What Can Grow

Read a story's details to understand characters' choices.

8.RL.10.a "Demonstrate proficiency in reading and comprehending grade-appropriate texts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show why Grandfather values the garden, circle one detail that shows why Nia accepts the sidewalk plan, and number the two moments when Nia moves toward another place for the seedlings.

The Blue-Handled Spoon

1 The morning the city crew came to clear the lot, Nia found her grandfather beside the chain-link fence. He held a paper cup of tomato seedlings, their stems bent toward the weak sun. For years, neighbors had planted the narrow strip between the laundromat and the bus stop. Now a sign promised a new sidewalk and a safer corner for crossing. Nia knew the corner needed fixing; last winter she had watched a cyclist skid into traffic. Still, her grandfather stared at the pale soil as if he had misplaced something there.

2 When a worker lifted the first board from the garden bed, Grandfather stepped forward. Nia caught his sleeve, afraid he would argue with a person who had not made the plan. Instead, he asked for five minutes and knelt beside the fence. From beneath a stone, he took a rusted spoon with a blue handle. “Your grandmother used this to plant the first seeds,” he said. Nia had heard that story before, but she had never noticed how carefully he rubbed the dirt from its handle.

3 The worker waited while Grandfather placed the spoon in Nia's hand. He did not ask anyone to stop the sidewalk. Nia looked at the seedlings, then at the curb where the cyclist had skidded. “Our building has a sunny stairwell,” she said. Grandfather shook his head at first; plants were not allowed there. Nia nodded toward the manager watching from the bus stop. She would have to ask, and the answer might be no. Grandfather passed her the paper cup anyway, keeping the spoon for himself.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does Nia look at both the seedlings and the curb before suggesting the stairwell? Use details from the story.

2. What does Grandfather's care with the spoon suggest he fears losing when the garden is cleared?

3. Why does Grandfather first shake his head at Nia's idea but then give her the seedlings?

4. What does the final exchange of the spoon and seedlings suggest about how Nia and Grandfather will respond to the change?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence continuation from Nia's point of view in which she asks the manager about the seedlings. Include two details from the story that help explain her request, and stop before the manager answers.

ANSWER KEY

What Can Grow

GRADE 8 · 8.RL.10.a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show why Grandfather values the garden, circle one detail that shows why Nia accepts the sidewalk plan, and number the two moments when Nia moves toward another place for the seedlings. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why does Nia look at both the seedlings and the curb before suggesting the stairwell? Use details from the story.	**She wants to save the seedlings but also remembers the cyclist skidding into traffic, so she looks for a place where the plants will not block the safer crossing.**
2	What does Grandfather's care with the spoon suggest he fears losing when the garden is cleared?	**He fears losing a connection to Nia's grandmother and the garden she began. He saved her spoon and carefully rubbed dirt from its handle.**
3	Why does Grandfather first shake his head at Nia's idea but then give her the seedlings?	**He knows plants are not allowed in the stairwell, but giving Nia the seedlings suggests he is willing to let her ask the manager.**
4	What does the final exchange of the spoon and seedlings suggest about how Nia and Grandfather will respond to the change?	**Grandfather keeps the spoon, preserving a reminder of the garden's beginning. Nia takes the seedlings and may find them a new place to grow, though success is uncertain.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Nia crossed to the bus stop with the paper cup held steady in both hands. She told the manager she knew the corner needed a safer crossing, because she had seen the cyclist skid into traffic last winter. Then she explained that her grandmother had planted the garden's first seeds with the blue-handled spoon, and she asked whether the seedlings could grow in the sunny stairwell. The manager looked at the cup, then at the building, while Nia waited for an answer.

Accept supported interpretations that recognize both the need for a safer crossing and the garden's personal meaning. For the continuation, look for four sentences, two accurate story details, and no answer from the manager.