Words That Matter

How precise vocabulary shapes a public decision

11-12.L.6.b "Understand the importance of vocabulary knowledge in comprehension or expression."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline four words in the passage whose meanings affect how people understand the proposal. Number them 1 to 4, then circle the nearby clues that help you understand each word.

The Rain Garden Proposal

(1) At a school board meeting, a proposal to replace part of the asphalt lot with a rain garden drew an unexpected objection. One parent read the phrase *temporary ponding* and pictured a permanent pool beside the entrance. The engineer explained that the garden is a shallow planted area where runoff can collect briefly after a storm, then soak into the soil. She chose *ponding* rather than *flooding* because the water would stay within the designed basin, not spread across walkways. Her explanation changed the parent's question from "Will students walk through water?" to "How long will the basin hold water?"

(2) Another sentence in the proposal said the garden would *mitigate* runoff from ordinary storms. A student thought that meant the garden would eliminate runoff altogether. The engineer clarified that *mitigate* means reduce the severity of a problem, not erase it. During a very heavy storm, excess water could still flow toward a street drain. The report also called the existing asphalt *impermeable*: rain cannot soak through its surface into the ground. Replacing some asphalt with soil and plants gives part of that water a place to go. The student revised a poster from "No more runoff" to "Less runoff during ordinary storms."

(3) Before the vote, the student rewrote the poster's final line: "A rain garden manages runoff; it does not guarantee a dry lot." The word *manages* mattered because the proposal described a limited improvement, not a cure for every storm. The parent asked the board to post the expected drainage time after a storm, rather than abandon the project over an imagined permanent pool. Nobody claimed that a precise term could settle the vote. But when speakers distinguished water collecting inside a planned basin from water crossing a walkway, they could disagree about the same project instead of arguing over different pictures of it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did *ponding* give the parent a more accurate picture than *flooding*?

2. Why was "No more runoff" an inaccurate poster claim? Use the meaning of *mitigate* in your answer.

3. What does *impermeable* tell you about the asphalt, and why does that word help explain the proposed change?

4. How would saying the garden *guarantees* a dry lot change the meaning of the student's final line?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a school or community proposal other than a rain garden. In four sentences, show how one vague word could lead readers to expect too much, replace it with a more precise word, and explain how your revision changes their understanding.

ANSWER KEY

Words That Matter

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.L.6.b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline four words in the passage whose meanings affect how people understand the proposal. Number them 1 to 4, then circle the nearby clues that help you understand each word. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did *ponding* give the parent a more accurate picture than *flooding*?	**The water would collect briefly inside the designed basin, not spread across the walkways as the parent had imagined.**
2	Why was "No more runoff" an inaccurate poster claim? Use the meaning of *mitigate* in your answer.	**Mitigate means reduce a problem, not eliminate it. Excess water could still reach a street drain during a very heavy storm.**
3	What does *impermeable* tell you about the asphalt, and why does that word help explain the proposed change?	**Rain cannot soak through the asphalt into the ground. Replacing some of it with soil and plants gives some runoff a place to soak in.**
4	How would saying the garden *guarantees* a dry lot change the meaning of the student's final line?	**It would promise a dry lot after every storm, while the student's line says the garden manages runoff without guaranteeing that result.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A club promises that new bike racks will "solve" traffic at the school entrance. "Ease" is more precise because racks may encourage some students to ride bikes, but cars will still arrive. The revised claim suggests less congestion, not an empty road. Families can then judge the proposal without expecting it to end traffic.

Accept other well-supported explanations of how each word limits or clarifies the proposal's claim. For Part 3, look for a plausible proposal, a precise replacement word, and an explanation of the different expectations the two words create.