Words at Work

How word choice shapes an informational text

RI.6.4 "Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle "ecosystem engineers," "sediment," "sponge," "pest," and "neighbor," then underline nearby clues that help you explain what each means or how it sounds.

A Beaver Changes the Stream

1 At the edge of a forest, a beaver cuts small trees with its sharp front teeth. It carries branches to a stream and packs them with mud to build a dam. Water collects behind the dam, forming a pond. Beavers are sometimes called ecosystem engineers. They do not draw plans or wear hard hats, but their work changes the places where other living things can survive. Frogs may breed in the still water, and birds may find food nearby.

2 As cloudy brown water slows, sediment sinks to the bottom instead of rushing downstream. After a heavy rain, the pond can hold extra water for a while. In this way, the wetland acts like a sponge, soaking up some of the sudden flow. That does not mean a dam stops every flood. Water can spill over a dam or flow around it. Still, the pond may give the stream below a little more time before the water rises.

3 Some people call a beaver a pest when a pond floods a road or a farm field. Flooding can block travel or damage crops, so the concern is real. Communities may use pipes through dams to control pond levels while leaving some wetland habitat in place. These pipes are called flow devices. Where a road and a pond meet, people must weigh costs against benefits. A beaver can be a difficult neighbor, yet its pond can support many other neighbors.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does “ecosystem engineers” suggest about beavers? Use a detail from the first paragraph to support your answer.

2. What does “sediment” mean in the second paragraph? Which nearby words help you tell?

3. Why does the writer compare the wetland to a “sponge”? What does that word help you picture?

4. How does calling a beaver a “pest” create a different tone from calling it a “neighbor”?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write two original descriptions of water from a beaver pond covering a road, one calm and one urgent. Keep that fact the same in both, then explain how one word you chose changes the tone.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle “ecosystem engineers,” “sediment,” “sponge,” “pest,” and “neighbor,” then underline nearby clues that help you explain what each means or how it sounds. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does “ecosystem engineers” suggest about beavers? Use a detail from the first paragraph to support your answer.	**Beavers change habitats through their building. Their dams form ponds where frogs may breed and birds may find food.**
2	What does “sediment” mean in the second paragraph? Which nearby words help you tell?	**Sediment is small material, such as soil, carried by water. The cloudy brown water and the material sinking to the bottom are clues.**
3	Why does the writer compare the wetland to a “sponge”? What does that word help you picture?	**The comparison helps readers picture the wetland holding some extra water after rain and slowing its flow.**
4	How does calling a beaver a “pest” create a different tone from calling it a “neighbor”?	**“Pest” sounds annoyed and focuses on damage. “Neighbor” sounds more accepting and suggests people must share space with beavers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Water from a beaver pond has covered the road. Water from a beaver pond has swallowed the road. “Swallowed” makes the second description feel more urgent because it suggests the water is taking over.

Accept meanings supported by passage clues rather than exact wording. For Your Turn, both descriptions must keep the road-covering fact and show a clear change in tone.