The Water Question

Investigate who should act when a community's water may be unsafe.

TOT.P.1.2.A "Develop, investigate, and evaluate plausible answers to essential questions that reflect enduring understandings across time, real world circumstances, and social studies disciplines."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two plausible answers to the passage's essential question and circle one piece of evidence from each case. Mark one limit of the first answer with a 1 and one limit of the second answer with a 2.

When Water Raises an Alarm

1 Who should make sure a city's drinking water is safe when trouble appears? In 1854, cholera swept through a London neighborhood. Physician John Snow mapped deaths and found that many people who fell ill had used the Broad Street pump. Some nearby people who drank other water escaped illness. Officials removed the pump handle, but the outbreak had already begun to fade, so the removal alone cannot explain the decline. Snow's investigation challenged the common belief that foul air spread cholera. Later work showed that contaminated water can carry the bacteria that cause the disease.

2 In 2014, Flint, Michigan, changed its water source to the Flint River. The city did not use proper corrosion control, and lead from plumbing entered some tap water. Residents reported problems and demanded answers; researchers measured elevated lead in water samples, and officials eventually acknowledged a crisis. Flint returned to its earlier water source in 2015, but changing the source did not instantly fix damaged pipes or rebuild trust. Lead harms children's developing brains. Unlike cholera, lead exposure does not spread between people, yet both cases show why people's observations and careful testing matter.

3 These cases pose a lasting question: Who should act first when drinking water may be unsafe? Residents may act first because they notice trouble at home before citywide testing begins. Officials may act first because they can test water, warn neighbors, and change a shared system. A resident cannot repair city pipes alone; officials may miss danger when they dismiss complaints. Historians can trace whose warnings were heard, scientists can test suspected hazards, and civics students can examine who has authority to act. Each lens helps judge a proposed answer, but neither case proves that one group can protect a community alone.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Using Flint, make a case that residents should act first when water may be unsafe. Give one supporting fact and one limit of this answer.

2. Using London, make a case for investigators and officials taking action. Give two supporting details, then explain why the pump handle's removal does not prove that this action ended the outbreak.

3. What could a scientist and a civics student each investigate to judge whether officials should lead the response in Flint? Write one question for each field.

4. Across both cases, why is shared public action a plausible answer? Why do the cases not show that officials can keep water safe without help?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine your school reopens a water fountain after pipe repairs, and some students say its water looks cloudy. Write an essential question that could matter in other places and times, give two plausible answers about who should act, identify evidence you would seek from science and civics, and explain one limit of each answer.

ANSWER KEY

The Water Question

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.P.1.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two plausible answers to the passage's essential question and circle one piece of evidence from each case. Mark one limit of the first answer with a 1 and one limit of the second answer with a 2. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Using Flint, make a case that residents should act first when water may be unsafe. Give one supporting fact and one limit of this answer.	**Flint residents reported problems and demanded answers. They could raise the alarm, but they could not repair city pipes alone.**
2	Using London, make a case for investigators and officials taking action. Give two supporting details, then explain why the pump handle's removal does not prove that this action ended the outbreak.	**Snow mapped deaths linked to the pump, and officials removed its handle. The outbreak had already begun to fade, so the handle's removal alone cannot explain its decline.**
3	What could a scientist and a civics student each investigate to judge whether officials should lead the response in Flint? Write one question for each field.	**A scientist could ask whether water samples contained elevated lead. A civics student could ask which officials had authority to test the water or change the water system.**
4	Across both cases, why is shared public action a plausible answer? Why do the cases not show that officials can keep water safe without help?	**Officials could remove a pump handle or change a water system. Snow's investigation and Flint residents' reports also helped reveal trouble that officials might otherwise miss.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Who should act when people suspect that shared water is unsafe? Students should report the cloudy water immediately because they can spot a change first, but they cannot determine whether it is harmful. School officials should pause use and arrange testing because they control the fountain, but they might overlook reports. A scientist could test the water for hazards rather than assume cloudiness means danger. A civics inquiry could identify who has authority to close the fountain and notify families.

Accept other plausible answers when students support them with passage details and acknowledge limits. For the open task, students should treat cloudy water as a reason to investigate, not as proof that the water is unsafe.