Clues Beyond Words

Use context to interpret a historical fiction excerpt.

7.P.ST.1 "Context: Develop and apply knowledge of key components of context such as background information, geographic location, cultural influences, time period, and contemporary events when interpreting and constructing texts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that place Lila in a time and location, and circle details about her family's background, community culture, or events happening then. In the margin, number three marked details that help explain what Lila's poem means.

Northbound Notes

1. In November 1917, thirteen-year-old Lila Brooks stood on Chicago's South Side beside her mother. A year earlier, their family had left Mississippi, where Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation and limited Black people's rights. Like many Black families in the Great Migration, they traveled north hoping for safer lives and steady work. Now rows of brick apartments rose above the crowded street, and elevated trains rattled overhead. Lila still missed the wide fields behind her old house.

2. Her father worked long shifts at a steel mill, where factory whistles cut through the morning air. Because the United States had entered World War I that spring, factories needed workers to make supplies for the war. Industrial employers recruited Black workers from the South, though discrimination did not disappear in northern cities. On Sundays, Lila's family joined neighbors at church, where people traded news, sang spirituals, and planned mutual-aid collections for new arrivals. There, she heard stories of trains still coming north.

3. At school, Lila wrote a short poem titled "Northbound Notes." She described train windows flashing like silver rivers and said that "the city is loud, but it calls my name." Her teacher passed around the Chicago Defender, a Black newspaper that reported on job opportunities and unfair treatment. Lila understood that the poem's hopeful voice did not mean the move was easy. Its images of trains, work, church, and crowded streets showed both the promise and the strain of beginning again in a new city.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What background information explains why Lila's family moved from Mississippi to Chicago?

2. How does the South Side setting help you understand why Lila calls the city "loud"? Use two details from the passage.

3. What two cultural influences shape Lila's experience in Chicago, and what do they show about her community?

4. How did World War I affect Lila's family after they arrived in Chicago?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75-95-word journal entry set during another real historical moment and place. Include details that reveal the writer's background, location, cultural influences, time period, and a contemporary event.

ANSWER KEY

Clues Beyond Words

GRADE 7 · 7.P.ST.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that place Lila in a time and location, and circle details about her family's background, community culture, or events happening then. In the margin, number three marked details that help explain what Lila's poem means. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What background information explains why Lila's family moved from Mississippi to Chicago?	**Jim Crow laws in Mississippi enforced segregation and limited Black people's rights, so the family joined the Great Migration seeking safer lives and steady work.**
2	How does the South Side setting help you understand why Lila calls the city "loud"? Use two details from the passage.	**The elevated trains rattled overhead, and factory whistles cut through the morning air. Crowded streets also add to the noisy city setting.**
3	What two cultural influences shape Lila's experience in Chicago, and what do they show about her community?	**The church's spirituals and mutual-aid collections, along with the Chicago Defender newspaper, show a community that shared traditions, information, and support.**
4	How did World War I affect Lila's family after they arrived in Chicago?	**The war increased factories' need for workers to make supplies, helping create the steel-mill work Lila's father did.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

April 1935, Boise City, Oklahoma. Our family has rented this dry wheat farm since before I was born, but today another dust storm pushed brown clouds over the plains. Mama tied a wet cloth across my face before I carried water from the pump. At night, neighbors gathered in our kitchen, singing old ballads and sharing news from the radio. The report said President Roosevelt's government was sending help, yet Father still wonders whether we must leave for California.

Accept equivalent evidence-based answers that connect a context detail to Lila's situation or the poem's meaning. For the journal entry, accept varied historical settings if all five context components are clear and the details are historically plausible.