

Vale Middle School Reading Article

Plastic Mat Project Weaves Softer Nights for Homeless (1030L)

Instructions: COMPLETE ALL QUESTIONS AND MARGIN NOTES using the CLOSE reading strategies practiced in class. This requires reading of the article three times.

Step 1: Skim the article using these symbols as you read:

(+) agree, (-) disagree, (*) important, (!) surprising, (?) wondering

Step 2: Number the paragraphs. **Read** the article **carefully** and **make notes in the margin**.

Notes should include:

- Comments that show that you **understand** the article. (A summary or statement of the main idea of important sections may serve this purpose.)
- Questions you have that show what you are **wondering** about as you read.
- Notes that differentiate between **fact** and **opinion**.
- Observations about how the **writer's strategies** (organization, word choice, perspective, support) and choices affect the article.

Step 3: A final quick read noting anything you may have missed during the first two reads.

Your **margin notes** are part of your score for this assessment. Answer the questions carefully in **complete sentences** unless otherwise instructed.

Student _____ Class Period _____

Plastic Mat Project Weaves Softer Nights for Homeless



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SALINAS, Calif. -- Thursday afternoons, a group of women gather at the Steinbeck Library gather to weave mats for homeless people to sleep on. They weave, not with cotton or wool, but with plastic bags cut into strips.

That would be the same plastic bags into which the supermarket clerk puts the egg cartons and ground beef. The women call their weaving material "plarn," with the "pl" for "plastic" and the "arn" for yarn, said Ramona Romandia, a librarian. Once they've knitted several of the clean, 6-foot long blankets, they bundle them out the door. They tote them across Lincoln Street to the First United Methodist Church.

*Notes on my thoughts,
reactions and questions as I
read:*

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"Once we're done, they serve as sleeping mats for the homeless," said Romandia, a librarian, who has a masters in library science.

The advantages the plarn mats provide to a homeless person are critical, she said. For example, the mats thicken the barrier separating the ground from a blanket or a sleeping bag with a person tucked inside it.

Brian Dusenberry, 34, has slept on two of the plarn mats, and they do make a difference in the outdoors, he said. "You put them on the ground and they help you stay drier," he said. "Your blankets don't get so dirty. They have a cushioning impact."

If you're homeless or for some other reason forced to sleep outdoors, "bedtime" can mean the wet cement or damp earth. Sleep swirls in, less as an opportunity for peaceful rest and optimistic dreams than the real dangers of the dark, including assault and robbery. The plarn mats can do little to shield a person from those threats, but they can help assure that the fragments of sleep remaining are more restful, Dusenberry said.

Romandia got the idea for making the plarn mats at the Steinbeck Library as a community project while visiting a library in Turlock, Calif., which had a similar effort. The Steinbeck Library already had a crocheting and knitting group, but the emphasis was on creating items such as shawls and gloves. Making plastic mats for the homeless was another matter. Romandia had to learn to crochet herself.

The mat-making technique requires cutting around a plastic bag to create a series of circle-shaped plastic rings. Next step is to loop the rings together, pulling them straight into a 3-foot-long strand of plarn then crocheting that strand — and many others, of course — into a mat. Most of the mats are 6-feet long, which accommodates the majority of heights.

"These mats are well-received and prized highly," said the Rev. Jim Luther, pastor of First United Methodist. "They keep people off the ground, and the ground is cold and damp. These mats are a meaningful gesture."

Romandia, a 62-year old mother of four, is motivated to work with the plastic mat project for several basic reasons. One thought is that the number of homeless are multiplying, she said. Romandia lives in San Jose and commutes to Salinas daily. That gives her ample time to reflect.

Another reason, another motivation, for helping those less fortunate is that, that threat of homelessness could impact anyone. "At some point any one of us could be out there in the street," she said.

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Comprehension questions – answers may be in phrases.

1. *List three positive attributes of this variety of sleeping mat.*
2. *List three terms used to describe the process used to create the mats.*
3. *Define **plarn** as used in the article.*
4. *Explain why a 6-foot mat would accommodate a majority of heights.*
5. *Define **fragments** as used in the text.*

7/8.RI.1,2,3,4

Answer each question in one or more complete sentences and by providing complete explanations.

1. *Aside from the actual process of creating the mats, which portion of the creation process would likely be the most tedious? Explain fully.*
2. *What line in the text gives the reader the idea that the librarian has a lengthy commute to work each day? Explain your reasoning.*

7/8.RI.5

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3. Typical articles used for this assignment have more recent dates of publication. Explain why this topic is especially relevant during the winter months even though the news is approximately eight months old. Cite additional information from the text explaining why all readers may be inclined to show compassion for the homeless.

7/8.RI.8

4. There are multiple Internet sites providing information about making plastic bag mats. Most use the following statistics:

- Mat size: 2 ½ feet by 72 inches
- Number of bags required per mat: 500-700
- Number of strips from each bag: 4
- Approximate length of each strip: 3 feet

Based on the information provided, approximately how many lineal feet of plarn is required for each mat? What is the square footage of each mat? Show your math. Explain your thought process in complete sentences.

7/8.RI.10