The Lunch Line

Study an everyday problem through sociological lenses.

S.1 "Explain the sociological perspective and identify sociology as a scientific field of inquiry. Describe the development of the field of sociology as a social science, including the contributions of leading theorists within sociology..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline a phrase showing what each of the three approaches studies, circle the two variables in the lunch-line hypothesis, and number the three research methods. These marks will help you connect explanations to evidence.

What Can a Lunch Line Tell Us?

1. At Westfield High, the lunch line wraps past the library. One student calls slow service a problem of impatient teens. A sociologist instead asks how schedules, staffing, and school rules shape everyone's wait. This sociological perspective links personal experiences to social patterns. Sociology is a social science: researchers gather evidence and test explanations rather than rely on guesses. In the nineteenth century, Auguste Comte argued that society could be studied systematically.

2. Three major approaches offer different explanations for the line. Functional analysis asks how serving routines help the school feed students, but also how a slow line disrupts class time. Conflict theory examines who controls resources: seniors might get priority while younger students wait longer. Symbolic interactionism examines everyday meanings: one student may read a staff member's hand signal as "move ahead," while another reads it as "stop." Émile Durkheim shaped functional analysis; Karl Marx influenced conflict theory; George Herbert Mead influenced symbolic interactionism.

3. A researcher predicts that adding a second serving station will reduce average wait time. The number of serving stations is the independent variable; average wait time is the dependent variable. An experiment comparing similar lunch periods could test the prediction, but attendance may affect results. Observation records behavior directly but misses private reasons; surveys reveal opinions but rely on honest answers. Researchers should seek consent, protect identities, and avoid disrupting meals.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the sociologist's explanation of the lunch line differ from the student's?

2. What different parts of the lunch line would conflict theory and symbolic interactionism examine?

3. In the proposed experiment, which variable changes, which is measured, and what does the researcher predict?

4. Why might a researcher use both observation and surveys to study the line? Name one ethical safeguard.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

At a school library, some students cannot find a quiet seat after classes. In one paragraph, apply two sociological approaches, state a testable hypothesis with its independent and dependent variables, and choose a research method with one limitation and one ethical precaution.

ANSWER KEY

The Lunch Line

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a phrase showing what each of the three approaches studies, circle the two variables in the lunch-line hypothesis, and number the three research methods. These marks will help you connect explanations to evidence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the sociologist's explanation of the lunch line differ from the student's?	**The student blames impatient teens. The sociologist examines how schedules, staffing, and rules shape a shared experience.**
2	What different parts of the lunch line would conflict theory and symbolic interactionism examine?	**Conflict theory would examine who gets priority and who waits longer. Symbolic interactionism would examine how students interpret a staff member's hand signal.**
3	In the proposed experiment, which variable changes, which is measured, and what does the researcher predict?	**The number of serving stations changes. Average wait time is measured. The researcher predicts that a second station will reduce wait time.**
4	Why might a researcher use both observation and surveys to study the line? Name one ethical safeguard.	**Observation records behavior, while surveys reveal opinions. The researcher should seek consent, protect identities, or avoid disrupting meals.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Functional analysis asks whether quiet seating helps students study, while conflict theory asks who gets access to the limited seats. I predict that adding ten quiet seats will reduce the average number of students turned away each afternoon. The independent variable is the number of quiet seats, and the dependent variable is the average number of students turned away. I would observe entrances for a week before and after the change, but changes in attendance could affect the results. I would seek permission and record counts without students' names.

Accept other accurate applications of two approaches and other testable hypotheses with correctly identified variables. Methods, limitations, and ethical precautions should fit the student's proposed study.