Who Gets the Reward?

Examine claims about work, ownership, and inequality.

TOT.C.1.3 "Examine the claim that private enterprise is exploitative and inequality the fault of capitalism. Analyze the proposition that industrialization and free trade had alienated workers from the fruits of their labors..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the sentence that explains why critics called owners' profits exploitative, and circle two details that show workers' alienation. Put a 1 and a 2 beside two sentences that trace how ownership could lead to inequality.

A Mill and Its Workers

1. Imagine a nineteenth-century textile mill: workers tend looms, while an owner buys cotton, owns the machines, and sells the cloth. The owner pays wages and keeps what remains after paying costs. Karl Marx and other critics of capitalism argued that this arrangement can be exploitative. Workers create value through their labor, they said, but owners can take a share of that value as profit because they control the workplace. In this view, a worker may have to accept low wages to survive, even when the cloth sells well. This is a claim about who gains from production, not proof that every employer cheats workers.

2. Industrialization brought large machines and divided clothmaking into repeated tasks. A worker might operate one loom all day without owning the cloth or deciding how it would be used. Marx called this separation from the product and control of work *alienation*. Free trade could widen the distance: cloth made in one town might be sold overseas, so the worker would never see its buyers or share directly in its sale price. Critics argued that competition across borders could pressure owners to cut labor costs. Yet trade could also expand markets and create jobs, so its effects were not the same for every worker.

3. These critics focused on private property in factories, machines, and other productive assets, not on a worker's coat or books. They argued that owners could use property rights to collect profits from work done by others. In their view, putting individual gain first encouraged owners to hold wages down, while profits built wealth for people who already owned assets. Over time, this could deepen inequality between owners and workers. Defenders of private enterprise answered that owners risk money, organize production, and may raise living standards through investment. The disagreement concerns whether ownership and markets distribute the rewards of work fairly.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did Marx and other critics consider the mill owner's profit potentially exploitative?

2. How could industrialization and free trade each separate a mill worker from the cloth the worker helps make?

3. According to the critics, how could putting individual gain first turn ownership of a mill into greater inequality?

4. What two points in the passage could a defender use to challenge the claim that keeping profits is always exploitative?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A company owns a phone-repair workshop. Technicians repair phones, and the company sells the repaired phones overseas and keeps the profits. In four or five sentences, explain how a critic from the passage might connect ownership, alienation, and inequality in this case, then give one reason the conclusion might not apply to every technician.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.C.1.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the sentence that explains why critics called owners' profits exploitative, and circle two details that show workers' alienation. Put a 1 and a 2 beside two sentences that trace how ownership could lead to inequality. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did Marx and other critics consider the mill owner's profit potentially exploitative?	**They argued that workers create value, but the owner can keep part of that value as profit because the owner controls the workplace.**
2	How could industrialization and free trade each separate a mill worker from the cloth the worker helps make?	**Industrialization could limit the worker to one repeated task without ownership or control of the cloth. Free trade could send the cloth overseas, away from the worker and its final sale.**
3	According to the critics, how could putting individual gain first turn ownership of a mill into greater inequality?	**Owners could hold wages down and keep profits from workers' labor. Those profits could build owners' wealth while workers received less.**
4	What two points in the passage could a defender use to challenge the claim that keeping profits is always exploitative?	**Owners risk money and organize production. Their investment may also raise living standards.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A critic might say the technicians create value by repairing phones, while the company keeps profits because it owns the workshop. Selling the phones overseas could separate technicians from the buyers and the final sale price. If owners put their own gain first and keep wages low, their wealth could grow faster than workers' wealth. That gap could increase inequality. Still, overseas sales might create more repair jobs, so the outcome would not be the same for every technician.

Accept other passage-based explanations of exploitation, alienation, and inequality. Student responses should present these as critics' claims, not as facts true of every workplace.