The Blue Barrel

Trace how a dry garden changes two neighbors.

RL.8.2 "Determine themes of a text, and analyze how they are developed through relationships of characters, setting and plot, citing textual evidence, paraphrasing or summarizing."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two moments when the dry courtyard affects a character's choice, and circle one moment when Nia and Omar begin to cooperate. Number your three marks in plot order to trace how a theme develops.

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1 By late August, the courtyard garden looked like a tray left in the oven. Cracks crossed the soil, and the blue rain barrel held only a few inches of water. Nia guarded it with a measuring cup because her grandmother's pepper plants had finally begun to flower. When Omar, the new boy upstairs, asked for water for a drooping bean vine, Nia shook her head. "If I share, neither plant may make it," she said. Omar stared at the peppers, then carried his empty can back to the stairs.

2 That afternoon, Nia found Omar beside the garden, holding a torn white sheet. He had noticed that the wall shaded the peppers each morning but left the beans baking all day. "We could hang this over both beds," he offered. Nia nearly refused. Her grandmother had taught her to save water, not waste it, and she had promised to protect the peppers. Then she noticed Omar's hands were red from pulling weeds around her grandmother's plants. She fetched string, and together they tied the sheet between two railings.

3 Under their new patch of shade, the soil stayed damp longer. Nia poured half a cup at the base of each plant while Omar loosened the hard ground so the water could sink in. For the next week, they met before the sun reached the courtyard. The beans stood upright again, and the pepper blossoms remained. When Nia's grandmother came downstairs, she asked who had saved her plants. Nia looked at Omar and said, "We saved more than the peppers." Omar handed her the measuring cup for tomorrow.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What theme emerges from Nia's first refusal and her later decision to share water? Use both moments to explain your answer.

2. How does the courtyard setting lead Omar to suggest the sheet? Explain how his idea helps develop a theme.

3. How does Omar's care for the pepper plants change Nia's choice? What does this change suggest about their relationship?

4. What does Nia mean when she says, "We saved more than the peppers"? Connect her words to Omar's action in the final sentence and one earlier detail.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an alternate ending in which the sheet comes loose during the next hot morning. In 5 to 6 sentences, show how Nia and Omar respond, state a theme their actions develop, and explain how the setting and their relationship support it using one detail from the original passage.

ANSWER KEY

The Blue Barrel

GRADE 8 · RL.8.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two moments when the dry courtyard affects a character's choice, and circle one moment when Nia and Omar begin to cooperate. Number your three marks in plot order to trace how a theme develops. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What theme emerges from Nia's first refusal and her later decision to share water? Use both moments to explain your answer.	**Working together can protect more than keeping a scarce resource to yourself. Nia first refuses Omar water, but later gives each plant half a cup as they care for the garden together.**
2	How does the courtyard setting lead Omar to suggest the sheet? Explain how his idea helps develop a theme.	**The wall shades the peppers but leaves the beans in the sun, so Omar suggests hanging the sheet over both beds. His idea shows that they can respond to a shared problem by helping each other.**
3	How does Omar's care for the pepper plants change Nia's choice? What does this change suggest about their relationship?	**Seeing that Omar has pulled weeds around her grandmother's peppers helps Nia accept his offer. She begins to see him as a partner rather than someone who only wants the garden's limited water.**
4	What does Nia mean when she says, "We saved more than the peppers"? Connect her words to Omar's action in the final sentence and one earlier detail.	**They also saved Omar's beans and formed a partnership. Earlier, they tied up the sheet together; at the end, Omar hands Nia the measuring cup, showing they plan to keep caring for the plants together.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The next morning, a hot wind tore the sheet from the railings. Nia caught one corner while Omar brought two heavy pots to hold its edges down. Their first attempt failed, but they tried again together. With the beds shaded, they needed only a little water from the barrel. Their actions show that cooperation can help people protect what they both value. The dry courtyard makes their solution important because the barrel held "only a few inches of water," and Nia now trusts Omar enough to work beside him.

Accept other supported themes, including that trust can grow when people face a shared problem. In Part 3, look for an invented event that fits the setting, a clear theme, and an accurate detail from the passage.