support analysis."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one sentence in each paragraph that helps build the writer's argument. Number your underlined sentences 1, 2, and 3 to track how the argument develops.

An Untidy Solution

1. On Monday, the school courtyard looked like it had been painted in copper and gold. By Wednesday, the leaves were gone, and bare soil showed through the flower beds. I watched a groundskeeper push the last pile into a cart while a robin hopped along behind it. Clean paths matter, especially when wet leaves make them slippery. But stripping every bed as bare as a hallway floor solves one problem by creating another. Our school should clear the walkways and let some fallen leaves remain where plants grow.

2. Leaves are not just scraps to be thrown away. As they break down, they add organic matter to soil, which helps it hold moisture. A layer of leaves can also shelter small animals, including insects, during cold weather. That does not mean we should bury every plant under a heavy mound. A thin layer, kept off paths and drains, would make the beds easier to maintain without treating every leaf like litter. We could even put a small sign beside one bed to explain why it looks different.

3. Some students might see a leaf-covered bed and think the school has stopped caring for it. I understand that reaction because I used to think neat meant empty. Then I noticed the robin searching the soil after the cart had passed, and I wondered what our tidy courtyard had lost. A sign could turn that question into a conversation instead of a complaint. We do not have to choose between safety and living soil. Let the paths stay clear, and let the beds tell a different story.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the contrast between Monday and Wednesday in the opening help introduce the writer's argument? Use a detail from the passage.

2. Why does the writer explain what leaves do for soil and animals in the second paragraph, after describing the courtyard?

3. How does the writer address a concern about leaving leaves on school grounds? Identify the concern and the proposed solution.

4. What does the admission “I used to think neat meant empty” reveal about the writer's perspective? Explain how it helps the writer's purpose.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence alternative opening from the groundskeeper's point of view. Then write two sentences explaining how this perspective changes the focus, using one detail from the original passage as evidence.

ANSWER KEY

What Counts as Clean

GRADE 8 · 8.RC

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one sentence in each paragraph that helps build the writer's argument. Number your underlined sentences 1, 2, and 3 to track how the argument develops. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the contrast between Monday and Wednesday in the opening help introduce the writer's argument? Use a detail from the passage.	**The courtyard changes from leaves described as copper and gold to bare soil. This contrast makes the complete removal of leaves seem like a loss and introduces the case for leaving some in the beds.**
2	Why does the writer explain what leaves do for soil and animals in the second paragraph, after describing the courtyard?	**The courtyard scene raises a concern about removing leaves. The second paragraph supports that concern with reasons to keep some leaves: they add organic matter to soil and shelter small animals.**
3	How does the writer address a concern about leaving leaves on school grounds? Identify the concern and the proposed solution.	**The writer acknowledges that wet leaves can make paths slippery, then proposes clearing walkways while leaving a thin layer in the flower beds.**
4	What does the admission "I used to think neat meant empty" reveal about the writer's perspective? Explain how it helps the writer's purpose.	**The writer once valued bare, tidy beds but now sees a reason to leave some leaves. Admitting that change may help readers reconsider their own idea of a cared-for courtyard.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I steer the cart beside the school flower beds while a robin follows me. Wet leaves on the walkway could make someone slip, so I clear the path first. When I reach the beds, I pause before scooping up the leaves there. This opening focuses on the groundskeeper's decisions rather than the student's reaction to the bare soil. The original narrator says wet leaves can make paths slippery, a detail that explains why the groundskeeper might start with the walkway.

Accept different underlined sentences if students can explain how each contributes to the argument. For the alternative opening, accept plausible groundskeeper perspectives that remain consistent with the passage and explanations supported by a specific detail.