Reading the Gaps

Weigh what an archive reveals against what it leaves out.

11-12.RI.10 "By the end of the year, independently read and comprehend literary nonfiction and informational texts representing a variety of genres, cultures, and perspectives that exhibit complexity appropriate for at least grade 11 and 12..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two statements about what digitized newspapers can reveal, circle two statements about what they can miss, and number two other kinds of sources the writer proposes consulting. Use your marks to track how the writer qualifies the passage's main claim.

What a Search Cannot Find

1. A town's newspaper archive can look like a complete record until someone searches for a neighborhood that rarely appeared in print. Digitized papers make scattered issues searchable from home, sparing readers a trip to a library basement. Yet a search result is not the same as a full account. Editors chose which events deserved space, and printers sometimes misspelled names. Even when a page survives, the software that converts its image into searchable words can mistake faded letters for others. A historian who finds no matches for a family name has learned something about the search, but not necessarily about the family's presence.

2. Imagine a researcher tracing a street that was demolished for a highway. She finds several articles praising faster commutes but almost none quoting residents who lost their homes. The articles provide evidence about how officials defended the project, not proof that displaced residents agreed with it. A former resident might value the same archive for preserving dates and addresses while objecting to its narrow account of the loss. Neither reader must discard the newspapers. Instead, each can ask whose experiences the papers recorded, which voices they overlooked, and what other sources might complicate the story.

3. An oral history interview might recover a resident's account of moving day, while city planning records might reveal which alternatives officials considered. Each source has limits: memory can shift over time, and official files may describe households as parcels rather than communities. Reading them beside the newspapers does not produce a single, flawless narrative. It allows a reader to explain why accounts differ and to make a narrower, better supported claim: the highway promised convenience to some people while imposing costs that the newspaper's coverage did not fully capture. The archive becomes more useful when its silences become questions.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why would a search with no results for a family name be weak evidence that the family never lived in the town?

2. How might the researcher and the former resident use the same highway articles differently?

3. A reader claims that the highway benefited everyone. How do details from the second and third paragraphs challenge that claim?

4. What could an oral history and city planning records each add to the newspaper account, and what limit does the passage identify for each?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a real nonfiction text you would read next to test or extend this passage's account. Name its title and author or publishing organization, then write 3 to 4 sentences explaining what perspective it might add, why it fits your reading purpose, and one limitation you would watch for.

ANSWER KEY

Reading the Gaps

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.RI.10

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two statements about what digitized newspapers can reveal, circle two statements about what they can miss, and number two other kinds of sources the writer proposes consulting. Use your marks to track how the writer qualifies the passage's main claim. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why would a search with no results for a family name be weak evidence that the family never lived in the town?	**The papers may have omitted the family or misspelled its name, and the search software may have misread faded letters.**
2	How might the researcher and the former resident use the same highway articles differently?	**The researcher could use them to examine how officials defended the highway. The former resident could use their dates and addresses while challenging their failure to represent residents' losses.**
3	A reader claims that the highway benefited everyone. How do details from the second and third paragraphs challenge that claim?	**The articles praise faster commutes but rarely quote people who lost homes. The final paragraph concludes that the highway offered convenience to some while imposing costs on others.**
4	What could an oral history and city planning records each add to the newspaper account, and what limit does the passage identify for each?	**An oral history could describe a resident's moving day, but memory can shift. Planning records could show alternatives officials considered, but they may treat households as parcels rather than communities.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would select *The Power Broker* by Robert A. Caro to investigate how highway decisions affected New York neighborhoods. Its account of Robert Moses and public works could add detail about the power behind choices that newspapers framed as progress. I would compare its treatment of displaced residents with the passage's concern about missing voices. Because the book concentrates on a powerful official, I would also seek residents' firsthand accounts.

Accept other text-supported explanations for the short answers. For the open task, accept any identifiable nonfiction text if the student gives a plausible reading purpose, a perspective it might add, and a relevant limitation.