Meaning Matters

Use context to study literal meanings and suggested feelings.

8.RV.1.F "Discriminate between the meanings of connotative words and their denotative meanings."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three words or phrases that create a feeling beyond their dictionary meanings. Circle three words or phrases used mainly for their literal meanings, then write +, -, or N above each underlined choice to show its connotation.

The Garden Bin

1 On Saturday, volunteers opened the gate to Maple Street Garden before sunrise. The air was cool, and beads of water clung to the bean leaves. Near the fence, a wooden bin held compost made from fruit peels, dry leaves, and coffee grounds. When Maya lifted the lid, she saw red worms twisting through the dark material. “Our tiny workers are busy,” she said. Her brother Eli leaned closer, watching the bin as if it held a secret city.

2 By afternoon, the garden path looked crowded with neighbors carrying buckets. Mr. Chen called the compost “black gold” and pointed toward the rich, crumbly material. He filled a small pot for a visitor who wanted healthier soil for tomato plants. Compost adds organic matter to soil and can help it hold water. The plain bin now drew a line of people, each waiting for a turn to scoop some out before heading home with full buckets.

3 Later, Eli carried a pail of compost to the school courtyard. A sixth-grade class was planting lettuce there, and their teacher asked him to explain where the dark soil came from. Eli said the worms had turned scraps into a “feast” for the plants. One student wrinkled her nose at the pail, but another said the compost smelled like a forest after rain. Eli set the pail beside the seedlings, which stood in neat rows like a small green army.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. In paragraph 1, what does the word "workers" literally mean? What does Maya's use of the word suggest about the worms?

2. What phrase in paragraph 2 gives compost a more valuable connotation than the word "compost" alone? What feeling does the phrase create?

3. Compare "dark material" in paragraph 1 with "rich, crumbly material" in paragraph 2. Which description has the more positive connotation, and why?

4. What does "feast" literally mean in paragraph 3? What idea does the word suggest about what compost does for plants?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose an ordinary school object. Write three sentences: first give its denotative description, second use a connotative word or phrase to describe the same object and underline that word or phrase, and third explain the feeling or tone created.

ANSWER KEY

Meaning Matters

GRADE 8 · 8.RV.1.F

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three words or phrases that create a feeling beyond their dictionary meanings. Circle three words or phrases used mainly for their literal meanings, then write +, -, or N above each underlined choice to show its connotation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In paragraph 1, what does the word "workers" literally mean? What does Maya's use of the word suggest about the worms?	**Literally, workers are people who do jobs. Maya suggests that the worms are helpful and busy.**
2	What phrase in paragraph 2 gives compost a more valuable connotation than the word "compost" alone? What feeling does the phrase create?	**"Black gold." It makes the compost seem valuable or precious.**
3	Compare "dark material" in paragraph 1 with "rich, crumbly material" in paragraph 2. Which description has the more positive connotation, and why?	**"Rich, crumbly material" has the more positive connotation because it makes the compost seem fertile, useful, and appealing.**
4	What does "feast" literally mean in paragraph 3? What idea does the word suggest about what compost does for plants?	**A feast is a large, special meal. The word suggests that compost gives plants plentiful nourishment.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The cafeteria is a room where students eat lunch. At noon, the cafeteria becomes a _buzzing hive_. The phrase creates an energetic, busy tone.

Accept reasonable explanations of connotation when students connect the word or phrase to details in the passage. For Part 3, accept varied objects and connotative language if the literal description, marked word or phrase, and tone explanation are all present.