Cotton Under Pressure

Trace three problems that affected Alabama farmers.

SS24.5.6a "Explain how overcropping, the boll weevil, and low cotton prices affected farmers in Alabama."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number 1, 2, and 3 beside sentences that explain how overcropping, boll weevils, and low cotton prices hurt farmers. Underline the effect on farmers in each sentence.

A Hard Time for Cotton Farmers

(1) In the early 1900s, many Alabama families grew cotton year after year on the same fields. Cotton took nutrients from the soil. Without enough rest or other crops to restore it, the soil became less able to support healthy plants. This practice, called overcropping, meant smaller cotton harvests. With less cotton to sell, a farmer had less money for food, supplies, and loan payments.

(2) Another problem arrived on six tiny legs. The boll weevil, a beetle, spread through Alabama cotton fields in the early 1900s. It laid eggs inside cotton buds and young bolls, the parts that grow into fluffy cotton. The damaged bolls could not produce as much usable cotton. Even when farmers worked hard and cared for their soil, the insects could leave them with a smaller crop to sell.

(3) A farmer could face trouble even after bringing in a large harvest. When cotton prices were low, buyers paid less for each pound. Selling cotton then brought in less money, even if the farmer had picked plenty. Many Alabama farmers had borrowed money to buy seeds and supplies. Smaller harvests from worn-out soil or weevils, combined with low prices, made those debts harder to repay.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did growing cotton on the same fields year after year change what a farmer could sell?

2. How could boll weevils reduce a farmer's income, even if the farmer cared for the soil?

3. Why might a farmer earn less money even after a large cotton harvest?

4. Why would debts be especially hard to repay if boll weevils damaged a crop when cotton prices were low?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are an Alabama cotton farmer planning next year's fields. In four sentences, explain how overcropping, boll weevils, and low cotton prices would affect your plan, then describe one planting choice you would make and why.

ANSWER KEY

Cotton Under Pressure

GRADE 5 · SS24.5.6a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number 1, 2, and 3 beside sentences that explain how overcropping, boll weevils, and low cotton prices hurt farmers. Underline the effect on farmers in each sentence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did growing cotton on the same fields year after year change what a farmer could sell?	**Overcropping wore out the soil, which led to smaller cotton harvests and less cotton to sell.**
2	How could boll weevils reduce a farmer's income, even if the farmer cared for the soil?	**Boll weevils damaged cotton buds and bolls, leaving the farmer with less usable cotton to sell.**
3	Why might a farmer earn less money even after a large cotton harvest?	**When cotton prices were low, buyers paid less for each pound, so even a large harvest brought in less money.**
4	Why would debts be especially hard to repay if boll weevils damaged a crop when cotton prices were low?	**The farmer would have less cotton to sell and receive less money for each pound sold, leaving less money to repay loans.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Growing cotton year after year has worn out my soil, so I might harvest less. Boll weevils could damage the cotton I do grow and leave even less to sell. Low cotton prices would also mean less money for each pound I sell. I would plant peanuts in one field to rest it from cotton and rely less on cotton sales.

Accept answers that correctly connect overcropping and boll weevils to smaller harvests, and low prices to less money per pound. For Your Turn, accept other reasonable planting choices if the student explains how the choice responds to at least one of the three problems.