Choices in Context

How messages, groups, and authority shape behavior

PS.6.4 "Examine the influence of the social situation on individual behavior and mental processes, including persuasion, conformity and obedience."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline what others say or do, circle Maya's choices, and write P, C, or O beside moments of persuasion, conformity, or obedience.

After the Game

1. At Friday's basketball game, Maya volunteered to help clean the bleachers. A student environmental club had posted a message near the exit: "At last week's game, volunteers found 62 empty cans in trash bins. Put empty cans in recycling bins tonight." The count gave Maya a reason to think the problem was real, and the clear request told her what to do. She decided to recycle her own can. She knew the count came from only one game, so she could not tell whether fans made the same mistake every night.

2. Near the bins, Maya watched three teammates toss their empty cans into the trash. One teammate shrugged and said, "Everybody's doing it. We want to get out of here." Maya still believed recycling mattered, but she worried that stopping to sort cans would make her look fussy. She dropped her can into the trash too. No one ordered her to do it, and no one gave her new information about waste. As they walked away, she glanced back at the recycling bin beside the trash. She noticed that she had acted against the plan she made earlier.

3. A few minutes later, the teacher supervising cleanup asked Maya to collect cans left on the seats and place them in recycling. Maya picked up two cans and did as asked, even though her teammates kept walking. The teacher had authority to assign cleanup jobs; the teammates had not given her an instruction. Later, when Maya walked past the bins alone, she recycled another empty can without a reminder. She wondered whether the teacher's request had helped her follow her original plan, or whether she had simply wanted to avoid being corrected during cleanup.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the club's message try to change Maya's thinking and action? What is one limit of its evidence?

2. Why did Maya put her can in the trash despite her plan? Which details show that social pressure, rather than new information, influenced her?

3. How was Maya's response to the teacher different from her response to her teammates?

4. What does Maya's choice when she was alone suggest about whether she recycled only because the teacher asked her to?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a different school or community situation in which one person encounters a persuasive message, group pressure, and a direct request from an authority figure. In 5 to 6 sentences, explain how each affects the person's thoughts or actions, and show one difference between what the person believes and what the person does.

Choices in Context

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline what others say or do, circle Maya's choices, and write P, C, or O beside moments of persuasion, conformity, or obedience. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the club's message try to change Maya's thinking and action? What is one limit of its evidence?	**The count of 62 cans made the waste problem seem real, and the request told Maya to use a recycling bin. A count from one game cannot show how often fans put cans in the trash.**
2	Why did Maya put her can in the trash despite her plan? Which details show that social pressure, rather than new information, influenced her?	**She saw her teammates use the trash and worried that sorting her can would make her look fussy. No one gave her new information, and she still believed recycling mattered.**
3	How was Maya's response to the teacher different from her response to her teammates?	**Maya followed the teacher's direct instruction from someone with authority over cleanup. She followed her teammates' example without being instructed.**
4	What does Maya's choice when she was alone suggest about whether she recycled only because the teacher asked her to?	**Recycling without a reminder suggests that the teacher's instruction was not the only influence on her choice. It does not prove exactly why she chose to recycle.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At a school fundraiser, a flyer says that ticket sales will pay for new library books, and Leo decides the event is worth supporting. His friends walk past the ticket table, so he pretends not to notice it because he does not want to stand out. Their behavior changes his action, although he still believes the books matter. Later, the faculty adviser asks him to hand out flyers, and he does so because she is supervising the volunteers. When he is alone, Leo buys a ticket. The message offered a reason, the group shaped his public choice, and the adviser gave an instruction.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of Maya's motives if students distinguish a persuasive reason, pressure to fit in, and a direct instruction from an authority figure. For Part 3, look for all three influences and a clear difference between belief and behavior.