Words Change Places

Read how word choices shape a neighborhood story.

9-10.L.5 "Demonstrate understanding of semantics. Interpret figurative language (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze its role in the text. Analyze word relationships (morphology, etymology…"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two expressions that mean more than their literal words, circle the two words the narrator uses for a place without people, and box the prefix in the verb on the garden sign.

The Lot Beside the Pool

1 By late August, weeds pushed through the cracked concrete around our neighborhood pool. The diving board was gone, and a chain hung across the gate. At a meeting, a city official said the pool would be "retired." My brother whispered, "Why not say they're closing it?" People had learned to swim there for forty years, but the city could not afford to fix the leaking basin. On the walk home, I wrote "vacant" on the back of the meeting flyer. Then I crossed it out and wrote "deserted." Both words described a place without people, but only one seemed to remember who had left.

2 In October, neighbors got permission to turn the fenced lot beside the pool into a garden. On our first workday, wheelbarrows rolled in every direction, and someone lost a shovel under a mountain of leaves. Still, each team had a task: one measured beds, another pulled weeds, and a third sorted seeds. I called it "orderly chaos" in my notebook. The phrase fit better than "mess" because no one stood still, yet no one worked at random. From the sidewalk, the pool looked like a relic; next to it, fresh soil made the whole block feel unfinished rather than finished.

3 That afternoon, I painted RECLAIM THE LOT on a scrap of plywood. I almost painted USE THE LOT, but that sounded as if we were merely borrowing space. Years ago, picnic tables had stood there, and families had carried dripping towels across the grass after swimming. Now the grass was buried beneath gravel. No shovel could bring the pool back, and the sign did not pretend otherwise. But as neighbors passed bags of soil over the fence, I thought of the word "deserted" on my flyer. By spring, would anyone still use it?

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might the city official call the pool "retired" instead of "closed"? What does that wording soften?

2. How can the workday be both "orderly" and "chaos"? What does that phrase show that "mess" would not?

3. What does the prefix in "reclaim" add to the sign's meaning? Why does "reclaim" fit better than "use"?

4. "Vacant" and "deserted" both describe a place without people. How does each word make you view the pool differently?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write four sentences about a real or invented place that changes. Include a euphemism or oxymoron, two words with similar meanings but different feelings, and a word with a meaningful prefix; in your final sentence, explain what those choices add.

Words Change Places

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two expressions that mean more than their literal words, circle the two words the narrator uses for a place without people, and box the prefix in the verb on the garden sign. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might the city official call the pool "retired" instead of "closed"? What does that wording soften?	**"Retired" makes the permanent closing sound gentler and more dignified, softening the loss of a place where people learned to swim.**
2	How can the workday be both "orderly" and "chaos"? What does that phrase show that "mess" would not?	**People and wheelbarrows move in many directions, but each team has a task. The phrase captures both the busy movement and the organized work.**
3	What does the prefix in "reclaim" add to the sign's meaning? Why does "reclaim" fit better than "use"?	**The prefix re- suggests taking back something once held. Families once gathered on the lot, so "reclaim" suggests restoring a connection to it rather than merely using it.**
4	"Vacant" and "deserted" both describe a place without people. How does each word make you view the pool differently?	**"Vacant" states that the pool is unoccupied. "Deserted" suggests abandonment and draws attention to the people who no longer come.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The closed train station was "taking a break," according to the mayor. Its benches looked weathered to my brother but shabby to me. In May, crews reopened the station for the morning trains. "Taking a break" softens the closure, "shabby" suggests neglect more than "weathered," and re- in "reopened" suggests a return.

Accept other interpretations grounded in the passage's details. For Part 3, check that each required word choice fits the student's setting and that the final sentence explains its effect.