Teacher Answer Key

Case Study

1. The displacement problem means that emotional energy given to an AI cannot simultaneously build real-world relationships. Tyler is gaining frictionless comfort from Owen — constant availability, no competing needs, no drain. He is losing his friendship with Marcus, which required showing up and being a listener even when tired. The cost of Tyler's comfort with Owen is the slow disappearance of a real relationship. His mom noticing Marcus has not been at the house is the external evidence; Tyler wondering if he misses it is the internal one.

2. Tyler avoids two specific challenges the reading identifies as productive: reciprocity (Marcus talks about his own life, which Tyler finds draining) and showing up even when inconvenient (Tyler declines plans with reasons that are not entirely true). The reading argues these challenges are valuable precisely because they develop something: tolerating a friend's needs builds empathy and the capacity for sustained, non-self-centered relationship. Tyler is not just choosing an easier option — he is bypassing the experiences that would be building his relational capacity.

Multiple Choice

1. B
2. D
3. C

Matching

1-E, 2-C, 3-A, 4-B, 5-D

Fill-in-the-Blank

1) substitution, 2) capacities, 3) friendship

Short Answer (Sample Responses)

Q1: The reading makes this argument with two examples. First, navigating conflict with a real person who has their own feelings develops the skills of negotiation and repair that no frictionless AI relationship requires — remove the conflict and you remove what conflict-resolution was building. Second, showing up for a friend when you would rather not — being on the receiving end of reciprocity — develops empathy and the relational capacity to care for someone other than yourself. In both cases, the difficulty is the instruction: eliminating it also eliminates the growth.

Q2: Bidirectionality means the relationship runs both ways. Lonely teens use AI companions more, which makes sense — they are seeking connection. But the research also found that AI companion use predicted increased loneliness over time even in teens who started with average connection levels. This matters because it rules out the simple explanation that lonely kids just happen to like AI more. It suggests AI companion use itself is contributing to isolation — probably through the displacement mechanism: hours with the AI are hours not spent practicing real-world social connection, which gradually erodes those relationships.

Q3: The reading suggests AI companions may be appropriate as bridges for teenagers with severe social anxiety, limited peer access, or exceptionally difficult circumstances — situations where some connection is genuinely better than nothing. The concern the reading identifies is substitution: AI companions becoming the primary or preferred source of social-emotional engagement in a teenager's life. This is the concern because human friendships produce neurological, developmental, and social outcomes that AI cannot replicate, and an adolescent who routes their relational energy away from people during a critical developmental window may arrive at adulthood without the capacities adult life will require most.