Beyond the Limit

Trace how one term changes the meaning of an informational text.

11-12.RI.4 "Interpret figurative, connotative, and technical meanings. Analyze how an author uses and refines key term(s) as they shape meaning or tone."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle every use of *capacity*, number the uses in order, and underline nearby words that help you track how its meaning changes.

What Can a Library Hold?

1 At noon, the library's front doors open to a line of neighbors escaping the heat. Some have come for books, but others want a chair, a drink of water, and a few hours out of the sun. On the door, a notice lists the room's capacity as 80 people. The number is fixed by the room's occupancy rules; it does not rise when the sidewalk fills. It is easy to mistake that number for a complete measure of the library's usefulness. Yet a building can meet its limit long before the need outside ends.

2 Inside, a staff member points visitors toward water and asks them to leave clear paths between the tables. The library has another kind of capacity: its ability to help people stay safe and comfortable. That capacity depends on working air-conditioning, available staff, and hours the doors remain open. When a machine fails, the sign still says 80, but the building may no longer offer the same relief. When volunteers bring extra water, the building has not grown larger, yet its capacity to care for visitors has expanded. These changes cannot be printed on a single notice by the door.

3 Outside, the line continues past a row of young trees that cast only narrow shadows. A library cannot replace shaded sidewalks, affordable housing, or reliable power during a heat wave. Calling it a cooling center may sound like a tidy solution, but its limits reveal a larger question: what capacity has the city built to protect people before they reach that door? If the city measures success only at the library entrance, the blocks without shade disappear from view. Counting seats matters, but counting only seats makes the people still waiting almost disappear from the story.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does *capacity* mean on the notice in the first paragraph? Why does the author say that number cannot fully measure the library's usefulness?

2. How do the failed machine and the extra water refine the meaning of *capacity* in the second paragraph?

3. What does the phrase "people still waiting almost disappear from the story" mean? How does it affect the tone?

4. In the question about what *capacity* the city has built, what does the term mean now? How does this use change who is responsible for relief from the heat?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a bus stop during a snowstorm. In 4 to 5 sentences, use *access* first to mean a concrete feature of the stop, then to mean a wider ability to use transit; explain how that shift changes the tone or message.

ANSWER KEY

Beyond the Limit

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.RI.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle every use of *capacity*, number the uses in order, and underline nearby words that help you track how its meaning changes. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does *capacity* mean on the notice in the first paragraph? Why does the author say that number cannot fully measure the library's usefulness?	**It means the room's allowed occupancy of 80 people. The number does not show how many people still need relief outside.**
2	How do the failed machine and the extra water refine the meaning of *capacity* in the second paragraph?	**Capacity comes to mean the library's ability to provide relief, not just its occupancy limit. A failed machine reduces that ability, while extra water increases it, although the limit stays at 80.**
3	What does the phrase "people still waiting almost disappear from the story" mean? How does it affect the tone?	**The people are not literally disappearing; a focus on seats leaves their needs out of the account. The image gives the passage a concerned, critical tone.**
4	In the question about what *capacity* the city has built, what does the term mean now? How does this use change who is responsible for relief from the heat?	**It means the city's broader ability to protect people through measures such as shade, housing, and reliable power. The focus shifts from one library's limits to the city's public priorities.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the bus stop, a cleared ramp gives riders access to the platform. But access also means that a bus arrives often enough for a night-shift worker to get home. After the storm, the ramp is clear while the route remains suspended. The shift from a physical entrance to dependable service gives the scene a critical tone, since an open path alone cannot carry anyone home.

Accept equivalent interpretations supported by details in the passage. For the open task, look for two distinct meanings of the same term and an explanation of how the shift shapes tone or message.