Room for the River

Weigh the benefits and costs of a flood policy

HS-ENV6-2 "Construct an argument to explain that environmental policies/decisions have negative and positive impacts on people, societies, and the environment."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two possible benefits and circle two possible costs or harms in the passage. Write a 1 beside one benefit and one cost you would weigh against each other when judging the policy.

A Town Makes Space for Floodwater

1. After three floods in a decade, the fictional town of Mill Creek adopts a voluntary buyout policy for homes on its lowest riverbank. Owners who accept payment move elsewhere, and the town removes the buildings. It then plants native grasses and trees on the cleared land rather than allowing new construction there. During a flood, water can spread across this open ground instead of pushing against buildings. The policy aims to reduce danger and repair costs, but it also changes where neighbors live and how the town uses valuable land.

2. Open floodplain gives floodwater space to spread and soak into the soil, which may reduce damage nearby. New vegetation can provide shelter for birds and insects, while roots help hold the riverbank in place. These benefits do not mean the town is floodproof: unusually high water can still reach other buildings. People living nearby may gain safer streets and a place to walk. Yet the town must spend money on planting and long-term upkeep, funds it cannot use for other public projects.

3. A buyout is voluntary, but a fair payment does not erase every loss. Families who move may leave neighbors, familiar routes, and local businesses they rely on. Shops can lose customers, and removing homes may reduce the property taxes that support town services. Some owners, however, may welcome a chance to leave a risky home without trying to sell it on the open market. Town leaders could pair buyouts with help finding nearby housing and publish the program's costs and flood results. The strongest case for this policy weighs reduced flood exposure and healthier river habitat against displacement and public expense.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Make a claim about how the policy could benefit both residents and the river environment. Support it with two different details from the passage.

2. A resident says, "Because the buyouts are voluntary, nobody loses anything." Use two details from the passage to challenge this claim.

3. The town has limited funds. Explain one tradeoff it faces if it pays for the buyouts and restoration, using evidence from the passage.

4. Would publishing the program's costs and flood results help the town decide whether to continue it? Explain how that evidence could help weigh a benefit against a cost in the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A school district is considering replacing half of a mowed playing field with native wildflowers. Mowing uses fuel, wildflowers provide nectar for insects, and students use the field for games. Write a four- to five-sentence argument that recommends a decision, explains an environmental benefit and a drawback for students, and proposes a way to address the drawback.

Room for the River

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two possible benefits and circle two possible costs or harms in the passage. Write a 1 beside one benefit and one cost you would weigh against each other when judging the policy. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Make a claim about how the policy could benefit both residents and the river environment. Support it with two different details from the passage.	**The policy could make nearby homes safer because open ground gives floodwater room to spread. Native plants can also shelter birds and insects.**
2	A resident says, "Because the buyouts are voluntary, nobody loses anything." Use two details from the passage to challenge this claim.	**Families who accept buyouts may lose contact with neighbors and familiar places. Local shops may also lose customers.**
3	The town has limited funds. Explain one tradeoff it faces if it pays for the buyouts and restoration, using evidence from the passage.	**The town may reduce flood damage, but planting and upkeep use money that could fund other public projects.**
4	Would publishing the program's costs and flood results help the town decide whether to continue it? Explain how that evidence could help weigh a benefit against a cost in the passage.	**Yes. The town could compare spending on the program with evidence of reduced flood damage to judge whether the benefit justifies the cost.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The district should plant native wildflowers on part of the field, but not half of it. The flowers would provide nectar for insects, and mowing less area would use less fuel. Losing half the field could leave students too little space for games. The district could plant a smaller plot along the edge and keep the main playing area open.

Accept claims that use accurate passage details and explain both a benefit and a cost. For the open task, accept either recommendation if the argument addresses the environmental benefit, the loss of playing space, and a workable adjustment.