Dust and Decisions

Track how historical context shapes a family's journey.

6.T.C.2.c "Identify and analyze the impact of background information and context (e.g., geography, location, era, historical happenings) on text development. (I)"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that give background information about place, time, or historical events. Number 1, 2, and 3 beside three details that show how the background changes what characters do.

Road West

1 In 1935, twelve-year-old Rosa lived with her family on a small farm in the Oklahoma Panhandle. For years, drought had dried the soil, and strong winds lifted it into huge clouds of dust. The family covered windows with damp cloths, but grit still settled on the table and in their food. Their corn crop failed again. When the bank warned that it might take the farm, Rosa's father began talking about California, where fruit growers advertised jobs.

2 Rosa had never traveled farther than the county seat, so the plan felt frightening. In April, the family packed quilts, a skillet, and a few clothes into their truck. They joined other families traveling west on Route 66. Along the road, Rosa saw tents beside gas stations and people waiting for work. These sights showed her that the drought was not only her family's problem. It had pushed many farming families to leave the Great Plains at the same time.

3 California was greener than Rosa expected, but finding work was difficult. Growers could choose among many workers, so wages were low and families often lived in crowded camps. Rosa's mother kept a notebook of each job, each pay amount, and each new town. At night, Rosa read the notes aloud to her younger brother. The notebook turns the family's journey into more than a trip. It records how a national disaster changed ordinary choices, from where they lived to how they earned food.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the Oklahoma Panhandle setting affect the family's problem and their plan?

2. Why does the 1935 drought matter to Rosa's journey? Use one detail from the passage.

3. How do the details about Route 66 and the other travelers change Rosa's understanding of her family's situation?

4. How does California's job situation make Rosa's mother's notebook important in the final paragraph?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence historical-fiction scene set in a real place and time from the past. Name the place and historical event or era, then show two ways that context changes a character's choices or actions.

ANSWER KEY

Dust and Decisions

GRADE 6 · 6.T.C.2.c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that give background information about place, time, or historical events. Number 1, 2, and 3 beside three details that show how the background changes what characters do. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the Oklahoma Panhandle setting affect the family's problem and their plan?	**Drought and dust ruin the farm's corn crop, so the family considers leaving for California to find work.**
2	Why does the 1935 drought matter to Rosa's journey? Use one detail from the passage.	**The drought causes the journey because it makes farming fail. It also pushes many other Great Plains families to travel west at the same time.**
3	How do the details about Route 66 and the other travelers change Rosa's understanding of her family's situation?	**Seeing tents and people waiting for work helps Rosa realize that many families, not just hers, have been harmed by the drought.**
4	How does California's job situation make Rosa's mother's notebook important in the final paragraph?	**Low wages, crowded camps, and frequent moves make the notebook a record of the family's struggle to find work and earn food.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In 1849, Ana arrived in San Francisco after news of gold had drawn people from many places. The steep, muddy streets were crowded with tents and wagons. Because rooms cost too much, her family slept in their wagon near the harbor. The crowded boomtown made Ana's father sell supplies instead of searching for gold.

Accept answers that identify relevant details about geography, time, or the Dust Bowl and explain how those details shape events, character choices, or the passage's message. For Part 3, accept a plausible historical setting with clear explanations of at least two context-based effects.