# Westward Under Pressure

Trace a central idea through causes, consequences, and public responses.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2** "Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline details about why families left the Plains, circle details about what they found after moving, and number 1, 2, and 3 beside details showing how the public responded.

### Roads West, Hard Realities

1 During the 1930s, severe drought and wind erosion turned parts of the southern Great Plains into the Dust Bowl. Farmers had removed much native grass, whose roots once held soil in place. When rain failed, strong winds lifted dry topsoil into enormous clouds. Families who had already faced falling crop prices and debts could no longer rely on harvests. Some rented out their land or sought federal relief; others packed cars and headed west, hoping California farms offered wages and stability for their children's futures.

2 Many migrants were called "Okies," although they came from Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, and other states as well as Oklahoma. California growers needed seasonal labor, but the jobs were irregular, low-paid, and often housed workers in crowded camps. Large numbers of newcomers increased competition for work, which fed resentment in some communities. California officials sometimes tried to block destitute families at the state border. At the same time, federal New Deal agencies built sanitary camps that provided water, schools, and spaces for residents to organize. Migration therefore brought both opportunity and new forms of hardship.

3 The migrants' experiences became part of national debate about poverty, labor, and government responsibility. Photographs by Dorothea Lange and reports by journalists made camp conditions visible to people far from the Plains, though no single image represented every family. John Steinbeck's 1939 novel The Grapes of Wrath, a work of fiction based partly on research, further shaped public understanding. The Dust Bowl migration did not create all of California's farm labor problems, but it exposed them sharply. Its story connects environmental change, economic pressure, human movement, and public response in the United States.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What central idea does the passage develop about Dust Bowl migration?

2. How do the environmental and economic details in paragraph 1 work together to explain why families migrated?

3. What relationship does paragraph 2 show between California's need for farm labor and migrants' living conditions?

4. How did photographs, journalism, and fiction affect the larger significance of the migration in paragraph 3?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 55-70 word accurate summary of the passage. State its central idea, include at least three key details, and show how the details are connected.

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## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details about why families left the Plains, circle details about what they found after moving, and number 1, 2, and 3 beside details showing how the public responded. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | What central idea does the passage develop about Dust Bowl migration? | **Environmental and economic crises pushed Plains families to migrate, but the move brought both possible work and serious hardship while drawing attention to larger social problems.** |
| 2 | How do the environmental and economic details in paragraph 1 work together to explain why families migrated? | **Drought and erosion destroyed productive soil, while low crop prices and debt made it difficult for families to survive by farming.** |
| 3 | What relationship does paragraph 2 show between California's need for farm labor and migrants' living conditions? | **Farm labor needs attracted migrants, but seasonal, low-paid work and competition left many migrants in crowded, unstable conditions.** |
| 4 | How did photographs, journalism, and fiction affect the larger significance of the migration in paragraph 3? | **They made migrant conditions known to a wider public and helped turn the migration into a national debate about poverty, labor, and government responsibility.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

During the 1930s, drought, erosion, debt, and low crop prices pushed many southern Plains families to migrate west. California offered seasonal farm work, yet migrants often found unstable jobs, crowded housing, and hostility. Federal camps offered some aid, while photographs, journalism, and fiction drew national attention to conditions. The migration revealed how environmental and economic crises could create social and political pressures.

Accept central ideas and summaries that connect environmental damage and economic pressure to migration, difficult conditions in California, and public response. For the open task, require 55-70 words, an accurate central idea, relevant details, and clear relationships among ideas.