The Fine Debate

Compare two arguments about library overdue fines.

12.3.R.5 "Students will evaluate how authors writing on the same issue reached different conclusions because of differences in assumptions, evidence, reasoning, and viewpoints, including examining rhetorical appeals, bias..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one piece of evidence from each speaker, circle each speaker's stated assumption, and number two claims that go beyond the evidence. Use your marks to compare how the speakers reach different conclusions.

Should the Library Drop Overdue Fines?

1. At a city hearing in the fictional town of Grayhaven, librarian Mira Solis argues that the public library should end overdue fines. She points to a library count: of 240 accounts blocked for unpaid fines last year, 150 belonged to residents of the town's two lowest-income neighborhoods. "A late fee should not decide who gets to read," she says, asking listeners to imagine a child unable to check out a book. Solis assumes that easier access matters more than the money fines bring in. "Either we drop fines or admit the library belongs only to people who can pay," she concludes.

2. At the same hearing, library board member Daniel Reed argues that the town should keep fines. He cites the library's annual report, which lists $18,000 in overdue-fine revenue and $12,000 spent replacing lost or badly damaged materials. Reed reasons that removing one source of money could strain a budget already paying for replacements, although the two amounts cover different expenses. He also says a neighbor once returned a book promptly because she wanted to avoid a fine. "If fines worked for her, they work for everyone," he claims. Reed assumes that a payment deadline motivates borrowers more than a reminder does.

3. The mayor asks both speakers about another option: stop charging overdue fines while still billing patrons for books that are lost or badly damaged. Solis says this plan would reopen accounts for borrowers who owe only late fees. Reed replies that the town would still lose the $18,000 in fine revenue, even if it could charge for missing books. Both speakers agree that library cards should be available to every resident, but neither offers a study comparing return rates before and after a similar change. As the hearing ends, the council has not yet voted; the same facts remain open to different readings.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does each speaker use evidence to support a different conclusion about overdue fines?

2. What does each speaker assume about fines, and how does the mayor's alternative put those assumptions in tension?

3. How does Solis's image of a child appeal to listeners differently from Reed's budget figures? How might their jobs shape those choices?

4. Identify one leap in each speaker's reasoning. What evidence is missing that could help the council assess their claims?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 90 to 110 word council memo recommending what to do about overdue fines. Compare the speakers' assumptions and evidence, identify one weak inference or fallacy, and explain what additional evidence could change your recommendation.

ANSWER KEY

The Fine Debate

GRADE 12 · 12.3.R.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one piece of evidence from each speaker, circle each speaker's stated assumption, and number two claims that go beyond the evidence. Use your marks to compare how the speakers reach different conclusions. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does each speaker use evidence to support a different conclusion about overdue fines?	**Solis cites 150 blocked accounts in low-income neighborhoods to support ending fines for greater access. Reed cites $18,000 in fine revenue and replacement spending to support keeping fines.**
2	What does each speaker assume about fines, and how does the mayor's alternative put those assumptions in tension?	**Solis assumes access matters more than fine revenue; Reed assumes fines motivate timely returns more than reminders. The alternative could improve access while removing both that revenue and the payment deadline.**
3	How does Solis's image of a child appeal to listeners differently from Reed's budget figures? How might their jobs shape those choices?	**Solis appeals to concern for a child's access, consistent with her work as a librarian. Reed appeals to concern about funding, consistent with his role on the library board.**
4	Identify one leap in each speaker's reasoning. What evidence is missing that could help the council assess their claims?	**Solis presents dropping fines and excluding people who cannot pay as the only choices. Reed treats one neighbor's response as proof that fines work for everyone. Data from a comparable library before and after ending fines could help test effects on access and returns.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I recommend ending overdue fines for a one-year trial while continuing to bill for lost books. Solis's count of blocked accounts suggests an access problem, though it cannot establish why those patrons stopped borrowing. Reed's revenue figure raises a real budget concern, but his neighbor's experience does not prove fines motivate everyone. Solis assumes access should take priority; Reed assumes fines improve returns. The council should track return rates, reopened accounts, replacement spending, and lost revenue during the trial, then compare them with the prior year. If returns fall sharply or replacement costs rise beyond the budget, I would reconsider the policy.

Accept either policy recommendation if the memo compares both arguments, identifies a specific weak inference, and names evidence that could test the recommendation. Students may also note that the annual report does not establish that fine revenue directly pays replacement costs.