

Threads & Themes Grade 8, Unit 3, Investigation 1 Summative Assessment

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class:

PASSAGE 1

Buying Back the Balance: A Guide to Eco-Friendly Consumer Choices

(1) Every trip to the grocery store or shopping center involves dozens of small decisions. Paper or plastic? Name brand or store brand? But one category of choice carries weight beyond the checkout line: whether to buy products that support or harm the ecosystems that keep life on Earth in balance. As concern about environmental damage has grown, a wave of certifications, seals, and labels has appeared on products ranging from coffee to lumber. These labels promise that the item was produced in a way that respects the natural world. Understanding what these labels actually mean is the first step toward making purchases that give back to the land.

WHY WHAT YOU BUY MATTERS

(2) What people choose to buy affects what companies produce, and that affects how land is used. When shoppers consistently choose products made through environmentally responsible practices, they send a signal to producers: protect the environment, and the demand will follow. When farmers, loggers, and manufacturers see that signal clearly enough, many shift their methods. The result is a chain of cause and effect that stretches from a store shelf to a forest or a farm halfway around the world.

CERTIFIED ORGANIC

(3) The term “organic” is one of the most recognized certifications in the United States. The U.S. Department of Agriculture requires products bearing the official organic seal to meet strict standards. Farms must avoid chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and they cannot use genetic engineering. Inspectors visit certified farms every year to make sure the rules are being followed. Operations are also subject to surprise inspections. For consumers, the organic label signals that a product was grown using methods designed to protect soil health, conserve water, and reduce pollution practices to help farmland grow healthier rather than wear it out.

(4) However, the organic seal has limits. It certifies what farmers do not use, but it does not measure the broader health of the ecosystem surrounding the farm. A field can meet every organic standard and still sit in a landscape stripped of native plants and areas where wildlife can live. For this reason, some environmental scientists argue that organic certification is a starting point for responsible farming, not a finish line.

SHADE-GROWN AND FOREST-FRIENDLY

(5) Some certifications go beyond just addressing the farm itself. They take the extra step of addressing the rich ecosystems that surround the farmland. The Smithsonian Institution’s Bird Friendly certification, for instance, requires coffee farms to maintain a canopy of native shade trees above their crops. Research has shown that shade-grown coffee farms can support more

than 150 bird species. That’s compared with fewer than twenty species on farms that clear trees to grow coffee in open sunlight! By protecting these habitats, shade-grown farms help protect the wide variety of species that depend on forest cover during migration.

(6) Similarly, the Forest Stewardship Council certifies wood and paper products from forests managed to protect biodiversity and respect the rights of Indigenous communities. Certified forests must maintain natural water sources and preserve sensitive habitats. These standards are based on the idea that a forest is more than a source of timber—it is a living system that provides clean air, water, and shelter for countless species.

WHEN LABELS MISLEAD

(7) Not every label on a product tells the full story. The practice known as greenwashing occurs when companies use vague or misleading language to make products appear more environmentally responsible than they are. Terms such as “eco-friendly,” “natural,” and “green” have no regulated definition. They can be applied to almost anything without proof. One study by the European Commission found that more than forty percent of the environmental claims it examined were exaggerated or false. Some companies have even created their own fake certification logos that are designed to look official but are not checked by any independent group. Spotting the difference between reliable labels and misleading ones requires careful attention. Trustworthy certifications typically name the independent organization behind them, describe the specific standards a product has met, and allow the public to confirm claims through a database or website. When a label offers none of these details, its claims deserve skepticism rather than confidence.

CHOICES THAT GIVE BACK

(8) The most meaningful eco-labels share a common principle: they make producers responsible for giving back to the systems they depend on. Organic standards protect the soil. Bird Friendly certification protects migration habitats. Forest certification protects water systems and biodiversity. Each label represents a form of reciprocity — the recognition that taking from the natural world without giving back leads to long-term harm. Every informed purchase is a small act of stewardship, a decision to support the cycle of care that keeps ecosystems healthy for future generations.

ITEMS — PASSAGE 1

Item 1

According to “Buying Back the Balance,” what happens when shoppers consistently choose products made through environmentally responsible practices?

- A)** More products carry environmental certification labels.
- B)** Producers shift their methods to protect the environment.
- C)** Farms meet organic standards by avoiding chemical pesticides and fertilizers.
- D)** Companies design new labels to attract customers who care about the environment.

Item 2

Read this sentence from paragraph 2 of “Buying Back the Balance.”

The result is a chain of cause and effect that stretches from a store shelf to a forest or a farm halfway around the world.

What idea does this sentence help develop in the paragraph?

- A) It shows that small consumer choices can have far-reaching environmental effects.
- B) It explains that most products come from farms and forests around the world.
- C) It suggests that companies control what happens in forests and farms.
- D) It shows how products are transported from farms to stores.

Item 3

Read paragraphs 3 and 4 from “Buying Back the Balance.”

How does the author present different perspectives on organic certification?

- A) The author introduces organic certification and then shows that most experts agree it is the best way to protect the environment.
- B) The author explains the benefits of organic certification and then presents the view that it may not fully protect entire ecosystems.
- C) The author describes the requirements for organic certification and then explains how surprise inspections help enforce those requirements.
- D) The author explains how organic certification works and then argues that it is less important than other types of environmental labels.

Item 4

Read this sentence from “Buying Back the Balance.”

Similarly, the Forest Stewardship Council certifies wood and paper products from forests managed to protect biodiversity and respect the rights of Indigenous communities.

In the word *biodiversity*, *bio* means “life” and *divers* means “different.”

Based on this information and your knowledge of the suffix -ity, what is the meaning of biodiversity?

- A) different types of life that live in separate places
- B) a group of different living things working together
- C) the act of protecting different kinds of living things
- D) the state or condition of having many different forms of life

Item 5

Read these sentences from “Buying Back the Balance.”

Not every label on a product tells the full story. The practice known as greenwashing occurs when companies use vague or misleading language to make products appear more environmentally responsible than they are.

What does the author’s use of the word *greenwashing* suggest about this practice? Choose TWO answers.

- A) that companies sometimes create labels that appear official but are not verified

- B) that companies are confused about what environmental terms on their labels actually mean
- C) that companies are showing how they improve their environmental practices in honest ways
- D) that companies have made environmental labels more difficult for people to understand over time
- E) that companies may exaggerate or make false claims about the environmental benefits of their products

Item 6

Read this sentence from “Buying Back the Balance.”

When a label offers none of these details, its claims deserve skepticism rather than confidence.

Which context clue BEST helps the reader determine the meaning of skepticism as it is used in this sentence?

- A) The contrast with the word “confidence” signals that skepticism means doubt or distrust.
- B) The phrase “a label offers” suggests that skepticism describes how information is presented to consumers.
- C) The use of the word “claims” suggests that skepticism refers to statements made by companies about their products.
- D) The phrase “none of these details” suggests that skepticism means noticing when information is missing from a claim.

Item 7

Read this sentence from “Buying Back the Balance.”

Each label represents a form of reciprocity—the recognition that taking from the natural world without giving back leads to long-term harm.

A student reads this sentence and looks up the word *reciprocity* in the dictionary.

Which of the following definitions BEST matches the meaning of reciprocity as it is used in the passage?

- A) responding to an action with a similar action in return
- B) an agreement between two countries to provide equal trade privileges
- C) the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit over time
- D) a formal system of rules that controls how resources are shared among groups

Item 8

Which statement BEST summarizes “Buying Back the Balance: A Guide to Eco-Friendly Consumer Choices”?

- A) Greenwashing is a problem that can make it harder for people to find products that truly help the environment.
- B) Organic certification helps protect soil and water and is one of the most common eco-labels people see on products.

- C)** Eco-labels can encourage companies to protect the environment, but people need to understand which labels are trustworthy.
- D)** The European Commission has found that most environmental claims are false, so people should avoid products with eco-labels.

PASSAGE 2

The Buffalo Come Home: Tribal-Led Prairie Conservation

(1) On a September morning in 2022, a convoy of livestock trailers turned off a highway in South Dakota and rolled through open grassland toward a gathering of tribal members. Inside the trailers stood forty bison—massive animals that had grown restless after hours on the road. When the gates swung open, the animals surged forward into the prairie, their hooves striking ground that their ancestors had grazed by the millions. For the members of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe who gathered to witness the release, the moment was more than an act of conservation. It was a homecoming.

(2) The return of bison to tribal lands is part of a growing movement. The movement is led by the InterTribal Buffalo Council, an organization founded in 1992 by representatives of nineteen tribal nations. It began with a shared conviction: returning bison to Indigenous lands could repair relationships between people, animals, and ecosystems that had been severed by more than a century of destruction. By the 1890s, commercial hunting, military campaigns, and the spread of cattle ranching had reduced the bison population from an estimated thirty million to fewer than a thousand. The loss shattered not only the species. It also decimated the cultures, food systems, and spiritual practices of the Plains nations that had depended on bison for thousands of years.

(3) Today, more than eighty tribal nations belong to the council, managing roughly twenty thousand bison across more than one million acres of tribal land. The size of the effort reflects a principle rooted in the traditions of many participating nations: that the health of a community cannot be separated from the health of the land it inhabits. Bison are not simply livestock to be raised and sold. They are relatives—living connections to a way of life that values balance between what people take and what they return.

(4) The ecological evidence supports this view. Bison are what scientists call a keystone species, meaning their presence shapes the entire ecosystem around them. As bison graze, they do not clip grass evenly the way cattle do. Instead, they move in dense groups, grazing one area heavily before shifting to another. This pattern creates a patchwork of tall and short grasses across the prairie—a diversity of habitats that benefits birds, insects, and small mammals. Prairie chickens, for example, nest in taller grass but feed in shorter patches. Without the varied landscape that bison grazing produces, species like these lose the conditions they need to survive.

(5) Bison shape the land in other ways as well. They roll on the ground in the same spots repeatedly. As they roll, they press shallow depressions into the earth called wallows. When rain falls, these wallows collect water and become small temporary wetlands where frogs breed and insects gather. Their waste returns nitrogen to the soil, enriching the ground and encouraging new plant growth. Each of these actions—grazing, wallowing, fertilizing—feeds back into the ecosystem, creating a cycle in which the bison feed the prairie and the prairie feeds the bison.

(6) Not everyone supports the expansion of bison herds. Some cattle ranchers near tribal lands have raised concerns about competition for grazing space. Others note the risk that bison could spread brucellosis, a bacterial disease, to cattle. These worries are not new; they have shaped federal bison policy for decades. However, wildlife managers note that no documented case exists of a managed tribal bison herd transmitting brucellosis to neighboring cattle. Supporters

of the bison movement also point out that the economic benefits—including cultural tourism, responsibly raised meat sales, and healthier grasslands—extend well beyond tribal boundaries.

(7) The work of the InterTribal Buffalo Council offers a model for what recovery can look like when it is guided by the knowledge of communities that have lived with the land for generations. Rather than treating nature as a resource to be controlled, the council’s approach treats it as a partner to be renewed. The bison that now graze these prairies are doing what they have always done: moving, feeding, shaping the ground beneath them. What has changed is that people are once again paying attention—and making room.

ITEMS — PASSAGE 2

Item 9

How does the information in paragraph 2 of “The Buffalo Come Home” connect to the ideas in paragraph 3?

- A) Paragraph 2 describes the damage caused by the loss of bison, and paragraph 3 explains how those losses have been completely reversed today.
- B) Paragraph 2 explains how the loss of bison harmed Plains nations, and paragraph 3 focuses mainly on the number of bison and acres of land now involved.
- C) Paragraph 2 describes the causes of the bison’s decline, and paragraph 3 explains how those same forces are still affecting bison today.
- D) Paragraph 2 explains the destruction of bison populations and the losses that followed, and paragraph 3 shows how the modern movement has grown in response.

Item 10

Why does the author make a comparison between bison and cattle in paragraph 4 of “The Buffalo Come Home”?

- A) to argue that bison are a better choice than cattle for managing prairie grasslands
- B) to demonstrate that bison and cattle have essentially the same effect on prairie ecosystems
- C) to show that bison grazing patterns create ecological variety that cattle grazing does not
- D) to explain that cattle cause more environmental damage than bison and other livestock

Item 11

What is the role of the final sentence in paragraph 5?

- A) It explains how each of the bison’s actions directly improves plant growth on the prairie.
- B) It restates the idea from the opening sentence of the paragraph to provide additional emphasis.
- C) It introduces a new example of how bison affect the ecosystem that the earlier sentences did not mention.
- D) It synthesizes the individual examples into the larger idea of a reciprocal cycle between bison and prairies.

Item 12

Why does the author of “The Buffalo Come Home” include the concerns of cattle ranchers in paragraph 6?

- A)** to argue that ranchers’ concerns are not supported by evidence and are less important than the benefits of bison restoration
- B)** to present opposition to the bison movement and then respond with specific evidence that addresses those concerns
- C)** to suggest ways that ranchers and tribal nations can work together to solve the brucellosis problem
- D)** to explain that brucellosis is the primary threat to cattle populations across the United States

Item 13

What central idea does “The Buffalo Come Home: Tribal-Led Prairie Conservation” develop?

- A)** Tribal nations are working to restore bison herds as part of broader efforts to support their communities and local economies.
- B)** Bison are ecologically important because their grazing and wallowing behaviors create varied prairie habitats.
- C)** Concerns about disease and land use continue to shape how people view the return of bison to certain areas.
- D)** Returning bison to tribal lands helps restore ecosystems and supports living in balance with the land.

ITEMS — LANGUAGE

Item 14

Read this sentence.

The researchers studied the effects of grazing patterns on grassland health, and a report was published by the team last spring.

Which revision corrects the inappropriate shift in verb voice?

- A) The effects of grazing patterns on grassland health were studied, and a report was published by the team last spring.
- B) The researchers studied the effects of grazing patterns on grassland health, and the team published a report last spring.
- D) The researchers studied the effects of grazing patterns on grassland health, and a report will be published by the team next spring.
- C) The researchers had studied the effects of grazing patterns on grassland health, and a report was being published by the team last spring.

Item 15

Read the sentence.

Returning bison to tribal lands helps restore prairie ecosystems and supports balance between people and the land.

Which revision best uses the conditional mood to show a possible outcome?

- A) Returning bison to tribal lands would help restore prairie ecosystems and support balance between people and the land.
- B) Returning bison to tribal lands can help restore prairie ecosystems and support balance between people and the land.
- C) Returning bison to tribal lands will help restore prairie ecosystems and support balance between people and the land.
- D) Returning bison to tribal lands restored prairie ecosystems and supported balance between people and the land.

SPELLING

Item 16

Write the spelling word you heard:

Item 17

Write the spelling word you heard:

Item 18

Write the spelling word you heard:

Item 19

Write the spelling word you heard:

Item 20

Write the spelling word you heard:
