Question Detective

Narrow a research question to fit available evidence.

6.R.1.A "Formulate appropriately narrow questions about a research topic and refocus the inquiry when appropriate."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each research question. Circle the details that narrow a question or show why Lena needs to refocus her inquiry, so you can see how a researcher matches a question to available evidence.

Following the Evidence

1. For a science fair project, Lena chose monarch butterflies. Her first question was, "Why are monarch butterflies disappearing?" It sounded important, but it covered every place, every season, and many possible causes. Lena made a planning chart with columns for place, time, and evidence. She decided to study Iowa because it has summer breeding habitat. Her next question was, "How did changes in Iowa milkweed habitat from 2000 to 2020 affect the number of monarch eggs?" This version named a location, a time span, and one possible relationship.

2. Before searching, Lena listed the evidence her question would require. She needed yearly counts of monarch eggs in Iowa and measurements of milkweed habitat. At a library database, she found reports that estimated monarch numbers at Mexican wintering sites and maps showing milkweed loss or gain. The reports did not give statewide egg counts for each year. Lena could not use those sources to prove that habitat changes caused a change in egg numbers. Instead of forcing the evidence to fit her question, she paused and compared what the sources actually measured.

3. Lena refocused her inquiry. Her new question was, "What changes in Iowa milkweed habitat and eastern monarch wintering numbers do sources report from 2000 to 2020?" The question did not claim that one change caused the other. It asked about two kinds of evidence that her sources could provide. Lena also planned to note limits in her report. Wintering-site estimates describe a large eastern population, not only butterflies that bred in Iowa. Her focused question gave her a manageable path, while her notes would keep her conclusion careful.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why was Lena's first question too broad? Name two ways it covered too much.

2. What three features made Lena's second question narrower?

3. What missing evidence showed Lena that she could not answer her second question with the sources she found?

4. How did Lena's final question better match her sources? Give two details.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a research topic other than monarch butterflies. Write a broad question, a narrower question, and a refocused question that would fit a source after you discover the source does not have all the evidence your narrower question needs.

ANSWER KEY

Question Detective

GRADE 6 · 6.R.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each research question. Circle the details that narrow a question or show why Lena needs to refocus her inquiry, so you can see how a researcher matches a question to available evidence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why was Lena's first question too broad? Name two ways it covered too much.	**It covered every place, every season, and many possible causes. Any two of these ideas are correct.**
2	What three features made Lena's second question narrower?	**It named Iowa, the years 2000 to 2020, and one possible relationship between milkweed habitat and monarch eggs.**
3	What missing evidence showed Lena that she could not answer her second question with the sources she found?	**The sources did not provide statewide counts of monarch eggs in Iowa for each year.**
4	How did Lena's final question better match her sources? Give two details.	**It asked about milkweed habitat maps and eastern monarch wintering estimates, which the sources provided. It also did not claim that habitat changes caused changes in egg numbers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My topic is lunch waste; my broad question is “Why do students waste food?”; my narrow question is “How many unopened food items did seventh graders throw away at lunch in March 2026?” I found cafeteria records that count unopened food items for all grades, not seventh grade, so my refocused question is “How many unopened food items did cafeteria records show were thrown away at lunch in March 2026?”

Accept equivalent explanations that identify scope, available evidence, and the need to change direction when evidence does not fit a question. For the open task, look for a topic, a clearly narrowed question with specific limits, and a refocused question that matches the described source.