Claims Under Scrutiny

Test the reasoning behind a town decision

AWH.P.1.2.C "Reinforce critical thinking by evaluating and challenging ideas and assumptions, analyzing and explaining inconsistencies in reasoning."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two broad claims, circle two details that limit what the speakers know, and label the two conflicting statements about delays 1 and 2. Use your marks to examine how well each speaker's reasoning holds up.

The Cedar Street Decision

1. In the fictional town of Millford, the council is deciding whether to close Cedar Street to cars during the half hour before school. A student, Maya, argues that a closure would protect walkers. She reports that volunteers counted 72 students crossing Cedar Street on Tuesday morning. Maya also says, "Every family will support this plan because every family wants children to be safe." A council member asks whether families who drive on Cedar Street might favor a different safety measure. Maya replies that she has not surveyed families. The council must decide what her count shows and what it cannot show.

2. Another speaker, Mr. Ortiz, objects to the closure. He says the street is a vital route for drivers heading to work and warns that any delay would be unacceptable. Later, he argues that moving cars to nearby Oak Street would be harmless because drivers can take a few extra minutes. The council has no traffic counts for Oak Street, so neither the size of a delay nor its effect on that street is known. Mr. Ortiz also mentions that an ambulance uses Cedar Street sometimes, but he offers no information about how an emergency vehicle would pass a temporary barrier.

3. The principal describes a one-week trial in which staff placed temporary signs at Cedar Street and left a gap for emergency vehicles. During the trial, staff recorded fewer cars passing the school entrance in the morning, but they did not count cars on Oak Street. The principal concludes, "The trial proves this plan makes the entire neighborhood safer." A parent points out that rain kept some students home on two trial days. The council now faces a choice: keep the street open, adopt the closure, or gather more evidence first. Each choice may affect people beyond the school gate.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does Maya assume when she predicts that every family will support the closure? How could the council test that assumption?

2. What narrower claim does the count of 72 students support? What does the count not establish about the proposed closure?

3. Compare Mr. Ortiz's two statements about delays. Why do they apply different standards?

4. Why does the trial not prove that the entire neighborhood is safer? Use two details from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a short exchange about a different town decision. Write a speaker's claim, an unstated assumption behind it, and a later statement by the same speaker that conflicts with it; then explain the conflict and name evidence that could test the assumption.

ANSWER KEY

Claims Under Scrutiny

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.P.1.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two broad claims, circle two details that limit what the speakers know, and label the two conflicting statements about delays 1 and 2. Use your marks to examine how well each speaker's reasoning holds up. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does Maya assume when she predicts that every family will support the closure? How could the council test that assumption?	**She assumes that wanting children to be safe means favoring this closure over other safety measures. The council could survey families about the closure and alternatives.**
2	What narrower claim does the count of 72 students support? What does the count not establish about the proposed closure?	**It shows that 72 students crossed Cedar Street during the Tuesday morning count. It does not establish that closing the street is necessary or would make crossing safer.**
3	Compare Mr. Ortiz's two statements about delays. Why do they apply different standards?	**He calls any delay on Cedar Street unacceptable but says a few extra minutes on Oak Street would be harmless. He has not explained why a delay matters on one street but not the other.**
4	Why does the trial not prove that the entire neighborhood is safer? Use two details from the passage.	**Staff did not count cars on Oak Street, where traffic might have increased. Rain also kept some students home on two trial days, which could affect what the trial shows.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At a meeting about keeping the public pool open later, a speaker says, "Any added city expense is unacceptable, so we must close the pool at six." The speaker assumes that later hours would cost the city more than they bring in. Later, the same speaker proposes paying for extra evening police patrols around the closed pool, even though those patrols would add an expense. The speaker treats added costs as unacceptable for pool hours but acceptable for patrols; staffing costs and admission revenue could test the assumption about later hours.

Accept other well-supported limits on the speakers' claims. For Your Turn, look for a conflict within one speaker's reasoning, an identified assumption, and evidence that could test it.