Evidence Before Action

Investigate how communities make decisions when evidence is incomplete.

WG.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 the question about acting with incomplete proof, circle one piece of evidence from each city, and number two different actions officials could take while the cause is being investigated.

When Is the Evidence Enough?

1. In 1854, a cholera outbreak struck London's Soho neighborhood. Many people believed foul air caused the disease. Physician John Snow suspected contaminated drinking water instead. He plotted where deaths occurred and noticed a cluster near the Broad Street pump. Some people who lived farther away also became ill after drinking that pump's water; some people living nearby avoided it and stayed well. These patterns made water a plausible explanation, not a certainty: people might have visited the same crowded places or faced other risks. Snow urged local officials to remove the pump handle so people would stop using it.

2. Officials removed the handle, but cases had already begun to fall. That timing limits the claim that closing the pump ended the outbreak. Still, the pattern of illness, the water source, and later research on cholera support Snow's explanation. Geography helped reveal where cases clustered; medicine helped investigate how illness spread. A public decision could not wait for perfect proof. Acting early might prevent more deaths, while closing a water source without a safe replacement could also harm residents. When should officials act on a suspected threat if proof is incomplete?

3. That question resurfaced in Flint, Michigan, after the city changed its water source to the Flint River in 2014. Without adequate corrosion control, lead leached from plumbing into some tap water. Residents reported discolored water and other problems, while outside researchers tested water and raised alarms about lead. Discolored water alone cannot measure lead, so test results mattered. Residents also needed affordable, safe water while officials investigated. An early protective response and more testing were both plausible steps, not opposing goals. Comparing Soho and Flint raises a harder test: whose observations count, and what risks arise while officials wait?

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What two plausible responses to an uncertain water threat does the passage suggest? Give a reason for each.

2. How did Snow investigate whether water, rather than foul air, explained the outbreak? Describe two comparisons from the passage.

3. Why does removing the pump handle not prove that it ended the outbreak? What other evidence supports Snow's explanation?

4. What does the Flint case add to the question of when officials should act? Use two details to evaluate whether waiting only for more tests would be enough.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A school notices more students coughing on days when buses idle outside its entrance. Write an essential question, offer two plausible responses, identify evidence that could help distinguish them, and evaluate which response you favor using health and transportation concerns.

ANSWER KEY

Evidence Before Action

HIGH SCHOOL · WG.P.1.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the question about acting with incomplete proof, circle one piece of evidence from each city, and number two different actions officials could take while the cause is being investigated. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What two plausible responses to an uncertain water threat does the passage suggest? Give a reason for each.	**Officials could act early to reduce possible harm, and they could continue testing to check the cause. Early action might prevent illness, while testing can guide decisions and help avoid harmful mistakes.**
2	How did Snow investigate whether water, rather than foul air, explained the outbreak? Describe two comparisons from the passage.	**Deaths clustered near the pump, and some people farther away became ill after drinking its water. Some nearby people avoided the pump and stayed well.**
3	Why does removing the pump handle not prove that it ended the outbreak? What other evidence supports Snow's explanation?	**Cases had already begun to fall before the handle was removed. The pattern of illness among pump users and later research on cholera support the water explanation.**
4	What does the Flint case add to the question of when officials should act? Use two details to evaluate whether waiting only for more tests would be enough.	**Residents reported problems, and outside tests raised alarms about lead. Because residents needed safe water during the investigation, testing alone would not address their immediate risk.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

When should our school limit bus idling near its entrance? One response is to stop idling immediately because exhaust may worsen breathing. Another is to keep current pickup rules while checking whether pollen, rather than buses, explains the coughs. I would compare cough reports, air readings, and bus activity across days, including days with similar pollen levels. I favor a no-idling rule now because it may protect health at little cost, but drivers would need a safe place to wait for students.

Accept other plausible responses when students connect each to passage evidence. For the open task, look for a question that applies beyond this one school and a judgment that considers both health and transportation.