Comma Clause Detectives

Sort clauses by whether they identify or add detail.

ELA.11.C.3.1 "Follow the rules of standard English grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling appropriate to grade level."

NAME _____ DATE _____

ESSENTIAL CLAUSE

An essential clause gives information needed to identify the noun. Do not set it off with commas.

The recipe that uses saffron takes longer to prepare.

EXTRA CLAUSE

An extra clause adds information that is not needed to identify the noun. Set it off with commas.

Our neighbor, who restores violins, invited us inside.

1 SORT

8 items

Circle ESSENTIAL or EXTRA for each sentence, then pick two items and explain whether their clauses identify the noun or add extra information.

1.	The hikers who carried maps reached the shelter before dark.	ESSENTIAL	EXTRA
2.	The article that challenged the policy drew many comments.	ESSENTIAL	EXTRA
3.	Ms. Alvarez, who teaches astronomy, organized the observatory trip.	ESSENTIAL	EXTRA
4.	The paintings that hang in the east gallery are on loan.	ESSENTIAL	EXTRA
5.	The final speaker, whose remarks were brief, received a standing ovation.	ESSENTIAL	EXTRA
6.	Our old printer, which jams often, needs repair.	ESSENTIAL	EXTRA
7.	The river, which flooded last spring, now runs quietly.	ESSENTIAL	EXTRA
8.	Students who miss the rehearsal must contact the director.	ESSENTIAL	EXTRA

2 PROVE IT

Explain your thinking

Pick two items from Part 1. For each one, tell how you knew where it belonged.

ITEM # _____ **HOW I KNEW** _____

ITEM # _____ **HOW I KNEW** _____

3 MAKE YOUR OWN

One of each

Write one new sentence with an essential clause and one new sentence with an extra clause.

ESSENTIAL _____

EXTRA _____

CHALLENGE

Write one sentence that has both an essential clause and an extra clause, using commas only around the extra clause.

ANSWER KEY

Comma Clause Detectives

GRADE 11 · ELA.11.C.3.1

PART 1 · SORT

#	ITEM	CATEGORY	WHY
1	The hikers who carried maps reached the shelter before dark.	**ESSENTIAL**	The clause identifies which hikers reached the shelter, so no commas are used.
2	The article that challenged the policy drew many comments.	**ESSENTIAL**	The clause identifies which article drew comments, so no commas are used.
3	Ms. Alvarez, who teaches astronomy, organized the observatory trip.	**EXTRA**	The clause adds information about Ms. Alvarez, who is already identified by name.
4	The paintings that hang in the east gallery are on loan.	**ESSENTIAL**	The clause identifies which paintings are on loan, so no commas are used.
5	The final speaker, whose remarks were brief, received a standing ovation.	**EXTRA**	The clause adds information about the already identified final speaker.
6	Our old printer, which jams often, needs repair.	**EXTRA**	The clause adds information about the identified printer.
7	The river, which flooded last spring, now runs quietly.	**EXTRA**	The clause adds information about the identified river.
8	Students who miss the rehearsal must contact the director.	**ESSENTIAL**	The clause identifies which students must contact the director, so no commas are used.

PART 2 · PROVE IT

Accept any explanation that names the deciding feature from the rule box for the chosen item.

PART 3 · MAKE YOUR OWN (SAMPLE ANSWERS)

- **ESSENTIAL**: The candidates who submitted portfolios received interviews.
- **EXTRA**: My cousin, who lives in Denver, studies architecture.

Challenge: The scientist who led the expedition, whose notes filled three journals, spoke at the museum.

Accept any explanation that names the deciding feature from the rule box for the chosen item. For Part 2, accept explanations that correctly identify whether a clause is needed to identify the noun or adds extra information. In student-created sentences, check that commas surround only extra clauses.