

Words in the Depot

Use context to distinguish near-synonyms in a museum exhibit.

9-10L5b "Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the three pairs of italicized words that have similar denotations. Circle the nearby details that show why each word is more precise, and number the pairs 1 through 3.

Mara's Depot Exhibit

- ① At the town museum, Mara arranged an exhibit about the old train depot. Her first label called the waiting room *empty* on the morning she visited. No travelers sat beneath the high windows, although the room still held benches, maps, and a working clock. Another label described the ticket office as *vacant*. Dust covered its counter, and no clerk had worked there since passenger service ended in 1982. Mara placed the two labels beside photographs taken from the same doorway, inviting visitors to consider why one unused space felt temporary and the other long forsaken.
- ② Next, Mara selected a close photograph of a wooden bench near the platform. Its arms were *worn* smooth where generations of passengers had rested their hands. For the depot sign, she chose a wider photograph. The painted letters were *weathered*, their edges faded after years of rain, wind, and summer sun. Both objects showed age, but the captions directed attention to different forces. The bench recorded repeated human use. The sign showed what the outdoors had done to it. Mara wanted the exhibit to make damage seem like evidence, not merely decay.
- ③ At the end of the exhibit, Mara wrote about the preservation crew. Workers *repaired* the station clock by replacing a broken gear so its hands could move again. They *restored* the faded mural in the lobby by cleaning it and matching missing paint to old photographs. Neither task made the depot new. Still, Mara avoided using the same verb for both projects. One caption emphasized function, while the other emphasized recovering an earlier appearance. As visitors left, they could see how a single careful word changed the story told by an object.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

- 1 In paragraph 1, why is *empty* more precise than *vacant* for the waiting room? Use one detail from the passage.

- 2 How do the details about the bench and the sign show the difference between *worn* and *weathered*?

- 3 Both *repaired* and *restored* describe improving something. What different result does each word emphasize in paragraph 3?

- 4 Choose one italicized pair from the passage. Explain why switching the two words would make the captions less precise.

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Write exactly three sentences about a place or object. Use and underline two words with similar denotations but different nuances, then include context clues that make the difference clear.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline the three pairs of italicized words that have similar denotations. Circle the nearby details that show why each word is more precise, and number the pairs 1 through 3. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In paragraph 1, why is <i>empty</i> more precise than <i>vacant</i> for the waiting room? Use one detail from the passage.	The waiting room had no travelers only on the morning Mara visited, but it still contained benches, maps, and a working clock. <i>Empty</i> suggests a temporary lack of people.
2	How do the details about the bench and the sign show the difference between <i>worn</i> and <i>weathered</i> ?	The bench was <i>worn</i> smooth by passengers' hands, so the word emphasizes repeated use. The sign was <i>weathered</i> by rain, wind, and sun, so the word emphasizes outdoor exposure.
3	Both <i>repaired</i> and <i>restored</i> describe improving something. What different result does each word emphasize in paragraph 3?	<i>Repaired</i> emphasizes making the clock work again by replacing its gear. <i>Restored</i> emphasizes bringing back the mural's earlier appearance by cleaning it and matching missing paint.
4	Choose one italicized pair from the passage. Explain why switching the two words would make the captions less precise.	Answers vary. For example, switching <i>worn</i> and <i>weathered</i> ignores that the bench changed through human use while the sign changed through outdoor conditions.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

After the final bell, the hallway was quiet, with only a custodian's cart rattling near the stairs. The closed science room was silent, because no one had entered it all weekend. The small sound in the hallway makes quiet less complete than silent.

Accept explanations that use passage details to distinguish temporary emptiness from long-term disuse, human use from outdoor exposure, or function from recovered appearance. For the open response, accept any accurate pair of near-synonyms if the context clearly establishes a meaningful difference.