Words Behind the Set

How similar words can change a reader's judgment

11-12.L.5.c "Analyze connotative meanings of words with similar denotations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle the six words Leo and Maya use to describe someone's behavior, and underline an action near each word that makes it sound approving or critical.

Opening Night

1 The theater club had forty dollars to turn an empty stage into a city street. Maya borrowed a ladder from the custodian, collected cardboard from the cafeteria, and persuaded a hardware store to donate leftover hinges. "She's thrifty," Leo said as they built folding storefronts. Then Maya refused to buy fresh paint after the donated cans yielded only dry lumps. She insisted that the actors perform beside bare cardboard, although the script called for bright shop signs. "Now she's being stingy," Leo muttered. The cast stared at the blank storefronts while the lighting crew tested its lamps.

2 Leo spent lunch periods repairing a storefront that kept collapsing. He tried wider supports, moved the hinges, and asked the custodian how to brace a heavy panel. "Persistent," Maya called him when the storefront finally stood. Before opening night, however, a loose hinge made the panel wobble again. The custodian proposed replacing the hinge and setting the panel farther from the actors. Leo refused both changes because he wanted his original design onstage. "Stubborn," Maya said, and the crew moved the panel backstage. Leo watched from the wings as the actors performed against a plain curtain instead.

3 During rehearsal, Nia learned every entrance and checked the timing of each scene with the stage manager. "She sounds confident," Leo said after Nia delivered her opening lines without looking at the script. At the final rehearsal, Nia interrupted a new actor who warned that a prop chair blocked his path. "I know this stage better than you," she said, and dismissed his suggestion to move it. "That sounded arrogant," Maya whispered. On opening night, Nia noticed the chair, shifted it before the scene began, and asked the new actor whether he had enough room.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does Leo's shift from "thrifty" to "stingy" change his judgment of Maya's spending choices? Use the paint decision as evidence.

2. Before the paint disagreement, which two actions make "thrifty" a fitting word for Maya?

3. Why does "persistent" suit Leo's first attempts to fix the storefront, while "stubborn" suits his later response to the custodian?

4. What changes between the moments when Nia is called "confident" and "arrogant"? Explain what each word suggests about her.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence scene about a student organizing a community event. Use two words with similar meanings but different emotional tones to describe the student, and include an action that makes each word fit.

ANSWER KEY

Words Behind the Set

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.L.5.c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle the six words Leo and Maya use to describe someone's behavior, and underline an action near each word that makes it sound approving or critical. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does Leo's shift from "thrifty" to "stingy" change his judgment of Maya's spending choices? Use the paint decision as evidence.	**"Thrifty" praises Maya for saving money, while "stingy" criticizes her for refusing to buy usable paint even though the storefronts need signs.**
2	Before the paint disagreement, which two actions make "thrifty" a fitting word for Maya?	**She borrowed a ladder and persuaded a hardware store to donate leftover hinges. Collecting cardboard from the cafeteria is also acceptable.**
3	Why does "persistent" suit Leo's first attempts to fix the storefront, while "stubborn" suits his later response to the custodian?	**Leo keeps trying different repairs and seeks advice, which makes his effort sound admirable. Later, he refuses changes that would address the wobbling panel, making his refusal sound unreasonable.**
4	What changes between the moments when Nia is called "confident" and "arrogant"? Explain what each word suggests about her.	**Nia first knows her entrances and delivers her lines without a script, suggesting justified self-assurance. Later, she dismisses another actor's warning, suggesting an inflated opinion of her own judgment.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the neighborhood book swap, Jalen calmly asked volunteers to sort donations by reading level, and they agreed. His friend called him assertive for explaining what the event needed. Later, Jalen ordered a volunteer to put a display table across the doorway even after she explained that it would block the exit. His friend called him pushy, and Jalen agreed to move the display instead.

Accept other evidence-based explanations that distinguish the approving and critical tones of each pair. For the open task, look for two closely related words whose different tones are supported by distinct actions.