Praise With Teeth

Trace how sarcastic praise reveals an editorial writer's view.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6 "Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each phrase that sounds like praise or approval, and number each detail that makes the praise seem unreasonable. Use your marks to distinguish Ortiz's literal words from her real meaning.

The Quiet Streets Initiative

1. At Monday's council meeting, Mayor Vale unveiled Harborville's "Quiet Streets Initiative," a plan to replace the town library's parking lot with a twelve-lane roundabout. He explained that the library attracted an alarming number of people who arrived, parked, and then remained indoors reading. A roundabout, he said, would keep residents moving, which was clearly the highest purpose of a town. To demonstrate efficiency, the council spent forty minutes debating the color of the traffic cones. The mayor thanked everyone for protecting Harborville from the dangerous habit of sitting still with a book.

2. Councilmember Ortiz, who had voted against the project, wrote the next day that Harborville had finally solved education. "Why preserve a building full of free information," she asked, "when drivers can learn geometry by circling it?" She praised the plan's "generous" treatment of students, since teenagers who once used the library after school could now enjoy crossing six lanes of traffic. Ortiz added that rain would make the trip especially memorable. Her praise appeared beside a photograph of students waiting at a crosswalk after dusk.

3. By Friday, the council had posted a banner: "A Faster Harborville Begins Here." Beneath it stood a temporary sign directing library visitors to a lot nearly a mile away. Ortiz reported that this arrangement offered readers "a refreshing opportunity to reflect on their choices during the walk." She also noted that the town had saved money by removing several benches, because no one would be tempted to waste time resting. Yet her final sentence shifts from playful praise to a plain observation: "A town that makes its library hard to reach has announced what it can do without." The banner flapped above the distant lot.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Ortiz calls the plan's treatment of students “generous.” What does she really mean, and which nearby detail shows her real meaning?

2. In the line about drivers learning geometry by circling the library, what is Ortiz literally saying, and what criticism is she implying?

3. The banner says, “A Faster Harborville Begins Here.” How does that direct message conflict with Ortiz's point of view? Use one detail from the passage.

4. Why is Ortiz's final sentence less sarcastic than her earlier comments? Explain what it reveals about her view of the council's priorities.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write exactly three sentences about an invented school or community policy. In the first sentence, praise the policy literally, in the second, include a concrete detail that reveals your sarcasm, and in the third, directly explain what you really mean.

ANSWER KEY

Praise With Teeth

HIGH SCHOOL · RL.11-12.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each phrase that sounds like praise or approval, and number each detail that makes the praise seem unreasonable. Use your marks to distinguish Ortiz's literal words from her real meaning. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Ortiz calls the plan's treatment of students "generous." What does she really mean, and which nearby detail shows her real meaning?	**She means the plan is harmful and inconvenient for students, not generous. The detail that students must cross six lanes of traffic shows this.**
2	In the line about drivers learning geometry by circling the library, what is Ortiz literally saying, and what criticism is she implying?	**Literally, she says drivers can learn geometry by driving around the library. She implies that traffic cannot replace access to books and learning.**
3	The banner says, "A Faster Harborville Begins Here." How does that direct message conflict with Ortiz's point of view? Use one detail from the passage.	**The banner presents the project as progress, but Ortiz suggests it harms the town by making the library difficult to use. The new parking lot is nearly a mile away, for example.**
4	Why is Ortiz's final sentence less sarcastic than her earlier comments? Explain what it reveals about her view of the council's priorities.	**It states her criticism more directly. She believes the council's choices show that it values traffic and savings more than keeping the library accessible.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our school's new Lunch Efficiency Plan deserves praise because it removes every cafeteria table and lets students eat while standing in the hallway. Students who drop a tray can use the extra time before class to practice quick reflexes. I really mean that the plan treats speed as more important than students' safety and comfort.

Accept responses that identify Ortiz's sarcasm as criticism of the roundabout and support that interpretation with relevant details. Students may describe her tone as sarcastic, ironic, or satirical if they accurately distinguish her literal praise from her intended criticism.