Name _____ Date _____

Context Clues in a Science Paragraph: How Desert Plants Survive

Directions: Read the paragraph about desert plants. The clue for each word in italics is somewhere in the paragraph, often in the sentence just before or after the word.

Staying Alive in the Sonoran Desert

The Sonoran Desert stretches across parts of Arizona, California and Mexico, and rain there is *scarce*. The driest areas get less than three inches in an entire year, and the spring months can pass with almost no rain at all. To survive, desert plants must *conserve* water. The saguaro cactus is an expert at saving every drop. Its roots spread out in a wide circle just a few inches below the surface, so they can *absorb* rainwater quickly. Like a sponge, they soak up as much as they can before the hot sun dries the ground. The saguaro stores that water in its thick green stem, which is folded into pleats like an accordion. After a big storm, the pleats spread apart as the stem fills with water and *expands*. During the long dry months, the stem slowly shrinks again. Instead of leaves, a saguaro is covered with sharp spines. The spines shade the stem, and they also *deter* many hungry animals. Few creatures want a mouthful of needles. Desert wildflowers survive in a different way. Their seeds can lie *dormant* in the soil for years. The seeds are alive, but they do not sprout or grow until enough rain soaks the ground. Then the plants grow fast, and in a wet year flowers become *abundant*. Whole hillsides can be covered with blossoms. Each plant's life is *fleeting*, however. Within a few months, each plant makes new seeds and dies, and the seeds wait for the next wet year. Even in this harsh place, many plants *thrive*. Instead of wilting and dying, they grow strong and spread across the land.

1. What does *scarce* mean in the paragraph?

A. In short supply
B. Cool and gentle
C. Falling all at once
D. Easy to find

2. Which sentence from the paragraph uses a word with almost the same meaning as *conserve*?

A. Instead of leaves, a saguaro is covered with sharp spines.
B. Desert wildflowers survive in a different way.
C. The Sonoran Desert stretches across parts of Arizona, California and Mexico, and rain there is *scarce*.
D. The saguaro cactus is an expert at saving every drop.

3. In the paragraph, what do the saguaro's roots do when they *absorb* rainwater?

A. They pour it out onto the ground.
B. They push it away.
C. They soak it up.
D. They heat it up.

4. Which word from the paragraph means the opposite of *expands*?

A. fills
B. spread
C. stores
D. shrinks

5. What do the spines do when they *deter* hungry animals?

A. They give the animals a shady place to rest.
B. They attract the animals to the cactus.
C. They discourage the animals from trying to eat the cactus.
D. They help the animals find water.

6. What does *dormant* mean in the paragraph?

A. Dead and rotting
B. Alive but not growing
C. Washed away by rain
D. Growing very quickly

7. In a wet year, the paragraph says, flowers become *abundant*. What does *abundant* mean?

A. Pale and faded
B. Hard to find
C. Present in large numbers
D. Very tall

8. What does *fleeting* tell you about each wildflower's life?

A. It lasts only a short time.
B. It needs no water at all.
C. It lasts for many years.
D. It is protected by sharp spines.

9. Which meaning of *thrive* fits the paragraph?

A. To move to a new place
B. To grow strong and do well
C. To barely stay alive
D. To wilt and die