Otters Change the Story

Trace how an author builds and limits an idea.

RI.6.3 "Analyze in detail how an author develops a key individual, event or idea over the course of a text."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one sentence in each paragraph that adds to or changes the author's explanation of how otters affect kelp. Number your underlined sentences 1, 2, and 3 to trace how the idea develops.

A Predator and a Kelp Forest

1. Along the Pacific coast, sea otters float on their backs and crack open sea urchins to eat. Urchins graze on kelp, a large seaweed that grows in cool coastal water. Kelp forests shelter fish and other animals. When hunters nearly wiped out sea otters in many areas during the fur trade, some urchin populations grew and ate large stretches of kelp. These bare areas are sometimes called urchin barrens. This food chain gives scientists a way to ask a bigger question: Can one predator help shape an entire habitat?

2. At some sites where sea otters returned, researchers watched the balance shift. Otters ate urchins, fewer urchins fed on kelp, and kelp had a better chance to grow. Scientists compared places with otters to nearby places without them. In some places without otters, hungry urchins kept kelp short or scarce. The comparison made the otter's role clearer: it could affect not only its prey but also the underwater shelter used by other species. A single meal mattered because thousands of meals changed how many grazers remained.

3. But the story does not end with otters. Storms can tear kelp loose, warm water can slow its growth, and urchins do not always respond to otters in the same way. In some areas, other predators also eat urchins. That means bringing back otters does not guarantee a kelp forest everywhere. Still, the earlier chain of meals and the comparisons between sites help explain why scientists call sea otters a keystone species: their feeding can have effects far beyond the animals they eat.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the author use the details in paragraph 1 to set up the question at its end?

2. How does the comparison between sites in paragraph 2 help develop an answer to that question?

3. Why does the author move from describing a single meal to describing thousands of meals at the end of paragraph 2?

4. How does paragraph 3 change or limit the explanation developed in paragraph 2?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an editor's note explaining how the author builds the idea about otters across all three paragraphs. Use a detail from each paragraph, then suggest one kind of evidence the author could add to extend the explanation.

ANSWER KEY

Otters Change the Story

GRADE 6 · RI.6.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one sentence in each paragraph that adds to or changes the author's explanation of how otters affect kelp. Number your underlined sentences 1, 2, and 3 to trace how the idea develops. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the author use the details in paragraph 1 to set up the question at its end?	**The author links otters to urchins and urchins to kelp, then describes kelp loss after otters nearly disappeared. Those details raise the question of whether one predator can shape a habitat.**
2	How does the comparison between sites in paragraph 2 help develop an answer to that question?	**At some sites with otters, fewer urchins grazed and kelp had a better chance to grow. At some sites without otters, urchins kept kelp short or scarce, supporting the idea that otters can affect the habitat.**
3	Why does the author move from describing a single meal to describing thousands of meals at the end of paragraph 2?	**The author shows how repeated feeding can change the number of urchins, which can then affect kelp and the shelter it provides.**
4	How does paragraph 3 change or limit the explanation developed in paragraph 2?	**Paragraph 2 shows how otters can help kelp grow. Paragraph 3 adds that storms, warm water, and other factors also affect kelp, so returning otters do not guarantee a kelp forest.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The author first shows why otters might matter: when otters nearly disappeared, some urchins ate large stretches of kelp. Next, a comparison between sites with and without otters helps show how their feeding can protect kelp. Finally, the author explains that storms and warm water can also affect kelp, so otters are not the only factor. The author could add counts of urchins at one site before and after otters returned to show how much the population changed.

Accept different marked sentences if one from each paragraph traces the idea from the food chain, to evidence of otters' effect, to a limit on that effect. For the editor's note, look for accurate details from all three paragraphs and a relevant suggestion for additional evidence.