

Words in the Dust

Use context clues to unlock history and science vocabulary.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4 "Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline six history or science words or phrases whose meanings may be unfamiliar, and circle the nearby words that reveal each meaning.

The Dust Bowl

- ① In the early 1930s, severe drought struck the Great Plains, a broad region of grasslands in the central United States. For years, many farmers had plowed up native grasses to plant wheat. The grasses' deep roots had once held soil in place. When rain became scarce, the loose, dry topsoil was exposed to powerful winds. Huge dust clouds rolled across fields and towns. People later called this disaster the Dust Bowl, a name that captured both the damaged land and the storms that swept over it.
- ② On April 14, 1935, one of the worst storms, known as Black Sunday, darkened the sky over parts of the Plains. Some witnesses said the approaching cloud looked like a tall, black wall. As dust entered homes through cracks, families covered their faces with damp cloths. The storm did not mean the sky was literally black all day. Instead, the nickname described how thick dust blocked sunlight and made daytime seem like night. It also showed how frightening and unusual the event felt to people who saw it.
- ③ The federal government responded with programs meant to conserve soil, or protect it from being carried away. Soil experts taught farmers to use methods such as planting rows that followed the land's curves. These curved rows slowed water runoff, the flow of water over the ground, and helped keep soil from washing away. Farmers also planted shelterbelts, long lines of trees that reduced the force of wind near fields. These efforts could not end the drought immediately, but they helped restore the land's defenses against erosion, the wearing away of soil by wind or water.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What does scarce mean as it describes rain? Which nearby details support your meaning?

2 What does the phrase held soil in place mean in the first paragraph?

3 Why was Black Sunday an effective nickname for the 1935 storm?

4 What does conserve soil mean? How does the sentence explain the phrase?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a two-sentence museum caption about a Dust Bowl photograph. Use the terms shelterbelt and erosion, and make each term's meaning clear through nearby context without using a dictionary-style definition.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline six history or science words or phrases whose meanings may be unfamiliar, and circle the nearby words that reveal each meaning. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does scarce mean as it describes rain? Which nearby details support your meaning?	Scarce means limited or not enough. The passage explains that dry topsoil was exposed after rain became scarce.
2	What does the phrase held soil in place mean in the first paragraph?	The grasses' deep roots kept the soil from being moved or blown away.
3	Why was Black Sunday an effective nickname for the 1935 storm?	It described dust so thick that it blocked sunlight and made daytime seem like night, not a sky that was literally black all day.
4	What does conserve soil mean? How does the sentence explain the phrase?	It means protect soil from being carried away. The words after "or" directly explain the phrase.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A shelterbelt of trees lines this field, slowing the wind before it can lift the loose soil. The trees help prevent erosion, so less soil blows away and the field can remain productive.

Accept equivalent meanings supported by nearby context, such as "rare" for scarce or "save" for conserve. For the caption, accept any accurate two-sentence response that uses both required terms and reveals their meanings through context.