

SKILL: Contrast and Evaluate Fact and Opinion Changing the Ecosystem

8th Grade Nonfiction

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A food chain is a series of links between plants and animals. It starts with a plant. The next part of the link is a plant eater. When the prairie plants started to die or be replaced with houses and roads, the animals that depended on them lost their food source. So while the farmers produced more food for people, they broke the animals' food chain and the animals died or had to move. This was a great mistake. We are paying for that mistake today. And, unfortunately, people still keep making that mistake. They keep breaking the food chains.

A food chain is part of a bigger system called a food web. That web links the living things in an ecosystem. The herbivores in that system depend on the plants. If the plants are removed, the herbivores cannot survive. Then the carnivores, the animals that eat other animals, lose their food, too. Remove just one kind of plant from an environment and you disrupt the food web. Plow up the land and you destroy the whole system. The problem was there were more and more people and less and less natural habitats. The timeline shows how the population of Chicago people changed.

1880	Population of the city is 503,185; farms continue to expand
1890	Population of the city is 1,099,850
1900	Population is 1,698,676
1910	Factories expand in the city; population is 2,185,283
1920	City population has grown to 2,701,705
1930	City population is 3,376,438

By 1900, Illinois and other Midwestern states were becoming known as the nation's breadbasket. This was because millions of acres of land had been turned from prairie into farms. Those farms could grow corn and wheat and other grains. Those grains were used to make bread and other food for people. This was not progress for everyone.

That agricultural progress benefited many people. The farmers and businesses that processed the grains prospered. Chicago became a transportation center. It became an industrial center, too. More and more homes, businesses, and roads were built. But many of the animals and plants that were native to this area were destroyed. So was the natural system called the prairie.

Today, people are trying to restore the prairie, but it's a great challenge. Suburban housing is expanding. Pollution is increasing. What's next? People need to decide which is more important. Should we keep building roads and homes or should we fix the housing we have and leave land free of construction so that what's left of the natural habitat can survive?

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question.

1. Which word in the first paragraph tells you it is the writer's opinion?

- a. lost
- b. broke
- c. unfortunately
- d. replaced

2. Which of these is an opinion?

- a. By 1900, Illinois and other Midwestern states were becoming known as the nation's breadbasket.
- b. This was not progress for everyone.
- c. Chicago became a transportation center.
- d. More and more homes, businesses, and roads were built.

3. How do you know if a statement is an opinion?

- a. It includes information.
- b. It uses adjectives.
- c. It tells what someone feels.
- d. It asks you a question.

4. How do you know if a statement is a fact?

- a. It tells you information you can check.
- b. It gives you a new idea about a topic.
- c. It makes you feel differently about the topic.
- d. It includes historical information.

5. Write your own answer to this question.

Choose a sentence from the passage that is a statement of fact. Change it so it is an opinion. Rewrite it here as an opinion.

TEACHER NOTES: Develop Students' Skills: Exercise Thinking

These questions have not been validated, so decisions about student's achievement should not be made based on their responses. They are intended to exercise skills. Recommended activities include: students work in pairs to choose the best response; give students the questions without the responses so they generate their own answers; students make up additional questions; students make up questions like these for another passage.

Answers: *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	1	2	3	4
Answer	c	b	c	a

Question 5 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.

5. Students should identify a statement of opinion and explain that it is not a fact.

SKILL: Contrast and Evaluate Fact and Opinion

South Africa

8th Grade Nonfiction

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The Republic of South Africa is a country located at the southern tip of the continent of Africa. It has a very long coast along both the Atlantic and Indian oceans. The Cape of Good Hope, at the southernmost point of South Africa, has been an important place in sailing history. It has a long history that includes many challenges.

About 50 million people live in South Africa today. It is 79.5% Black, 9.2% White, 8.9% coloured, and 2.5% Asian. Coloured is a term used formally in South Africa for mixed race. It is spelled with a u because that is how the people in England spell it, and it was England that labeled these groups. Race has been a very important part of its history. For many years, Black and coloured South Africans had few rights. Today, the situation is much better.

The problems for South Africa probably got started about 150 years ago. That was when gold and diamonds were discovered in inland South Africa. Many people moved to the country, to work in the mines and to own them. There were two groups of Europeans in the country: people from Holland and people from England. They fought for control of this land.

The trouble continued. The native peoples had a very difficult time. The Natives' Land Act of 1913 severely restricted the ownership of land by 'Blacks' to the small percentage of 7%. In 1948, the National Party was elected and intensified the implementation of the program of racial segregation that had begun with European settlers, and subsequently continued by the South African governments. The Nationalist Government set up a system of segregationist laws, which meant that only whites could own most property and that Blacks and coloured people had very few rights. That terrible system became known as apartheid.

People struggled to end apartheid. It was so very unfair. Their fight went on for years. One great leader, Nelson Mandela, was put into prison in 1964 and kept there for 27 years. Even though he was in prison, he still was a great leader. His writings helped inspire others.

Other nations recognized the injustice of apartheid and argued against it. Those good countries were protesting this ongoing situation. But the government of South Africa did not change for many years. It took a long time and an international boycott, but finally there was progress. A boycott is when a group refuses to do business with another group.

In 1990, the old government allowed Nelson Mandela's political party, the African National Congress, to have a voice. Finally, it released this persistent hero from prison. The first multi-racial elections were held in 1994, and Nelson Mandela's party won. He became the President and served as president until 1999. In 1993 he won the Nobel Peace Prize. That is an international prize given each year to someone who helps the world have more peace.

Many people believe there would have been more progress if South Africa's government had freed Nelson Mandela much sooner. But Nelson Mandela does not believe in looking back at problems. He wants people to look forward, to work together to plan and make progress. He is a very great leader for Africa. He is a leader for the whole world.

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question.

6. Which of these statements is factual?

- a. He is a very great leader for Africa.
- b. But the government of South Africa did not change for many years.
- c. Today, the situation is much better.
- d. That terrible system became known as apartheid.

7. Which words make this statement an opinion? "Those honorable countries were protesting this ongoing situation."

- a. honorable
- b. protesting
- c. ongoing
- d. situation

8. Which of these sentences is an opinion?

- a. They fought for control of this land.
- b. He is a leader for the whole world.
- c. The trouble continued.
- d. About 50 million people live in South Africa today.

9. Why do you think the writer wrote this sentence? "Finally they released this persistent hero from prison."

- a. to tell you information
- b. to finish a history
- c. to help you value Mandela
- d. to answer a question

10. Write your own answer to this question.

Choose a sentence that is a statement of opinion. Write it here.

Why do you think it is an opinion?

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Answers: *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	6	7	8	9
Answer	b	a	c	c

Question 10 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.

10. Students should identify an opinion and explain the basis for that identification.