A Wider Net

How Great Society programs addressed different economic risks

SS24.US2.12a "Investigate the major elements of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program and explain how it represents an attempt to expand the American social safety net, including the War on Poverty, Medicare, Medicaid, and Head Start."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle War on Poverty, Medicare, Medicaid, and Head Start as you read. Underline a detail that shows the risk or barrier each one addresses.

What Could a Safety Net Do?

1. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a War on Poverty, arguing that economic hardship required more than charity after a crisis. The Economic Opportunity Act funded efforts such as Job Corps, which offered job training to young people, and community action programs intended to let local residents help shape antipoverty services. These efforts aimed to improve people's chances of earning a living, rather than simply paying a bill once. Johnson called his broader domestic agenda the Great Society. Its programs addressed different kinds of insecurity, including low wages, illness, and unequal access to early learning.

2. Consider two neighbors in 1965: one has retired and worries that a hospital stay will erase her savings; another works for low wages and cannot afford medical care. Congress created Medicare and Medicaid in 1965 as parts of the Great Society. Medicare provided federal health insurance primarily for people age 65 and older, regardless of income. Medicaid helped pay for medical care for certain people with low incomes who met eligibility rules, with federal and state governments sharing costs. Neither program cured illness, but both reduced the financial danger of needing care. Their different eligibility rules reached different groups.

3. A different risk starts before a child can read. Head Start began in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty, offering preschool learning and services such as health screenings to children from low-income families. It sought to give these children a stronger start in school, not to insure their parents or replace a paycheck. Together, training, health coverage, and early education made the Great Society an effort to expand the social safety net: public programs that help people face economic risks. The net had limits, since eligibility rules and local program availability meant not everyone received every service.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the War on Poverty try to reduce economic insecurity in a way that went beyond paying a bill once?

2. How did Medicare and Medicaid reach different groups while addressing the same kind of risk?

3. What barrier did Head Start address that Medicare and Medicaid did not?

4. Why does the passage describe the Great Society as an expanded social safety net rather than a single solution to poverty? Name two different risks its programs addressed.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A town has a 70-year-old facing hospital bills, a low-income parent who needs medical care, and that parent's four-year-old who could benefit from preschool. Write five sentences proposing a different Great Society program for each person, explaining how each reduces a risk, and showing why the three programs form a broader safety net.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.12a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle War on Poverty, Medicare, Medicaid, and Head Start as you read. Underline a detail that shows the risk or barrier each one addresses. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the War on Poverty try to reduce economic insecurity in a way that went beyond paying a bill once?	**It supported efforts such as Job Corps training to improve young people's chances of earning a living and community action programs that involved residents in shaping services.**
2	How did Medicare and Medicaid reach different groups while addressing the same kind of risk?	**Medicare covered primarily people age 65 and older regardless of income. Medicaid helped certain people with low incomes who met eligibility rules. Both reduced the financial risk of needing medical care.**
3	What barrier did Head Start address that Medicare and Medicaid did not?	**Head Start addressed unequal access to early learning by offering preschool learning and services such as health screenings to children from low-income families.**
4	Why does the passage describe the Great Society as an expanded social safety net rather than a single solution to poverty? Name two different risks its programs addressed.	**Its programs addressed multiple risks, such as difficulty earning a living, the cost of medical care, and unequal access to early learning, rather than offering one form of help.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The 70-year-old could use Medicare to reduce the financial risk of a hospital stay. The low-income parent may qualify for Medicaid, which can help pay for medical care. The four-year-old could attend Head Start for preschool learning and health screenings if a place is available. These programs address medical costs and barriers to early learning at different points in life. Together they create a broader safety net, although eligibility and local availability limit who receives help.

Accept answers that explain the programs' different purposes, not just their names. Do not treat low income alone as a guarantee of Medicaid eligibility or a Head Start place.