Routes to Opportunity

Why African Americans moved north and west during the Great Migration

8.C.13.3.D "Describe the migration of African Americans from the discriminatory conditions of the South to opportunities in the north and west."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two conditions that pushed African Americans to leave the South, then circle one job opportunity in the North and one in the West. Write N or W beside each circled opportunity to show where it was.

Leaving the South

1. In the early 1900s, a train ticket could mean more than a new address for a Black family in Mississippi. Jim Crow laws forced Black people into separate schools and public spaces, while threats and violence made daily life dangerous. Many families farmed land owned by others and had to give the owner part of each crop. After paying debts, they could have little money left. These pressures helped drive the Great Migration, in which about six million African Americans left the South between roughly 1916 and 1970.

2. During World War I, factories in northern cities needed workers as immigration from Europe slowed. Chicago meatpacking plants and Detroit automobile factories offered wages that could be better than earnings on southern farms. Black newspapers, including the Chicago Defender, shared news about jobs and train routes. Some travelers went first, then sent word or money to relatives who followed. Moving did not guarantee an easy life. In northern cities, African Americans still faced housing discrimination, and crowded neighborhoods made finding a decent home difficult.

3. During World War II, wartime industries also drew African Americans west. In California, shipyards around Oakland hired workers to help build vessels for the war. A person leaving a southern farm might seek wages there instead of staying in a system of debt and limited choices. Families brought food, music, and community ties to new cities, helping reshape urban life. But discrimination followed them: employers did not always offer equal opportunities, and some neighborhoods blocked Black families from renting or buying homes. Migration changed people's options without ending racism.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might a family struggling with debt on a southern farm choose to move to Chicago or Detroit?

2. How could the Chicago Defender help someone decide to move north?

3. What southern condition might push a farmworker to leave, and what wartime opportunity could draw that worker to Oakland?

4. How could moving north or west improve a family's options without ending the problems they faced?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence letter from a person who left a southern farm for Chicago, Detroit, or Oakland. Explain why you left, why you chose that city, how you learned about the opportunity or traveled, and one challenge after arrival, using details supported by the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Routes to Opportunity

GRADE 8 · 8.C.13.3.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two conditions that pushed African Americans to leave the South, then circle one job opportunity in the North and one in the West. Write N or W beside each circled opportunity to show where it was. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might a family struggling with debt on a southern farm choose to move to Chicago or Detroit?	**Chicago meatpacking plants and Detroit automobile factories offered wages that could be better than earnings on southern farms.**
2	How could the Chicago Defender help someone decide to move north?	**It shared news about northern jobs and train routes, giving a potential traveler information about work and how to get there.**
3	What southern condition might push a farmworker to leave, and what wartime opportunity could draw that worker to Oakland?	**Debt and limited choices on a southern farm could push the worker to leave, while jobs building vessels in Oakland-area shipyards could draw the worker west.**
4	How could moving north or west improve a family's options without ending the problems they faced?	**Northern factories and western shipyards offered paid work, but African Americans still faced discrimination in employment or housing after moving.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Dear Cousin, I left our Mississippi farm because giving the landowner part of each crop and paying debts left us with little money. I chose Chicago because its meatpacking plants offered wages that could be better than earnings on southern farms. I read about jobs and train routes in the Chicago Defender before taking the train north. Finding a good home has been hard because housing discrimination has crowded Black families into some neighborhoods.

Accept other passage-supported links between southern conditions and northern or western work. The letter should have four sentences, a consistent destination, a reason for leaving, a reason for choosing that city, a way of learning about the opportunity or traveling, and a challenge after arrival.