

Choices, Barriers, Policy

Analyze competing explanations for inequality and poverty responses.

12.E3e "The degree to which economic inequality reflects social, political, or economic injustices versus individual choices is hotly debated. The role that the government should play in decreasing this gap..."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline individual choices. Circle barriers to opportunity. Mark government programs and their possible trade-offs.

Why Income Gaps Matter

- ① In a fictional city, new warehouse jobs favor residents with transport, flexible schedules, and required skills. Others face long commutes or caregiving demands. Income is money received over time; wealth is assets minus debts at a point in time. Inequality describes their uneven distribution. Poverty concerns resources below a defined threshold. A gap alone does not establish its causes: choices and conditions can interact.
- ② Training and job searches can influence earnings; saving can build wealth. Yet circumstances shape realistic choices. A worker unable to afford child care may turn down evening training. Past lending discrimination can leave families with less wealth for homes or education. Discrimination in hiring and unequal access to schools or transport can also constrain opportunity. Evidence is needed to assess each factor's contribution to a particular gap.
- ③ Government responses can reduce hardship but require funding and rules. Nutrition assistance helps eligible households buy food. Medicaid provides health coverage for eligible people. Housing vouchers help eligible renters, but limited funding and waiting lists mean eligibility does not guarantee immediate assistance. The earned income tax credit can raise after-tax income for eligible workers. Supporters emphasize health, stability, and opportunity. Critics may question costs, targeting, or how benefit rules affect work incentives. Evaluating policies requires evidence about these effects, not assuming every program has the same results.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

- 1** Identify one individual choice from the passage that can influence earnings and one barrier that can limit a person's realistic choices.

- 2** How does the example of a worker who cannot afford child care show why people disagree about the causes of inequality?

- 3** Choose two government programs named in the passage. Explain how each one can reduce a household's financial hardship.

- 4** What concerns do supporters and critics raise about government programs designed to reduce poverty?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

In four sentences, advise officials about this fictional case: Maya's unpredictable hotel shifts limit training time, and her college has cut evening classes. Identify an individual decision and a structural barrier, recommend a public response, and explain a trade-off.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline individual choices. Circle barriers to opportunity. Mark government programs and their possible trade-offs. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Identify one individual choice from the passage that can influence earnings and one barrier that can limit a person's realistic choices.	Completing training can influence earnings. Unaffordable child care can limit access to that training.
2	How does the example of a worker who cannot afford child care show why people disagree about the causes of inequality?	The worker may choose not to attend evening training, but inability to afford child care limits that choice. The example supports the argument that unequal outcomes can result from barriers as well as personal decisions.
3	Choose two government programs named in the passage. Explain how each one can reduce a household's financial hardship.	Accept any two: nutrition assistance helps buy food; Medicaid covers health care; vouchers help with rent; the earned income tax credit increases eligible workers' after-tax income.
4	What concerns do supporters and critics raise about government programs designed to reduce poverty?	Supporters say programs can protect health, stability, and opportunity. Critics may question program cost, whether benefits reach intended people, and whether rules discourage additional work.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Maya can decide whether to request steadier shifts, though approval is outside her control. The loss of evening classes is a structural barrier. Officials could partner with the college to restore evening courses and improve access for working students. This requires public funding, and enrollment or completion may still be limited by work schedules.

Accept reasoned responses that distinguish a personal decision from a condition that limits opportunity. The recommendation may be a different government action if the student clearly explains its benefit and a plausible tradeoff.