# Three Views, One Lunch

How sociological theories explain the same school policy differently

**SS24.S.3a** "Apply the major sociological theories to a situation and evaluate the differences in interpretations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** As you read, number the structural functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist explanations 1, 2, and 3. Underline one detail each explanation uses to support its interpretation.

### The Pickup Shelf

1. At fictional Westbridge High, lunch lasts 28 minutes. The school opens a pickup shelf for students who order meals through an app before first period. Students who order ahead spend less time in line, while everyone else waits at the counter. Some students do not have a phone or reliable internet at home, and others forget to place an order. A teacher notices that a few students arrive late to afternoon class after standing in the regular line. The principal says the shelf is meant to move more students through lunch before the bell.

2. A structural functionalist asks how the new shelf affects the school as a whole. Faster pickup may help classes start on time, but delays at the counter could disrupt that goal. A conflict theorist focuses instead on unequal access to a limited resource: time to eat. Students with reliable devices can gain time, while students without them may lose it. This view also asks who had a voice when the rule was made. Both theories notice the same lunch lines, yet one tests how the system works, while the other tests whose interests it serves.

3. A symbolic interactionist looks closely at daily encounters near the shelf. Suppose students begin calling the pickup group "the VIPs." Even if no adult uses that name, it could make some students feel important and others feel excluded. A student might then avoid the shelf to escape teasing, even after getting access to the app. This theory explains how a shared label can shape behavior, something line length alone cannot show. None of the three views proves why every student acts as they do. Together, they point to different evidence: class arrival times, access to ordering, and students' conversations.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How might a structural functionalist and a conflict theorist interpret a late arrival caused by the regular line differently?

2. Suppose the principal reports fewer late arrivals overall. Why might a conflict theorist still question whether the shelf is working well?

3. How would a symbolic interactionist explain why a student avoids the shelf even after gaining app access? What would a focus on access alone miss?

4. What different evidence would help a structural functionalist and a symbolic interactionist study the shelf's effects?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a school rule unrelated to lunch. In one paragraph, explain how a structural functionalist, a conflict theorist, and a symbolic interactionist would each interpret its effects, then explain one important difference between their interpretations.

**ANSWER KEY**

# Three Views, One Lunch

**HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.S.3a**

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, number the structural functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist explanations 1, 2, and 3. Underline one detail each explanation uses to support its interpretation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How might a structural functionalist and a conflict theorist interpret a late arrival caused by the regular line differently? | **A structural functionalist might see the late arrival as a disruption to class. A conflict theorist might ask whether students without reliable access to the app are more likely to face that delay.** |
| 2 | Suppose the principal reports fewer late arrivals overall. Why might a conflict theorist still question whether the shelf is working well? | **The improvement might not benefit everyone equally. Students without reliable devices may still lose time in the regular line.** |
| 3 | How would a symbolic interactionist explain why a student avoids the shelf even after gaining app access? What would a focus on access alone miss? | **The student might avoid the shelf because the "VIPs" label leads to teasing. A focus on access alone would miss how that label shapes the student's choice.** |
| 4 | What different evidence would help a structural functionalist and a symbolic interactionist study the shelf's effects? | **A structural functionalist could examine class arrival times. A symbolic interactionist could examine students' conversations and how labels affect their behavior.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Suppose a school requires students to put phones in pouches during class. A structural functionalist might ask whether the rule reduces distractions and helps lessons run smoothly. A conflict theorist might ask whether students had a say in the rule and whether teachers enforce it equally. A symbolic interactionist might study what happens when classmates call students who resist the pouches "troublemakers." That label could affect how those students act in class. The first view emphasizes how the classroom works, while the other views draw attention to unequal power and the meanings students create.

Accept interpretations that apply each theory to the stated situation, even if students use different wording. For Part 3, look for three distinct applications and an accurate comparison, not a claim that one theory must be correct.