The Green Leaf

Notice how word choices change the feeling of a scene.

6.RL.4.b "Analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle two words in each paragraph that make the greenhouse feel uneasy or hopeful. Write U beside each uneasy word and H beside each hopeful word.

A Small Flag

1. On the last afternoon before winter break, Mara slipped into the school greenhouse to find the watering can. The glass roof rattled under a hard rain. Empty pots crowded the shelves, and a loose sheet of plastic scraped the wall with every gust. In the corner, a young lemon tree leaned toward the dirty window. Its leaves had curled into tight fists. Mara had promised the science club she would water it, but the hallway lights clicked off behind her. The greenhouse seemed to swallow the little sound of the closing door.

2. Mara felt along the shelf until her fingers touched a metal handle. She found the watering can beneath a bench, still half full. As she poured, the soil drank quietly. One leaf, greener than the rest, lifted from the cluster of fists. Mara remembered how the club had planted the seed during the first week of school. Back then, each student had taken a turn checking the tiny sprout. She set the can down and wiped a clear circle in the window so the weak light could reach the tree.

3. Mara could not make the rain stop or promise the tree would survive the long break. She pulled a fallen tray beneath the leak, then tucked the tree away from the dripping roof. On a scrap of paper, she wrote a note for the custodian: "Please leave this tree near the window." The rain still tapped the glass, but now it sounded like fingers keeping time. When Mara opened the door, she glanced back. The green leaf held its place, a small flag in the gray room.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does “swallow” suggest about the greenhouse when Mara closes the door? How does it affect the tone?

2. Why is “fists” a stronger choice than “shapes” to describe the curled leaves?

3. What does “drank” suggest about the soil? How does that word change the feeling of Mara’s action?

4. How does calling the leaf “a small flag” shape the tone of the ending, even though Mara does not know if the tree will survive?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write two sentences about entering an empty gym. Make it feel unsettling in the first sentence and welcoming in the second by changing one word. Underline the changed word in each sentence, then write a third sentence explaining how the words change the tone.

ANSWER KEY

The Green Leaf

GRADE 6 · 6.RL.4.b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle two words in each paragraph that make the greenhouse feel uneasy or hopeful. Write U beside each uneasy word and H beside each hopeful word. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does "swallow" suggest about the greenhouse when Mara closes the door? How does it affect the tone?	**It makes the greenhouse seem to absorb even a small sound, creating a quiet, uneasy tone.**
2	Why is "fists" a stronger choice than "shapes" to describe the curled leaves?	**"Fists" suggests the leaves are clenched tight, making the tree seem tense or in trouble.**
3	What does "drank" suggest about the soil? How does that word change the feeling of Mara's action?	**It suggests the soil needs water and can take it in. Mara's watering begins to feel helpful and hopeful.**
4	How does calling the leaf "a small flag" shape the tone of the ending, even though Mara does not know if the tree will survive?	**A flag can stand for courage or hope. The image makes the leaf seem like a small sign of hope despite the gray room and uncertain future.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The empty gym loomed ahead as I stepped inside. The empty gym welcomed me as I stepped inside. "Loomed" makes the gym seem threatening, while "welcomed" makes it feel friendly.

Accept other well-supported explanations of each word's effect on meaning and tone. For Part 3, look for the same moment in both sentences, one changed word that shifts the tone, and an explanation of that shift.