Words That Matter

Analyze how word choices shape attitude, meaning, and mood.

12.RI.2.B "Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning, author's attitude toward the subject, and mood."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline at least six vivid or evaluative words or phrases in the passage. Circle three choices that most clearly reveal the author's attitude and create the passage's mood.

The Cuyahoga's Long Recovery

1 On June 22, 1969, the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland caught fire after sparks from a passing rail car ignited an oil slick and debris floating on the water. The blaze was brief, but its image was enduring. For decades, factories and cities had sent waste into the river, leaving stretches that residents described as foul and lifeless. The fire did not create the pollution crisis. Instead, it exposed a waterway already burdened by neglect, where a river that should have carried fish and boats had become a grim symbol of industrial damage.

2 Public alarm over polluted rivers helped build support for national action. In 1970, the United States created the Environmental Protection Agency, and Congress passed the Clean Water Act in 1972. The law set limits on many pollution discharges and funded sewage-treatment improvements. Cleveland also upgraded treatment plants and required industries to control waste. These measures were not a quick rescue. Cleaning sediment, tracing pollution sources, and enforcing permits demanded years of steady, often unglamorous work. The river's recovery began through regulations and maintenance rather than through a single dramatic event.

3 Today, more than 60 fish species have been documented in the Cuyahoga, although the river still faces runoff, combined sewer overflows, and contaminated sediment in some areas. Its return is therefore neither a miracle nor a finished triumph. The river offers evidence that public rules and local labor can repair severe harm, but it also makes a quieter demand: protection must continue after headlines fade. By describing recovery as partial, earned, and vulnerable, the account treats the Cuyahoga not as a polished success story, but as a living measure of civic responsibility.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the words “foul,” “lifeless,” “burdened,” and “grim” shape the mood of the first paragraph?

2. How do the words “brief” and “enduring” shape the meaning of the 1969 fire?

3. How does the contrast between “steady, often unglamorous work” and “a single dramatic event” reveal the author's attitude toward environmental recovery?

4. What cumulative effect do the phrases “neither a miracle nor a finished triumph,” “partial, earned, and vulnerable,” and “protection must continue” create in the final paragraph?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write exactly three sentences about a real environmental repair effort. Use at least four precise, attitude-revealing words across your first two sentences, then explain in the third sentence how those words create a mood and reveal your attitude toward the effort.

ANSWER KEY # Words That Matter

GRADE 12 · 12.RI.2.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline at least six vivid or evaluative words or phrases in the passage. Circle three choices that most clearly reveal the author's attitude and create the passage's mood. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the words “foul,” “lifeless,” “burdened,” and “grim” shape the mood of the first paragraph?	**They create a bleak, alarming mood by portraying the river as severely polluted and neglected.**
2	How do the words “brief” and “enduring” shape the meaning of the 1969 fire?	**They show that the fire itself lasted a short time, but its symbolic impact on public awareness lasted much longer.**
3	How does the contrast between “steady, often unglamorous work” and “a single dramatic event” reveal the author's attitude toward environmental recovery?	**The author respects recovery as difficult, persistent work rather than a quick or heroic solution.**
4	What cumulative effect do the phrases “neither a miracle nor a finished triumph,” “partial, earned, and vulnerable,” and “protection must continue” create in the final paragraph?	**They create a cautiously hopeful but urgent mood and present recovery as real progress that still requires continued responsibility.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

After the Elwha and Glines Canyon dams were removed from Washington's Elwha River between 2011 and 2014, sediment again moved downstream, and salmon began returning to habitat long blocked by concrete. The gradual, hard-won return feels hopeful but watchful. The words “gradual,” “hard-won,” “hopeful,” and “watchful” show respect for the restoration while recognizing that recovery takes time.

Accept responses that accurately connect specific quoted words to meaning, author attitude, and mood. For the open task, accept a real repair effort and a clear explanation of how at least four chosen words work together.