# When Hardship Spread

Tracing the unequal effects of the Depression and Dust Bowl

**9-12.US2.12** "Analyze the impact of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl on farmers, businesses, workers, and racial and ethnic minorities."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline a cause-and-effect chain in each paragraph and circle the people it affects to trace how hardship spread and differed.

### A Crisis Across Fields and Towns

1 In 1930, a small-town bank could fail after borrowers stopped paying loans. Families who lost savings bought less from nearby stores, so shop owners sold less and laid off clerks. On farms, crop prices had already fallen during the 1920s. When the Depression drove prices even lower, many farmers earned too little to repay debts or keep their land. Lower prices did not help them if a larger harvest brought in less money. Farm families cut purchases, which hurt businesses that sold tools and seed. A crisis that began in finance spread through paychecks, store counters, and fields.

2 On the southern Great Plains, years of plowing grassland left soil exposed. In the 1930s, severe drought and strong winds carried away topsoil, creating the Dust Bowl. Wheat could not grow well in damaged fields, and dust entered homes and barns. For farmers already struggling with low prices, lost crops made loan payments even harder. Some left for California to seek farm work. But the supply of job seekers exceeded the jobs available in many places, allowing growers to pay very low wages. The drought struck a region, yet its effects traveled with migrants into crowded labor markets far away.

3 The damage was not shared equally. In the South, Black sharecroppers, who farmed land owned by others, could lose both income and housing when landlords reduced planting or replaced workers with machines. Some federal farm payments went to landowners, who did not always pass the benefits to tenants. In the Southwest and California, officials and employers pressured many people of Mexican descent to leave for Mexico, including some U.S. citizens. This removed workers and separated families. White workers also faced unemployment, but discrimination made it harder for many Black and Mexican American workers to find relief or new jobs. Economic collapse and environmental disaster met unequal treatment.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did falling farm prices spread hardship beyond farmers in the town?

2. Why was the Dust Bowl especially damaging to farmers already facing the Depression, and how did migration affect farm workers in California?

3. How did landownership affect whether Black sharecroppers benefited from federal farm payments?

4. Compare the hardships faced by Black sharecroppers and people of Mexican descent. How did different forms of unequal treatment deepen the crisis for each group?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 80- to 110-word recommendation to a 1930s county relief board. Propose one action for a Dust Bowl farm family and a different action for a displaced Black sharecropper or Mexican American worker; explain how each addresses a cause of hardship and identify one limit of your plan.

ANSWER KEY

# When Hardship Spread

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.US2.12

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a cause-and-effect chain in each paragraph and circle the people it affects to trace how hardship spread and differed. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How did falling farm prices spread hardship beyond farmers in the town? | **Farm families bought fewer tools and seeds, hurting businesses that sold them.** |
| 2 | Why was the Dust Bowl especially damaging to farmers already facing the Depression, and how did migration affect farm workers in California? | **Farmers with low crop prices also lost crops to drought and wind, making debts harder to pay. Migrants seeking work added to the supply of job seekers in California, where growers could pay very low wages.** |
| 3 | How did landownership affect whether Black sharecroppers benefited from federal farm payments? | **Payments could go to landowners, who did not always share the benefits with tenants such as Black sharecroppers.** |
| 4 | Compare the hardships faced by Black sharecroppers and people of Mexican descent. How did different forms of unequal treatment deepen the crisis for each group? | **Black sharecroppers could lose income and housing while landowners kept farm payments. People of Mexican descent faced pressure to leave for Mexico, which removed workers and separated families, including families of U.S. citizens.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I recommend temporary housing and paid soil-conservation work for a Dust Bowl farm family. Wind and drought ruined crops, so wages would replace some lost income while the family waits for fields to recover. For a displaced Black sharecropper, the county should offer housing assistance and paid jobs directly, without requiring a landlord's approval. Losing access to land could also mean losing a home, and landlords did not always share federal aid with tenants. These steps would not restore damaged soil quickly or end discrimination in hiring, so families might still need support after the first payments.

Accept other historically plausible actions if the student connects each action to a distinct hardship described in the passage and identifies a realistic limit.