Academic and Domain-Specific Vocabulary in Nonfiction

Name: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____ / 10

Quick Review

Science and social-studies texts use special words. To find a word's meaning, look for a definition in the same sentence, an example nearby, or use clues from the rest of the paragraph. Then check that your meaning fits the WHOLE sentence.

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

The Water Cycle: A River in the Sky

The same water that fills your glass at dinner has been on Earth for billions of years. It is constantly moving from oceans into the air, from the air onto land, and from land back into the oceans. Scientists call this endless movement the water cycle. Although the cycle has no real beginning, most explanations start with the sun. Sunlight heats the surface of an ocean, lake, or puddle, and the heated water turns into an invisible gas called water vapor. This process is called evaporation.

As warm, moist air rises higher into the sky, it cools. Cool air cannot hold as much water vapor as warm air, so the vapor changes back into tiny liquid droplets. This change is called condensation. Billions of these droplets gathering together form a cloud. When the droplets in a cloud become large and heavy enough, they fall to the ground as precipitation. Precipitation is any water that falls from a cloud — rain, snow, sleet, or hail are all forms of it.

Once the water reaches the ground, it can take several different paths. Some of it flows downhill across the surface as runoff and joins streams that lead back to the ocean. Some soaks into the soil, where plant roots take it up and release it back into the air through their leaves in a process called transpiration. The rest seeps deeper, becoming groundwater that may be stored for years inside layers of rock called aquifers. Eventually, all of this water finds its way back into the cycle. The water that fills tomorrow's clouds may have rested last week inside an oak tree, last year inside a stone, or last century inside the deep ocean.

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Use the article to answer each question. Pay close attention to how each special word is used.

1. Read this sentence from paragraph 1: "The heated water turns into an invisible gas called water vapor. This process is called evaporation." What does the word evaporation MOST NEARLY mean?

A. The change of water from a liquid into a gas

B. The fall of rain from a cloud

C. The freezing of water into ice

D. The flow of water across the ground

2. What does precipitation mean as it is used in paragraph 2?

A. A cloud floating in the sky

B. Cool air at high altitudes

C. Any water that falls from a cloud, such as rain or snow

D. Wind blowing across an ocean

3. In paragraph 2, what does condensation describe?

A. Water vapor heating up and rising

B. Water vapor cooling and changing back into tiny liquid droplets

C. Water droplets joining to make a cloud

D. Heavy clouds falling to the ground

4. Read this sentence from paragraph 3: "Some soaks into the soil, where plant roots take it up and release it back into the air through their leaves in a process called transpiration." Which word from the sentence helps you figure out what transpiration means?

A. soil

B. soaks

C. roots

D. release

5. What does the word runoff mean in paragraph 3?

A. Water that turns into a gas in the air

B. Water that flows across the surface of the ground

C. Water held inside layers of rock

D. Water taken in by plant roots

6. What is an aquifer, according to the article?

A. A layer of rock that stores groundwater

B. A type of cloud high in the sky

C. A river that runs to the ocean

D. A machine that pumps water from the ocean

7. In paragraph 3, the author writes that water "seeps deeper." The word seeps MOST NEARLY means —

A. splashes loudly

B. slowly soaks downward

C. shoots upward

D. rushes quickly

8. What does the word cycle mean in the phrase "the water cycle"?

A. A repeating set of changes that returns to where it started

B. A short journey that happens only once

C. A wheel used to grind grain

D. A type of machine

9. Read this sentence from paragraph 2: "As warm, moist air rises higher into the sky, it cools." Use clues from the article to write what moist MOST NEARLY means.

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_____

10. Read this sentence: "The water that fills tomorrow's clouds may have rested last week inside an oak tree, last year inside a stone, or last century inside the deep ocean." Why does the author use this sentence?

A. To prove how much rain falls each year

B. To list the names of important rivers

C. To make the reader picture the water cycle as a long-lasting, connected process

D. To explain how clouds are formed

Answer Keys

1	**A**	B	C	D	6	**A**	B	C	D
2	A	B	**C**	D	7	A	**B**	C	D
3	A	**B**	C	D	8	**A**	B	C	D
4	A	B	C	**D**	9	See below			
5	A	**B**	C	D	10	A	B	**C**	D

Explanations

1. A	The next sentence DEFINES evaporation. B describes precipitation. C describes freezing, not evaporation (state-of-matter confusion). D describes runoff.
2. C	Paragraph 2 defines precipitation in the next sentence with the rain/snow examples. A names the source, not the falling water (cloud-vs-rain confusion). B and D name conditions that may surround precipitation but are not its meaning.
3. B	The text gives this exact definition. A describes evaporation. C describes how clouds FORM after condensation, but condensation itself is the change from gas to liquid. D describes precipitation.
4. D	"Release ... into the air" tells the reader transpiration is plants letting water out. A, B, and C are about the soaking-IN step, which is the OPPOSITE direction (in vs out confusion).
5. B	Paragraph 3 defines runoff as flowing across the surface. A describes evaporation. C describes groundwater. D describes the start of transpiration.
6. A	Paragraph 3 gives this definition. B is a cloud, not a rock layer (location confusion: sky vs ground). C is a stream, not a rock store. D is an invented machine never mentioned.
7. B	The phrase "seeps deeper" plus the description of slow movement into rock supports B. A, C, and D describe FAST or UPWARD motion, the opposite of seeping (speed/direction confusion).
8. A	The article describes movement that ends where it began, then begins again. B contradicts "endless" / "constantly moving." C is a real meaning of "cycle" in another context (similar-form confusion) but it does not fit. D is even further from the meaning here.
9.	**Answer:** Sample answers: "Slightly wet" or "having a lot of water vapor in it" or "damp." The clues are that this is air carrying water vapor that came from evaporation, and that vapor turns into droplets when the air cools. NOT acceptable: "frozen," "dry," "empty," or definitions that contradict the meaning. Accept any meaning close to "slightly wet / damp / full of water vapor" supported by an evaporation/vapor clue. Reject opposites (dry/frozen) or unrelated meanings.
10. C	The sentence connects different time scales (week, year, century) to show the cycle is endless and connected. A is about quantity, never measured here. B names rivers that are not in the sentence. D is a different topic from earlier in the article.