Vocabulary Skill Check

Grade 8 · Figurative language · Try 1

Name or code _____ Date _____

Read each passage. Circle the letter that gives the best meaning in that passage.

Passage 1

I had spent the afternoon rehearsing the explanation for my demonstration. When the visitors finally arrived, I arranged my materials, checked the projector and began speaking without losing my place. For the first time that day, I felt ready to enjoy the presentation.

The lights went out just as I reached the most important sentence of my presentation. I had not wanted darkness at that moment; I had needed the audience to see the diagram behind me.

“Well, that is **perfect timing**,” I said, hearing the frustration in my own voice. A teacher brought a flashlight while I searched for the printed version. After a pause, I continued beside the model, grateful that I had prepared something that did not require electricity.

1. What does the speaker intend by saying “perfect timing” in this passage?

Circle ONE letter.

A the speaker knows the exact time without checking

B the event should have lasted longer

C the event occurred at exactly the desired moment

D the timing is especially unfortunate

Passage 2

We had borrowed the only table in the workshop because it was large enough to hold the drawings. I reached for the jar just as Zubin lifted the corner of the tablecloth. The colored water had spilled across both plans, and neither set of measurements could be read. “Now this is **a fine mess**,” Zubin said, staring at the spreading stain.

His voice carried no admiration at all. We needed those plans to cut the remaining pieces, and the workshop would close before we could return to the classroom for another copy. We moved the dry materials away from the table and asked the supervisor for help. There was still work we could do, but our careless movement had created a problem that neither of us could solve by pretending it was minor.

2. What does the speaker intend by saying “a fine mess” in this passage?

Circle ONE letter.

A a small imperfection that improves the final result

B a seriously troublesome situation

C a situation worthy of sincere praise

D a temporary mix-up that needs little work

Passage 3

After our workshop appeared in the town newsletter, I expected nothing but good news. Then I began answering the messages that arrived each evening. The new attention brought volunteers to the workshop, but it also brought more repair requests than the small team could handle.

My mother had called the publicity **a double-edged sword**, and at first I had thought she was being unnecessarily gloomy. We welcomed the help and worried about disappointing people at the same time. The publicity had not become useless; its success had created a difficulty that success alone could not solve.

We began explaining our schedule before accepting new work. I understood my mother's expression better when I saw that the advantage and the problem came from the same source.

3. As used in this passage, what does "a double-edged sword" most likely mean?

Circle ONE letter.

A a choice between two equally harmful outcomes

B an object that is dangerous to touch

C something with benefits and drawbacks

D a tool that solves two problems at once

Passage 4

Jonah had planned the performance down to the final song, but he had arranged only one ride for the entire cast and all its supplies. His sister looked at the schedule and questioned how reliable it would be. Jonah protested that every box on the page had been filled.

If that one driver canceled, no equipment, costumes or performers would reach the hall. Several other arrangements also depended on that ride arriving early, yet Jonah had not confirmed a backup. The plan looked complete because it contained many details, but those details rested on one uncertain promise.

He began calling families to ask about alternatives. The schedule became less elegant after he added backup arrangements, though it was much more likely to survive an unexpected problem. The original arrangement had been **a house of cards**, despite its many carefully listed details.

4. As used in this passage, what does "a house of cards" most likely mean?

Circle ONE letter.

A a carefully protected collection of personal memories

B a complicated system that has been thoroughly tested

C a project designed mainly for entertainment

D a fragile plan that one small failure could ruin

Passage 5

When the votes were counted, my name stood at the top of the board. I had wanted to lead the club since the first meeting, yet the result felt like **a hollow victory**. Everyone was applauding, and I could barely look across the room.

I had won the position, but the way I had treated my friend made the announcement impossible to enjoy. During the campaign, I had repeated a complaint about her without checking whether it was true. The rumor had helped me, and now the title seemed much less valuable than the trust I had damaged.

After the meeting, I asked whether she would talk with me. I could not undo the vote, but I could begin taking responsibility for the way I had obtained it.

5. As used in this passage, what does “a hollow victory” most likely mean?

Circle ONE letter.

A a win that feels empty because of its cost

B a victory achieved with very little effort

C a result that is announced before the competition ends

D an achievement that no one else notices

Passage 6

Our group had revised the poster three times. At first, the organizer wanted a simple map. Then she requested a written history, and after we added that, she said every photograph needed an interview attached. Each time we met the stated requirements, the organizer added a new condition.

I began to call the assignment **a moving target**. I did not object to improving the work, but I could no longer tell what would count as complete. We needed a stable agreement before we could use our remaining time responsibly.

At the next meeting, we asked the organizer to review a final checklist with us. We left space for optional improvements, but we separated those from the work required before the poster could be accepted.

6. As used in this passage, what does “a moving target” most likely mean?

Circle ONE letter.

A a task that can be completed only while traveling

B a goal or requirement that keeps changing

C an objective that has already been achieved

D a person who avoids standing in one place

Teacher use: ____ / 6