Words Beneath Words

Use reference entries to read a museum label precisely

11-12.L.4.c "Consult general and specialized reference materials to find the pronunciation of a word, explore its meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two places where a general dictionary supplies information, circle two places where a manuscript glossary narrows a meaning, and number one word-history clue. These marks show how different references help you interpret a museum label.

A Closer Look at the Manuscript

1. During a museum visit, Lena saw faint lines beneath a page of medieval writing. The label called the page a *palimpsest*, but a quick guess from the display was not enough for her research notes. A general dictionary identified *palimpsest* as a noun for a writing surface reused after earlier writing was erased. It also listed a figurative sense: something that shows traces of earlier layers. A manuscript-studies glossary narrowed the museum meaning to reused material such as parchment. That specialized entry helped Lena avoid calling every faded manuscript a palimpsest: the surface must have been prepared for writing again.

2. On another label, Lena found the word *quire*. The general dictionary gave its pronunciation as *kwire*, rhyming with *fire*, and listed several meanings, including a unit of paper. A manuscript-studies glossary was more precise: a quire is a gathering of folded sheets, usually nested together and bound as a unit. A familiar sound did not make the sense obvious: she had once heard a choir sing, but *quire* on the label referred to a book's structure. Lena chose the specialized meaning because the curator was describing how a handwritten book was assembled, not how much blank paper a shop sold.

3. Back at her desk, Lena checked the dictionary's word history for *palimpsest*. Its Greek elements mean “again” and “scraped,” a clue to the physical work of reuse, not proof that every page was scraped in exactly the same way. She also checked *recto* and *verso* in a manuscript glossary. The glossary labeled the front of a leaf *recto* and its back *verso*; a leaf has two sides, unlike a page number in a modern book. Her final note used the specialized terms to locate the hidden lines: “Traces appear on the verso of the reused leaf.”

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which reference helps Lena decide whether a faded manuscript is a palimpsest? What detail from its entry settles the question?

2. What does the general dictionary tell Lena about how to say *quire*? Why does she need the glossary to understand it on the label?

3. How does the dictionary's word history help explain *palimpsest*, and what does that history not establish about every page?

4. A catalog note says, “Marks appear on the back of the leaf.” Which reference and term would make “back of the leaf” more precise?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a subject-area word from your own reading that does not appear in the passage, and consult a general dictionary and a specialized glossary. Write three sentences naming both references, giving a dictionary detail about the word, stating the glossary meaning, and explaining which meaning fits your text.

ANSWER KEY

Words Beneath Words

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.L.4.c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two places where a general dictionary supplies information, circle two places where a manuscript glossary narrows a meaning, and number one word-history clue. These marks show how different references help you interpret a museum label. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which reference helps Lena decide whether a faded manuscript is a palimpsest? What detail from its entry settles the question?	**The manuscript-studies glossary. A palimpsest is reused writing material prepared for writing again, not simply a faded manuscript.**
2	What does the general dictionary tell Lena about how to say *quire*? Why does she need the glossary to understand it on the label?	**It says *quire* sounds like *kwire*, rhyming with *fire*. The glossary identifies the relevant sense as a gathering of folded sheets in a book.**
3	How does the dictionary's word history help explain *palimpsest*, and what does that history not establish about every page?	**The Greek elements "again" and "scraped" point to reuse after earlier writing was removed. They do not establish that every page was scraped in exactly the same way.**
4	A catalog note says, "Marks appear on the back of the leaf." Which reference and term would make "back of the leaf" more precise?	**The manuscript glossary supplies *verso* for the back of a leaf.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In an earthquake report, I found *magnitude*; Merriam-Webster lists it as a noun meaning size or extent. The USGS Earthquake Glossary uses *magnitude* for a number that describes the size of an earthquake. The specialized meaning fits because the report gives a numerical value for a quake, not just a general description of size.

For the marking job, accept any two accurate general-dictionary details, two accurate glossary details, and the Greek word-history clue. For Part 3, accept other verifiable references and terms if the student distinguishes a dictionary detail from a relevant specialized meaning.