Behind the Dam

Trace how an article develops its central idea

6.RI.2.a "Analyze its development over the course of the text."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one sentence in each paragraph that changes or adds to the idea of what a beaver dam can do, then number your choices 1, 2, and 3 in the order they appear.

More Than a Pile of Sticks

(1) At the edge of a dry meadow, a beaver dam can look like a traffic jam in a stream. Sticks and mud slow the water, and a pond forms behind the wall. In some places, people remove dams because ponds can flood paths or fields. Yet the same backed-up water can spread across nearby soil instead of rushing downstream. This contrast raises a question: could a structure that causes trouble for a trail also help a stream survive a long, hot summer?

(2) As water collects behind a dam, some of it soaks into the ground. That stored water may seep back toward the stream when rain is scarce. Ponds also make wet places where insects, fish, and birds can find food or shelter. Researchers have found that beaver ponds can help keep nearby areas wetter during dry periods. A dam does not create new water, but it can change where water stays and how slowly it moves. The apparent blockage begins to look like a way to hold water for later.

(3) Still, a beaver dam is not a fix for every stream. A pond might flood a road, and a dry stream cannot fill a pond without water flowing into it. Beavers also need food and safe places to build, so they cannot settle everywhere. In some locations, people protect roads with devices that let water pass through a dam without draining the whole pond. By the end, the dam is neither just a nuisance nor a perfect solution. Its value depends on the stream and on how people manage its effects.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does paragraph 1 set up a question about beaver dams rather than present them as only harmful?

2. What information in paragraph 2 changes how a reader might view the backed-up water from paragraph 1?

3. How does paragraph 3 limit the idea that beaver dams help streams during dry weather? Give two details.

4. By the end, why is the “traffic jam” image from paragraph 1 an incomplete picture of a beaver dam?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Suppose paragraph 3 came first, followed by paragraphs 1 and 2. In four or five sentences, explain how that order would change the way the article's central idea develops and whether it would help readers understand the dam's mixed effects. Use a detail from each paragraph.

ANSWER KEY

Behind the Dam

GRADE 6 · 6.RI.2.a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one sentence in each paragraph that changes or adds to the idea of what a beaver dam can do, then number your choices 1, 2, and 3 in the order they appear. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does paragraph 1 set up a question about beaver dams rather than present them as only harmful?	**It describes flooding as a problem, then points out that backed-up water can spread into the soil and might help a stream during a hot summer.**
2	What information in paragraph 2 changes how a reader might view the backed-up water from paragraph 1?	**Some water soaks into the ground and may return to the stream when rain is scarce, so the pond can help hold water for later.**
3	How does paragraph 3 limit the idea that beaver dams help streams during dry weather? Give two details.	**A dry stream cannot fill a pond without water flowing into it, and beavers cannot settle everywhere because they need food and safe places to build.**
4	By the end, why is the "traffic jam" image from paragraph 1 an incomplete picture of a beaver dam?	**A dam does slow water, but it can also keep an area wetter during dry weather. Whether it helps depends on the stream and its effects on nearby places.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

If paragraph 3 came first, readers would meet the road-flooding risk and the need for flowing water before they knew what a dam does. Paragraph 1 would then show sticks and mud slowing the stream, but its question about helping during a hot summer would come after the limits. Paragraph 2 would end the article with stored water seeping back toward the stream, making the benefits feel like the final answer. The original order is clearer because it raises a puzzle, explains a benefit, and then shows why that benefit has limits.

Accept different judgments about the reordered article if students explain how its central idea would develop and support their reasoning with a detail from each paragraph.