Reading Between Boundaries

Read historical evidence for claims, limits, and perspective.

12.DSR.B "Proficiently read and comprehend a variety of literary and informational texts that exhibit complexity at the higher range of the grades 11-12 band to generate and respond logically to literal, inferential, evaluative, synthesizing..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each claim about what the maps show or cannot show, and circle the evidence or reasoning that supports or limits it.

When a Map Makes a Claim

1. In the late 1930s, the federal Home Owners' Loan Corporation, or HOLC, produced residential security maps for scores of U.S. cities. Neighborhoods received four color-coded grades, from green, judged most desirable for investment, to red, judged most hazardous. The maps drew on local real-estate agents, lenders, and officials, whose assessments commonly treated race, immigrant status, housing age, and proximity to industry as financial risks. HOLC did not invent housing discrimination, nor did every lender use its maps. Still, the documents made a hierarchy of neighborhoods visible, portable, and official-looking.

2. Researchers comparing these maps with later data have found that many formerly redlined areas experienced lower rates of mortgage lending and home investment for decades. Such patterns matter because homeownership can help families build wealth and because disinvestment can constrain a community's tax base and services. Yet correlation alone cannot show that a colored boundary caused every later difference. Segregation, zoning, industrial siting, municipal decisions, and private lending practices also shaped outcomes. A careful reader therefore sees the maps as evidence of an institutional system, not as a single, self-sufficient explanation for present-day inequality.

3. Reading the maps critically also requires asking who created them and for what purpose. HOLC's categories were administrative tools, not neutral measurements of a neighborhood's human worth or future potential. A map may appear precise because it uses boundaries, colors, and professional vocabulary, while still preserving the assumptions of its makers. To investigate a city's history, a researcher could place a historical map beside census records, lending data, residents' oral histories, and local policy documents. Agreement among sources can strengthen a claim, while disagreement may reveal whose experiences an official record omitted.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What four groups or factors did the local assessments commonly treat as financial risks?

2. Why does the author describe the neighborhood hierarchy as "official-looking"? What does this wording suggest about the maps?

3. Does the passage support the claim that HOLC maps alone caused all present-day inequality? Use two details from paragraph 2 to explain your answer.

4. How does paragraph 3 strengthen the caution about correlation in paragraph 2?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write exactly two sentences proposing a research plan for investigating one historical policy or public decision in your community or region. Name one official source and one community-based source you would compare, then explain what the comparison could help you evaluate.

ANSWER KEY

Reading Between Boundaries

GRADE 12 · 12.DSR.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each claim about what the maps show or cannot show, and circle the evidence or reasoning that supports or limits it. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What four groups or factors did the local assessments commonly treat as financial risks?	**Race, immigrant status, housing age, and proximity to industry.**
2	Why does the author describe the neighborhood hierarchy as "official-looking"? What does this wording suggest about the maps?	**It suggests that the maps could appear authoritative because of their formal design and federal connection, even though their categories reflected biased assumptions.**
3	Does the passage support the claim that HOLC maps alone caused all present-day inequality? Use two details from paragraph 2 to explain your answer.	**No. The passage says correlation cannot prove that map boundaries caused every later difference, and it identifies other forces, including segregation, zoning, industrial siting, municipal decisions, and private lending practices.**
4	How does paragraph 3 strengthen the caution about correlation in paragraph 2?	**Paragraph 3 recommends comparing maps with several kinds of evidence. Using multiple sources can test a claim more carefully and can reveal experiences or causes that one official record leaves out.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

To investigate whether a highway project changed access to jobs in my region, I would compare city planning reports with oral histories from residents of nearby neighborhoods. The reports could show the project's stated goals, while the oral histories could help evaluate whether its effects matched those goals across different communities.

Accept answers that distinguish documented patterns from claims of single, direct causation. For Part 3, accept varied policies and sources if the student names both source types and explains how comparison supports critical evaluation.