Name _____ Date _____

Logical Fallacies: Spot the Flaw in the Reasoning

Directions: Read the letters to the editor. Each question asks you to find or test the flaw in one writer's reasoning.

Letters to the Editor: A Skate Park for Riverside Park?

Last week the Maple Hollow parks board began discussing a proposal to convert the cracked, rarely used tennis courts at Riverside Park into a skate park. The board will hold a public hearing on the plan next month, and residents have already submitted plenty of opinions about it. Here are eight of the letters we received, lightly edited for length.

Dana: I oppose the skate park. If the town builds it, the skaters will soon ask for lights so they can ride after dark, then for speakers to play music, and before long Riverside Park will be noisy until midnight every night of the summer. The board should vote no and spare the neighborhood that future.

Grant: The petition for the skate park was started by Mr. Lowell, a well-known know-it-all who interrupts everyone at town meetings. Nobody should take his cost estimates seriously, and I hope the board throws them out along with the rest of his plan.

Priya: At last month's meeting, the parks board said it wants to repair the swimming pool before it starts any new project. Apparently the board believes teenagers should spend the entire summer indoors staring at their phones. I urge the board to reconsider its priorities and put the skate park first.

Theo: Maple Hollow should build the skate park. After the neighboring town of Brannock opened its skate park, attendance at its high school went up, so the park obviously gave those students a reason to come to school.

Helen: My nephew has visited the skate park in Brannock twice, and both times he saw a skater get hurt. Skate parks are simply too dangerous for any community, and Maple Hollow should not build one.

Rosa: Skaters already gather in the library parking lot every afternoon, and the librarians are tired of dodging them on their way to the entrance. Either the town builds a skate park this summer, or teenagers will go on skating in that parking lot. The board has to choose, and I hope it chooses the park.

Kevin: I asked the four teenagers who live on my street whether they would use a skate park, and all four of them said yes. Clearly every teenager in Maple Hollow wants one, so the board should build it without further delay.

Hank: If the board postpones the skate park this year, it will postpone it again next year, and eventually the town will stop paying for anything young people want. The board must approve the plan at the hearing.

1. Dana writes, "If the town builds it, the skaters will soon ask for lights so they can ride after dark, then for speakers to play music, and before long Riverside Park will be noisy until midnight every night of the summer." Which flaw does this reasoning contain?
   A. Ad hominem: attacking the person who made an argument instead of the argument itself
   B. Slippery slope: claiming that one step will set off a chain of worse results, without showing that each step would follow
   C. False dilemma: offering only two options when others exist
   D. Hasty generalization: drawing a conclusion about a whole group from too few examples

2. Grant writes, "The petition for the skate park was started by Mr. Lowell, a well-known know-it-all who interrupts everyone at town meetings. Nobody should take his cost estimates seriously, and I hope the board throws them out along with the rest of his plan." What is wrong with the way Grant responds to the petition?
   A. Ad hominem: attacking the person who made an argument instead of the argument itself
   B. False dilemma: offering only two options when others exist
   C. False cause: assuming that one event caused another just because it came first
   D. Slippery slope: claiming that one step will set off a chain of worse results, without showing that each step would follow

3. Priya writes, "At last month's meeting, the parks board said it wants to repair the swimming pool before it starts any new project. Apparently the board believes teenagers should spend the entire summer indoors staring at their phones." How does Priya's reasoning go wrong?
   A. Slippery slope: claiming that one step will set off a chain of worse results, without showing that each step would follow
   B. False cause: assuming that one event caused another just because it came first
   C. Straw man: misrepresenting an opponent's position so that it is easier to attack
   D. False dilemma: offering only two options when others exist

4. Theo writes, "After the neighboring town of Brannock opened its skate park, attendance at its high school went up, so the park obviously gave those students a reason to come to school." Which fallacy is at the center of Theo's argument?
   A. Ad hominem: attacking the person who made an argument instead of the argument itself
   B. False cause: assuming that one event caused another just because it came first
   C. Straw man: misrepresenting an opponent's position so that it is easier to attack
   D. False dilemma: offering only two options when others exist

5. Rosa writes, "Either the town builds a skate park this summer, or teenagers will go on skating in that parking lot." What flaw does this sentence contain?

A. False dilemma: offering only two options when others exist

B. Straw man: misrepresenting an opponent's position so that it is easier to attack

C. Ad hominem: attacking the person who made an argument instead of the argument itself

D. Slippery slope: claiming that one step will set off a chain of worse results, without showing that each step would follow

6. Hank writes, "If the board postpones the skate park this year, it will postpone it again next year, and eventually the town will stop paying for anything young people want." Which question would most directly test this reasoning?

A. What shows that one delay would lead to another, and then to cuts for young people?

B. Would the skate park cost the town more than repairing the swimming pool would?

C. Has Hank ever been late paying his own town taxes, or fined for anything else?

D. Does Hank live close enough to Riverside Park to use the skate park himself?

7. Which two letters reach a conclusion about a large group from only a few examples?

☐ A. Kevin's letter ☐ B. Helen's letter ☐ C. Grant's letter

☐ D. Dana's letter ☐ E. Rosa's letter

8. Taken together, what do the eight letters show about the reasoning on each side of the skate park debate?

A. Writers on both sides of the question rely on flawed reasoning.

B. The writers who mention Brannock reason more carefully than the others.

C. Only the writers who oppose the skate park rely on flawed reasoning.

D. Only the writers who support the skate park rely on flawed reasoning.