Narrow the Question

Use secondary-question answers to sharpen a research focus.

6.12.C "refine the major research question, if necessary, guided by the answers to a secondary set of questions;"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline Mateo's original major research question and his refined major research question. Circle the answers to secondary questions that helped him decide what to study next.

A Cafeteria Waste Inquiry

1. For a class inquiry, Mateo began with the major research question, "How can our school reduce cafeteria waste?" The question sounded important, but it covered many kinds of waste, including food, trays, napkins, and plastic bottles. Mateo created secondary questions to make his search manageable: What items fill the most trash bags? Which items can the school control? What happens to unopened food? He planned to gather answers from a cafeteria worker, lunch observations, and the school's recycling coordinator.

2. During three lunch periods, Mateo counted what students threw away at one set of bins. Food scraps filled about two bags each day, while napkins and bottles filled much less space. The cafeteria worker explained that sealed milk cartons and packaged snacks left on tables must be discarded under the district's food-safety rules. The recycling coordinator said plastic bottles could be collected separately, but few students used the recycling bin. These answers showed that food scraps were the largest problem Mateo observed, and unopened items followed different rules.

3. Mateo compared his original question with the answers to his secondary questions. Because food scraps took up the most space and the school could influence how students sort leftovers, he refined his major question to ask, "What lunchtime steps could reduce food scraps in our cafeteria?" He did not focus his question on unopened packaged food because food-safety rules limited what the school could do with it. His new question was narrower, named the main waste type, and pointed toward actions the school could study, such as sorting, portions, or composting.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which secondary question was meant to find the largest kind of cafeteria waste?

2. What evidence from Mateo's observations made food scraps the focus of his refined question?

3. Why did Mateo decide not to focus his refined question on unopened packaged food?

4. Give two ways Mateo's refined question is more focused than his original question.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a school issue. Write a broad major research question, three secondary questions with brief answers you could find through observation or research, and a refined major question that uses those answers to focus the inquiry.

ANSWER KEY

Narrow the Question

GRADE 6 · TEKS 6.12.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline Mateo's original major research question and his refined major research question. Circle the answers to secondary questions that helped him decide what to study next. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which secondary question was meant to find the largest kind of cafeteria waste?	**"What items fill the most trash bags?"**
2	What evidence from Mateo's observations made food scraps the focus of his refined question?	**Food scraps filled about two bags each day, much more space than napkins or bottles.**
3	Why did Mateo decide not to focus his refined question on unopened packaged food?	**District food-safety rules limited what the school could do with unopened packaged food.**
4	Give two ways Mateo's refined question is more focused than his original question.	**It focuses on food scraps instead of all cafeteria waste, and it asks about lunchtime steps the school could take.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Original question: How can our school help students find library books? Secondary questions and answers: Which section do students ask about most? Graphic novels. When do students ask for help? During the first five minutes of a class visit. What tool could the librarian add quickly? A labeled map at the entrance. Refined question: How could a labeled entrance map help students find graphic novels at the start of a library visit?

Accept equivalent answers that accurately connect secondary-question evidence to Mateo's narrower research focus. For Part 3, accept varied topics when the refined question is clearly narrower and is supported by the listed secondary-question answers.