



SAINT PIERRE
LEARNING RESOURCES

GRADE 7 | ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The Courtyard Proposal Grade 7 Story and Four Graphic Organizers

FREE SAMPLE | 7 PAGES

STANDARD / LEARNING FOCUS

Selected practice for NC 2017 L.7.4: use context and reference materials to determine and verify word meanings.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Complete Courtyard story
- Context-clue organizer with dictionary verification
- Matching word-meaning key and classroom-use license

This sample contains selected pages from the packet. Original page references are retained. Selected-skill practice; this packet does not establish complete standard mastery.

Official reference: NC DPI Grade 7 ELA standards and clarifications

The Courtyard Proposal

Name _____ Date _____

Read the numbered paragraphs. Annotate words, details, and changes that you can use in your responses.

1 On Monday morning, the eighth-grade hall smelled of fresh paint, and a strip of yellow tape blocked the entrance to the old courtyard. From her classroom window, seventh-grader Amara watched the custodian measure the cracked stone path. By Friday, the courtyard would either reopen as a student garden or remain locked for another year. The principal had asked students to propose a plan, but the proposal needed more than colorful drawings: it needed a way to keep rainwater from flooding the walkway.

2 Amara's science club had volunteered to help. Her best friend, Luis, wanted to build wooden planters; Sienna, the newest member, proposed a shallow channel that would guide water toward the trees. Amara had agreed to organize the project, partly because she liked making lists and partly because she disliked the uneasy feeling of letting others decide. During their first meeting, she arranged the papers in tidy stacks and assigned everyone a job before anyone had finished speaking.

3 Luis tapped the edge of Sienna's sketch. "There's no room for planters if the channel goes here," he said. Sienna started to answer, but Amara interrupted. "We already have a plan. We can solve the drainage problem later." The words sounded efficient until Amara saw Sienna fold her drawing in half. Sienna said she needed to return a library book and left before the meeting ended.

4 That afternoon, a sharp rain swept across the school. Water gathered against the courtyard door and seeped through a gap in the frame. The next morning, Amara found muddy tracks spreading across the hallway tiles. The custodian, Mr. Bennett, stood beside a bucket and pointed to a faded line on the wall. "Rain has reached that mark twice this semester," he said. "A garden won't last if we don't understand where the water travels." His voice was calm, but the evidence was difficult to dismiss.

The Courtyard Proposal continued

5 Amara felt a prickle of embarrassment. She had treated the drainage question as an inconvenience, even though the entire project depended on it. She opened the notebook where she kept her careful plans. For a moment she considered erasing the page and beginning again alone. Then she remembered Sienna's folded paper and wrote a different first step: Listen before deciding.

6 At lunch, Amara found Sienna in the library, studying a map of the school grounds. Amara hesitated between the shelves. Apologies were harder for her than organizing supplies. "I cut you off yesterday," she finally said. "You were trying to explain something important. Will you show me?" Sienna examined her face, then unfolded a new sketch. She had marked arrows showing the direction of runoff and drawn a curved channel beside the walkway. The trees, she explained, could absorb some of the water if the channel led toward their roots.

7 Sienna's idea was promising, but it had a weakness: the channel crossed the safest route into the courtyard. When Luis joined them, he suggested building a small raised bridge over the channel using leftover boards from the theater set. Sienna worried that the boards might become slippery. Instead of rushing to choose, Amara asked what evidence would help them decide. They agreed to test a sample board with water and compare it with a textured surface. The conversation took longer than Amara's earlier meeting, yet each person left knowing what to investigate.

8 On Wednesday, the group carried supplies into a covered outdoor work area. Luis built two miniature paths. Sienna poured the same amount of water over both while Amara timed how quickly it drained. Their first design sent water toward the trees, but the raised crossing wobbled. Luis frowned and pressed one corner flat. "We could hide the wobble in the model," he muttered. Amara looked toward the principal's office. They had only two days left, and a flawless model might be easier to approve.

9 Instead, Amara shook her head. "If we hide a problem, someone else has to deal with it when the real path is built." Luis looked frustrated, but then he replaced the loose supports with wider pieces. Sienna added a strip of rough material to improve traction. The second test worked better, although the water still collected near one edge. They recorded that result too. Amara began to see that a reliable proposal did not have to pretend that every question had been answered.

The Courtyard Proposal continued

10 Thursday brought another obstacle. Their presentation board, covered in diagrams and photographs, disappeared from the classroom after afternoon cleaning. Amara searched under tables and behind cabinets. She imagined standing before the principal with nothing but an unfinished model. "This always happens when we let things get complicated," she snapped. Sienna's shoulders tightened. Luis set down the tape dispenser without a word. The silence reminded Amara of their first meeting, and she recognized how easily fear could make her sound like a commander rather than a teammate.

11 Amara took a breath and spoke again. "That wasn't fair. I'm worried, and I blamed you." Together they retraced the board's path from the science room to the hallway. Mr. Bennett eventually discovered it leaning behind a rolling cart, where a worker had moved it to protect it from a leak. The board was slightly bent, but the diagrams were dry. Luis proposed strengthening the corners; Sienna wrote a short explanation of the tests; and Amara revised the opening of their presentation so it described the courtyard's actual problem instead of promising a perfect garden.

12 On Friday, they stood in front of the principal and two teachers. Amara began by showing a photograph of water against the courtyard door. Sienna explained how the proposed channel could move runoff toward the trees, and Luis demonstrated the textured crossing. Then Amara pointed to a box labeled Questions We Still Need to Test. The group requested permission for a small trial installation rather than immediate construction. One teacher asked whether their design would survive a heavy storm. "We can't guarantee that yet," Amara replied, "but we can measure what happens and change the design if we need to."

13 The principal approved a supervised trial. Outside, the courtyard gates were still locked, and the path remained cracked. Nothing had magically transformed overnight. Yet Amara felt lighter as her friends talked about the next test. She understood now that leadership was not the ability to hold every answer in her own hands. Sometimes it meant leaving enough space for someone else's idea to take root.

Organizer 1 Context clues

Name _____ Date _____

Use nearby details to infer word meanings. Then check each meaning in a dictionary and explain whether it fits the story.

Model runoff in paragraph 6

Sienna draws arrows for moving water and explains that a channel can guide it toward roots. Runoff is water flowing over the ground.

Word and paragraph	Context clue and inferred meaning	Dictionary check and meaning in this story
traction 9		
reliable 9		
supervised 13		

How does understanding one of these words help explain the group’s decisions?

Key for Organizer 1

traction paragraph 9

The rough strip is added after concern about slippery boards (7). Meaning: grip that helps prevent slipping. A dictionary should confirm grip or friction in this context, rather than medical traction.

reliable paragraph 9

The group records remaining problems instead of pretending every question is answered. Meaning: dependable or trustworthy; here, a proposal supported by honest tests.

supervised paragraph 13

The principal approves only a trial after teachers review the proposal (12-13). Meaning: watched or directed by someone responsible; the students do not begin unrestricted construction.

Reflection example

Understanding reliable explains why Amara reports weaknesses. An honest proposal is more dependable than a model that hides problems.

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