Whose Plaza?

Read a place through competing memories and public records

11.CL.1 "Read, analyze, and evaluate complex literary and informational texts written from various points of view and cultural perspectives, with an emphasis on works of American literature."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two phrases that show what the city chooses to record, circle two details from neighbors' lived experiences, and number one sentence in which the narrator questions her own view.

A Beginning at Alder Street

1 When I returned to Alder Street, a ribbon hung across the new plaza where my grandmother once sold guava pastries from a folding table. The mayor's sign called the space "an empty lot brought back to life." I almost laughed. On Saturdays, our block had smelled of coffee, fried dough, and rain rising from hot pavement. My grandmother knew which customers wanted news from San Juan and which wanted silence before a long shift. Yet the table had left no foundation, and a building permit could not prove that she had ever stood there.

2 At the ceremony, a boy in a Little League uniform asked why I looked angry. He pointed to the smooth path his grandfather could now cross in a wheelchair. I told him the path was good, though I heard how grudging my voice sounded. His grandfather had lived here longer than my family, he said, and had fought for curb cuts for years. The boy knew the plaza through someone else's struggle, not through my Saturday mornings. I wanted to tell him about the market, but I did not want my memory to erase his.

3 Later, I found a small metal plaque beside the benches. It named the architects, the donors, and the year the city bought the land. Nothing on it named the vendors. I took out my phone and typed what I remembered, including the woman who traded tamales for my grandmother's pastries. I could not recall her name. Across the plaza, the boy steadied his grandfather's chair while people gathered for a photograph. The mayor called the place a beginning. I wondered whether a beginning had to require an ending, or whether we could make room for both stories.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the narrator's memory challenge the mayor's description of the lot as “empty”? Use one detail from the passage.

2. How does the boy's perspective complicate the narrator's first reaction to the plaza?

3. Compare the plaque with the narrator's phone record. What can each preserve, and what does the narrator's forgotten name suggest about the limits of her own account?

4. The mayor calls the plaza “a beginning.” How does the narrator's final question evaluate that point of view?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75 to 100 word paragraph proposing a replacement plaque for the plaza. Include one sentence you would put on the plaque, then explain how it represents both the former market and the new access without claiming to tell everyone's story. Use at least two details from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Whose Plaza?

GRADE 11 · 11.CL.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two phrases that show what the city chooses to record, circle two details from neighbors' lived experiences, and number one sentence in which the narrator questions her own view. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the narrator's memory challenge the mayor's description of the lot as "empty"? Use one detail from the passage.	**The narrator remembers her grandmother selling pastries there and sharing news with customers, so the lot held community life even though it had no permanent structure.**
2	How does the boy's perspective complicate the narrator's first reaction to the plaza?	**The boy sees a path his grandfather can use in a wheelchair. His account shows that the plaza answers a long-standing need, even as its construction obscures the narrator's memories.**
3	Compare the plaque with the narrator's phone record. What can each preserve, and what does the narrator's forgotten name suggest about the limits of her own account?	**The plaque preserves official names and dates, while the phone record preserves memories of the vendors. The forgotten name shows that the narrator's account is incomplete, too.**
4	The mayor calls the plaza "a beginning." How does the narrator's final question evaluate that point of view?	**The narrator questions whether celebrating the new plaza requires treating the former market as gone and unimportant. She suggests that the new access and the earlier community can both be acknowledged.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would put this sentence on the plaque: "This plaza honors neighbors who shared food and news here and those who fought to make its paths accessible." It makes room for the narrator's grandmother, who sold guava pastries, and for the grandfather who fought for curb cuts. Unlike the mayor's sign, it does not call the land empty before construction. I would leave space for neighbors to add names because the narrator cannot remember the woman who traded tamales. A plaque cannot preserve every memory, but it can acknowledge that some are missing.

Accept interpretations that distinguish the city's official account from the neighbors' perspectives and support the distinction with passage details. For the open task, look for a proposed plaque sentence, both required perspectives, and an acknowledgment that no single account is complete.