Words at the Burn Site

Compare how a report and a narrative use word choice, connotation, and a technical term

Name: _____ Date: _____

Read Two Genres

Directions: Read both original classroom texts. They describe the same event from different genres. As you read, lightly box these exact phrases: **fuel load**, **smoke column**, **black coat**, **removed**, and **reset**.

Classroom Text A: Field Report: Willow Creek Burn Unit

By J. Morales, fire-crew intern
May 14, 2026
Fictional classroom text

At 9:10 a.m., crew members lit small lines of fire inside a 12-acre oak stand. Before ignition, they inspected the bare-soil firebreak around the unit. Flame heights stayed below two feet. A smoke column rose straight above the trees in the still air. The crew watched the boundary until the flames went out. The burn removed part of the fuel load without reaching the pines. No injuries or equipment damage were reported.

Classroom Text B: After the Fire

By Lena Ortiz, student observer
May 14, 2026
Fictional classroom text

When our bus passed the oak stand after lunch, the ground wore a black coat. For a moment, the woods looked silent and unfamiliar. Then I noticed small green shoots pushing through the ash near a log. The careful fire had not erased the place; it seemed to press a reset button. I could still smell smoke, but the pines stood above the dark ground like patient guards.

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Analyze the Word Choices

1. In Text A, what does the technical term **fuel load** most likely mean? Cite one detail from the report that supports your meaning.

2. Compare **smoke column** in Text A with **black coat** in Text B. What does each phrase make you picture or feel? Explain how the phrases help create a different tone or mood.

3. Compare the connotations of **removed** in Text A and **reset** in Text B. Then explain how the technical term and these word choices fit the purposes of a field report and a personal narrative.

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Teaching Notes and Answers 1-2

Materials supplied: two student pages containing two original fictional classroom texts and response space. **Additionally needed:** one copy per student, pencils, and optional highlighters. No outside source is needed.

Exact setup: Print pages double-sided or distribute page 1 before page 2. Seat students where they can annotate independently. Place pencils and optional highlighters at tables. Display or read the directions only; do not explain the target words before students respond.

Teaching script: Say: “These two texts describe the same burn site, but they have different purposes. First, box the five phrases named in the directions. Next, use nearby details to infer meaning. When you discuss connotation, explain the feeling or association a word carries, not only its dictionary meaning. Your evidence must come from the texts.” After independent reading, say: “For each response, name the word or phrase and connect it to a detail from the text.”

Observation method: During work time, use a checklist for each student: (a) boxed all five exact phrases, (b) inferred the technical term from context, (c) identified an effect on tone or mood, and (d) used textual evidence. Prompt without supplying answers: “Which nearby detail helps you infer that?” Collect page 2 and score each numbered response using the criteria below.

1. Technical term - acceptable answer: *Fuel load* means the burnable material available in the area, such as dry grass, small branches, or other vegetation. Supporting evidence may include that crew members “lit small lines of fire inside a 12-acre oak stand” and that the burn “removed part” of the fuel load while the pines were not reached. Award credit for an accurate context-based definition and one relevant detail. Do not require students to name a particular material not stated in the text.

2. Image, tone, and mood - sample answer: “Smoke column” creates a picture of smoke rising in a straight, vertical form. In the report, that precise image supports a calm, observational, controlled tone. “Black coat” compares the burned ground to clothing; it can make the scene feel dark, strange, or somber. The narrative's image supports a more personal and reflective mood. Accept other defensible mood words when connected to the language.

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Answer 3 and Scoring Notes

3. Connotation and genre - sample answer: *Removed* is neutral and procedural; it makes the burn sound like a measured action recorded in a report. *Reset* is figurative and can suggest renewal or a fresh start, so it gives the narrative a more hopeful, reflective feeling. The field report uses the technical term *fuel load* and measurable details because it documents operations. The personal narrative uses images and metaphor because it shares an observer's experience. Full credit requires both words, a comparison of connotation, the technical term, and a genre-based explanation.

Scoring suggestion: Item 1: 1 point for an accurate definition and 1 point for relevant evidence. Item 2: 1 point for comparison of the two images, 1 point for tone or mood analysis, and 1 point for evidence. Item 3: 1 point for connotation comparison, 1 point for technical-term and genre explanation, and 1 point for evidence. Total: 8 points.

Source credit: “Field Report: Willow Creek Burn Unit” and “After the Fire” are original fictional classroom texts created for this worksheet, dated 2026. They are not reports of an actual burn or quotations from an outside source.