Fire by Design

Close reading an informational explanation.

9.DSR.B "Proficiently read and comprehend a variety of literary and informational texts that exhibit complexity at the lower range of the grades 9-10 band..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one sentence in each paragraph that helps explain the author's central idea, and circle a word or phrase that signals a limit or trade-off.

Fire by Design

1 In many fire-adapted forests, a century of suppression changed the material on the ground. Agencies often treated every wildfire as an emergency, quickly extinguishing flames near roads, towns, and valuable timber. That policy protected many communities in the short term, but it also allowed needles, fallen branches, and small trees to accumulate. When drought and wind later fed a fire, flames could climb from this dense fuel into tree crowns. Crown fires move rapidly and are difficult to control, especially when several dry seasons have left vegetation unusually flammable.

2 To reduce that risk, land managers sometimes set prescribed fires, planned burns lit under carefully chosen conditions. Before igniting an area, crews study humidity, wind, fuel moisture, and the resources available to contain the fire. They may clear vegetation along boundaries and notify nearby residents about smoke. A low, controlled fire can consume leaf litter and small shrubs without killing many mature trees whose bark resists heat. Prescribed fire does not make a forest fireproof. Instead, it can interrupt the continuous layer of fuel that helps a surface fire become a destructive crown fire.

3 Yet prescribed fire is not a simple solution that can be used whenever fuel builds up. Smoke can worsen air quality, and a sudden change in wind can carry it toward homes or highways. In some regions, narrow weather windows, limited staff, and public concern make burns difficult to schedule. Indigenous communities have long used cultural burning to support foods, habitats, and safer landscapes, and many agencies now work with Tribal partners to restore these practices. Managers must weigh immediate effects, such as smoke, against the possibility of more severe smoke and damage from an uncontrolled wildfire later.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1 Explain the chain of events that can lead from fire suppression to a destructive crown fire.

2 How does paragraph 2 show that prescribed fire is planned rather than accidental? Use two details from the paragraph.

3 Why does the author include the statement that prescribed fire does not make a forest fireproof?

4 What trade-off do managers face in paragraph 3, and how does that trade-off shape the passage's central idea?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence explanation for a community newsletter. Explain the forest problem, describe how prescribed fire can help, and acknowledge one trade-off or limit.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 9 · 9.DSR.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one sentence in each paragraph that helps explain the author's central idea, and circle a word or phrase that signals a limit or trade-off. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Explain the chain of events that can lead from fire suppression to a destructive crown fire.	**Suppressing fires allows dry needles, branches, and small trees to build up. During drought and wind, that dense fuel can carry flames from the ground into tree crowns, creating a fast-moving crown fire.**
2	How does paragraph 2 show that prescribed fire is planned rather than accidental? Use two details from the paragraph.	**Crews study conditions such as humidity, wind, and fuel moisture before a burn. They also prepare boundaries, ensure containment resources are available, and notify residents about smoke.**
3	Why does the author include the statement that prescribed fire does not make a forest fireproof?	**The statement qualifies the benefit of prescribed fire. It reduces connected fuel and risk, but it cannot prevent every wildfire.**
4	What trade-off do managers face in paragraph 3, and how does that trade-off shape the passage's central idea?	**Managers must weigh immediate smoke and other difficulties against the possibility of worse smoke and damage from an uncontrolled wildfire. This shows that prescribed fire is a useful but limited management tool that requires careful decisions.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Putting out fires for many years can leave forests filled with dry material that helps flames reach the treetops. Carefully planned burns remove some of this fuel when crews can watch weather and contain the fire. Although these burns may create smoke now, managers use them to reduce the chance of a more damaging wildfire later.

Accept equivalent explanations that accurately connect fuel buildup, prescribed burning, and wildfire risk. For the marking task, accept defensible sentences that develop the central idea and words or phrases that signal limits or trade-offs, such as "but," "does not," "yet," or "against."