

Skill: Identify/Analyze/Infer Cause-Effect Relations

8th Grade Nonfiction: A Garden in Lawndale

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A catalyst is a spark. It is the start of a change. As you read this report, think what the spark was.

Eighth grade students at a school in Lawndale saw progress as builders constructed new homes where vacant lots had been. Families were moving into the community, although there still were some vacant lots. In those vacant lots, there was a lot of trash. Members of block clubs picked up the trash, but even then, the lots did not stay clean. Wind blew trash there from the street. “No one can do anything about this,” said one student. “Yes, we can,” said another. Their teacher agreed. They would plant a garden in a vacant lot.

Their teacher showed them pictures of the community long ago. She showed them that it used to have great gardens. The students said they could make this change. It was after Barack Obama had been elected. His slogan had been “Yes, we can.” They believed it, and they would prove it.

The students met with the principal to ask if they could create a community garden in the vacant lot closest to the school. She told them that it was a great idea, but they would have to volunteer their own time and work on it every weekend. The students agreed and promised they would donate their time every Saturday until it snowed. Even then, they would keep the sidewalk cleared near the lot.

The students needed to collaborate with the community. They wanted to be sure that everyone in the community wanted the garden. They met with block clubs and told them their plan. The block clubs applauded the project and said they would help.

The students went on the Internet to learn about plants. They looked for plants that would grow well in Chicago. They chose some evergreen plants and bulbs. They learned a lot about plants and gardening, and they also learned about fund-raising.

The students needed money to get the bulbs and plants. They needed tools, too. They made a budget and drew pictures of what the garden would look like when it was finished. They sent that budget and their plan to get funding, and a foundation funded their plan. The students got \$300 to buy what they needed.

They are 8th graders, so this spring they will meet with the seventh grade. They will ask them to take over the garden. It will be their legacy to the school community.

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question

1. What was the catalyst that started the plan?

- a. The teacher.
- b. The student.
- c. The block club.
- d. The principal.

2. What caused students to care about their community?

- a. They are committed citizens.
- b. They are 8th graders.
- c. They like their teacher.
- d. They live near the school.

3. Why did the students ask the Block Clubs to help?

- a. They live in the community.
- b. They like gardens.
- c. The principal told them to.
- d. They wanted to involve them.

4. What happened because the students did this project?

- a. They can graduate.
- b. They have changed their community.
- c. They have more friends.
- d. Their class got money.

5. *Write your own answer to this question.*

What do you predict will be an effect of the project in the future?

TEACHER NOTES: Develop Students' Skills: Exercise Thinking

These questions have not been validated, so decisions about student's achievement should not be made based on their responses. They are intended to exercise skills. Recommended activities include: students work in pairs to choose the best response; give students the questions without the responses so they generate their own answers; students make up additional questions; students make up questions like these for another passage.

Answers: *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	1	2	3	4
Answer	a	a	d	b

Question 5 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.

5. The community will be a better place to live.

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8th Grade Fiction: Making Progress

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I have lived in Lawndale for thirty years, and during this time I have seen things change, some for the better, some for the worse. Despite the challenges, I believe that my neighborhood is a good place to live; I like it here even though there are problems. I have many friends who live near-by, and my cousins live down the street; we support each other when there is a problem. Now new families are moving in, and there is a lot of construction of new townhomes. I'm optimistic.

Progress starts with hope--that's something I learned a long time ago. You can look at things and complain, or you can ask, "What can we do to make things better?"

My son came home from school in September with a plan that his class made to transform our block. They were going to turn a vacant lot into a garden. I said it would be much more complicated than he knew.

He explained that he had a dream; he wanted to have lots of flowers in Lawndale. He knew there were vacant lots, but he also saw the new construction. He said, "We are making progress, our neighborhood is getting better, and we can make it even better. If we turn the vacant lot across from the school into a garden, it will inspire people. The block clubs can plant flowers and trees, so changing that one vacant lot could lead to a great change--the community can get to be a really beautiful place. My teacher says that everything is interconnected."

I admired my son's idea, but I knew he would face significant obstacles and that they would need a coalition to carry out this vision. He has always been a thoughtful child. I promised to support the plan, and said that I would ask our cousins and my friends to participate. That way, it would be a school-community collaboration.

His class started by clearing out the trash from the lot, and they needed lots of trash bags for that because they didn't just clear the lot. They cleaned trash from the street, too. The block clubs did join the effort; it was a big cleanup day.

People came by and saw the difference they made. I noticed afterward that people were not littering so much. It seems they got the idea that keeping things clean is not as hard as picking up all the trash if you litter a lot. I know this sounds simple, but if people get into a habit of throwing paper on the ground, it is something they really don't think about. We got some big green trashcans from the city and put them on the street near the vacant lots. People put their trash in those cans instead of littering.

My son's class put bulbs in the ground, and the neighbors helped. I think we planted about 500 bulbs. I think I planted about 30 bulbs myself, and my back hurt a lot the next day. This spring we'll realize what we did when we see those colorful blooms, and I am convinced that everyone in the community will be inspired so this progress will be sustained.

A long time ago, someone said, "It takes a village to raise a child." I think it takes a child to inspire a community. I am proud of my son.

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question

6. Why did her son want to plant the garden?

- a. He liked plants.
- b. He wanted to help the community.
- c. It would flower in spring.
- d. It was across from the school.

7. Why did she help her son?

- a. He inspired her.
- b. She liked her neighbors.
- c. Her family lived there.
- d. She was proud of him.

8. Why was there less trash in the area?

- a. People were recycling.
- b. People noticed what the students did.
- c. The students picked it up every day.
- d. The school had a littering campaign.

9. What do you think the most important effect of his change was?

- a. The mother was proud.
- b. The community was improved.
- c. The students planted so many bulbs.
- d. There would be many flowers in spring.

10. *Write your own answer to this question.*

What do you think this change will cause people to do?

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Answers: *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	6	7	8	9
Answer	b	a	b	b

Question 10 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.

10. Improve the community, by planting and reducing litter.