Room to Grow

Trace how a story's setting and events develop its theme.

8.RL.2.a "Analyze its development over the course of the text including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail in each paragraph that shows how Nia's idea of leading changes. Circle a courtyard detail in each paragraph that helps cause or reveal that change.

The Courtyard Garden

1 On the first hot Saturday of June, Nia arrived at the apartment courtyard with a box of tomato seedlings and a plan. The courtyard was a square of pale concrete, except for one narrow strip of soil that ran from the sunny fence to a shaded wall. Nia set the seedlings in a straight row by the fence, proud to be the first person to fix the empty space. When her neighbor Eli suggested planting nearer the wall, she waved him off. "I measured the strip," she said. "We'll be fine."

2 By noon, the concrete threw heat against their ankles, and the small leaves had begun to droop. Nia poured the last of her water onto the soil, but the leaves stayed limp. Eli pointed to a patch near the wall where moss stayed green even in June. He also knew which neighbors could spare jars of water. Nia wanted to defend her neat row. Instead, she knelt beside him, touched the cooler ground, and asked, "What would you do first?"

3 They moved the seedlings to the shaded patch, taking turns digging with a bent spoon. By evening, jars of water lined the wall, each labeled with a neighbor's name. Nia made a sign asking everyone to check the soil before watering, then left a blank space for other ideas. The courtyard still looked mostly like concrete, and the tomatoes would need weeks of care. But when Eli asked who was in charge of the garden, Nia handed him the pencil. "Whoever shows up," she said.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. At the start, what does Nia's choice of planting spot suggest about how she thinks a leader should act?

2. How do the courtyard conditions at noon challenge Nia's first approach to leading?

3. Why is Nia's question to Eli a turning point in the story's developing theme?

4. How do the sign's blank space and Nia's final reply develop the theme?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that a leaking pipe floods the shaded patch the next morning. In five or six sentences, describe what Nia and Eli do next, using a courtyard detail from the story, and show how this new problem tests Nia's changed view of leadership.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail in each paragraph that shows how Nia's idea of leading changes. Circle a courtyard detail in each paragraph that helps cause or reveal that change. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	At the start, what does Nia's choice of planting spot suggest about how she thinks a leader should act?	**Nia plants by the sunny fence despite Eli's suggestion, showing that she thinks a leader should trust her own plan and make the decisions.**
2	How do the courtyard conditions at noon challenge Nia's first approach to leading?	**Heat from the concrete makes the seedlings droop, while the shaded wall offers cooler soil. Nia's plan is failing, and Eli's knowledge becomes useful.**
3	Why is Nia's question to Eli a turning point in the story's developing theme?	**Instead of defending her plan, Nia asks Eli what to do. She begins to lead by listening to someone else.**
4	How do the sign's blank space and Nia's final reply develop the theme?	**The blank space invites others' ideas, and "Whoever shows up" shares responsibility for the garden. Together, these details suggest that a community works best when people can contribute.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The next morning, a leaking pipe turned the shaded soil beside the wall into mud. Nia started to drag the seedlings back toward the sunny fence, then stopped and asked Eli what he noticed. Eli suggested moving the plants into jars for the day while a neighbor reported the leak to the building manager. Nia wrote the plan in the sign's blank space, and three neighbors brought jars to help. She was glad she had asked, because Eli's idea gave everyone a way to protect the garden.

Accept answers that connect Nia's changing actions to the courtyard conditions and the developing idea of shared leadership. For Part 3, look for a new event, a specific courtyard detail, and Nia listening or making room for others to help.