

SAYS

Dark, confined spaces filled with human waste, grease, and industrial chemicals.

Clogged pipes and overflowing manholes caused by improper disposal of trash.

Old, rusty equipment and dangerous working conditions.

Bystanders holding their noses or looking away in disgust.

The direct, unglamorous result of a city's habits.

THINKS

This is a dangerous job. One slip-up, and I could get seriously hurt.

I wish people would stop flushing things they aren't supposed to.

My work is disgusting, but it's vital for public health. No one else wants to do this.

I wonder if the city will ever invest in better equipment.

I hope I can finish this job quickly and get out of here.

SEWAGE WORKER

DOES

Descend into manholes and sewage pipes.

Use specialized tools to clear blockages and remove debris.

Inspect and repair damaged pipes and infrastructure.

Wear heavy-duty protective gear, including waterproof suits and masks.

Work long, physically demanding hours in hazardous environments.

FEELS

Pride in performing an essential and challenging job.

Isolation and a sense of social stigma associated with their work.

Physical discomfort from the smell, heat, and tight spaces.

Fear of accidents, gas exposure, or getting trapped.

Exhaustion from the heavy labor and stressful environment.

SAYS

"The toilet is working fine, so I don't really think about the sewage system."

"I always check if the wipes or cleaners say 'flushable' before buying."

"These water and sewage bills keep going up every year!"

"I hate it when the street floods after heavy rain — the drains must be clogged."

"I don't want to deal with plumbers, but sometimes I have no choice."

THINKS

"Out of sight, out of mind. The sewage system just works."

"What happens to all the stuff that goes down the drain? I don't really know."

"I wonder if I should be using different cleaning products to avoid damaging the pipes."

"Is that new restaurant's grease going down the drain? That can't be good."

"I hope the city's infrastructure is well-maintained so we don't have any problems."

MIDDLE CLASS RESIDENT

DOES

Flush toilets and use sinks without a second thought.

Read instructions on products to see if they're "septic-safe."

Pay their monthly or quarterly water and sewage bill.

Call a plumber for blockages in their own home

Complain on social media or to the city when there's an issue like a flooded street.

FEELS

Relief that the city's sanitation system handles a vital need.

Disgust at the thought of what happens in the sewers below the city.

Frustration when their toilet or sink is clogged.

Apathy about the entire system, as it functions without their direct involvement.

Uncertainty about what is and isn't safe to put down the drain.

SAYS

"I hate it when the bathroom is dirty or smells bad at school."

"Why can't we just throw everything in the trash instead of the toilet?"

"The toilets sometimes get clogged, and then we have to wait."

"I wish there were more soap and towels in the bathroom."

"It's gross when I see trash on the floor in the bathroom."

THINKS

"It's just water going down a hole, right?"

"Where does the water go after I flush the toilet?"

"I should n't throw my pencil in the toilet, or it will get clogged."

"My teacher said that what goes down the drain can end up in the river."

"Sewer workers have a really yucky job."

STUDENT

DOES

Flush toilets and wash hands without thinking much about it.

Mindlessly toss paper towels or sometimes even toys into the toilet.

Learn about the water cycle and sanitation in science class.

Observe and ask questions about things they see going down drains.

Try to follow instructions from adults about what to flush

FEELS

Curiosity about the hidden world of pipes and drains.

Amusement when they see a funny-looking manhole cover.

Indifference to the overall system, as it's something adults manage.

Disgust when they see a clogged or dirty toilet.

Confusion about the difference between a sewer drain and a storm drain.