Dust and Decisions

Evaluate causes, policy effects, and historical evidence.

MWH.P.2 "Use interdisciplinary tools to acquire, apply, and evaluate content understanding of the four strands of social studies. Demonstrate an understanding of the principles of government, the benefits of democratic systems..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two interacting causes of the dust storms, circle one intended effect and one unequal effect of the policy, and number the three types of evidence proposed for testing claims. Use your marks to connect causes, policy, and the limits of each source.

What Changed the Great Plains?

1. In the 1930s, severe drought struck the southern Great Plains, including parts of Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas. Years of plowing had removed many native grasses whose roots held soil in place. When dry fields met strong winds, loose topsoil blew away in enormous dust storms. Farmers lost productive land, and some families left the region. Drought alone does not explain the disaster: land-use choices also made the area vulnerable. A historian studying the Dust Bowl must connect climate, geography, farming practices, and the economic pressure to grow crops for sale.

2. The federal government responded with new powers and spending. Congress created the Soil Conservation Service in 1935 to help farmers protect land. Under a 1936 law, federal payments encouraged soil-conserving crops and practices, such as planting grasses rather than repeatedly plowing vulnerable fields. The intended result was less erosion and more stable farm income. But a payment offered to a landowner did not guarantee equal benefits for a tenant who worked the field. This difference matters when judging a policy: an action can improve conditions overall while distributing its benefits unevenly.

3. How could someone test those claims? Agency records showing how many acres received conservation treatment could reveal the program's reach over time. Yet an agency reporting its own work has reason to highlight progress; acreage alone cannot show whether each household benefited. Letters from tenant farmers could reveal who received money and who made planting decisions, but one family's experience cannot represent every farm. Comparing both sources with rainfall records would help separate the effects of policy from the effects of changing weather. Credible conclusions depend on matching evidence to a question and checking what each source leaves out.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does drought alone not explain the Dust Bowl? Connect it with another cause from the passage.

2. Compare the intended effect of federal conservation payments with a possible unequal effect.

3. Which source would best show how widely conservation treatment was used? Why would that source not prove that families benefited?

4. How would rainfall records help you judge whether conservation policy reduced erosion?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A county wants to pay farmers to plant trees beside streams to reduce flood damage. In 70 to 100 words, argue whether it should run a small trial first. Identify two different evidence sources and what each could show, note one source limitation, and explain one possible unequal effect.

Dust and Decisions

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two interacting causes of the dust storms, circle one intended effect and one unequal effect of the policy, and number the three types of evidence proposed for testing claims. Use your marks to connect causes, policy, and the limits of each source. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why does drought alone not explain the Dust Bowl? Connect it with another cause from the passage.	**Plowing removed grasses that held soil in place, so drought and strong winds could carry the exposed topsoil away.**
2	Compare the intended effect of federal conservation payments with a possible unequal effect.	**The payments aimed to reduce erosion and stabilize farm income, but landowners could benefit without tenants receiving equal benefits.**
3	Which source would best show how widely conservation treatment was used? Why would that source not prove that families benefited?	**Agency acreage records could show the program's reach, but acres treated do not reveal what happened to each household.**
4	How would rainfall records help you judge whether conservation policy reduced erosion?	**They would help distinguish changes linked to conservation practices from changes that might be due to wetter weather.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The county should run a small trial before offering payments everywhere. Flood records from the trial area could show whether damage changes after trees are planted. However, a few years of records might not include a major storm, so they could overstate the program's success. Interviews with nearby residents could show whether they notice changes to their property or access to the stream. Farmers who own land might receive payments, while renters who help maintain the trees receive none. The county should check both the flood results and who benefits.

Accept other supported cause-and-effect explanations and source limitations. For the open task, accept either position on a trial if the argument uses two distinct sources, identifies what each could show, notes a limitation, and explains an unequal effect.