When Work Vanished

Trace national and Oklahoma conditions behind the Great Depression

OKH.C.7.1 "Identify local and national economic conditions which contributed to the Great Depression and were characterized by mass unemployment and human suffering."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline national economic conditions, circle Oklahoma conditions, and number three effects on people's work or daily lives.

Hard Times in Oklahoma

1. In 1929, the stock market crash shook confidence, but the Great Depression had several causes. Across the United States, factories had made more goods than many customers could afford. As sales fell, businesses cut production and dismissed workers. Many banks had made risky loans; when banks failed, some depositors lost savings, and businesses found it harder to borrow. Families with less money bought fewer goods, which deepened the loss of jobs. By 1933, about one in four American workers was unemployed. For a family without steady wages or savings, even rent and groceries could become a daily problem.

2. Many Oklahoma farmers were already struggling before 1929. Cotton prices had fallen after World War I, while some growers still owed money for land, seed, or equipment. Tenant farmers worked land they did not own and often depended on a single crop to pay rent and debts. When the national economy weakened, cotton buyers paid even less. Some growers could not cover their costs, and farmworkers and tenant families lost income or land. In nearby towns, merchants sold less because farm families had little cash to spend.

3. Oil was another Oklahoma source of work. As too much oil reached the market in the early 1930s, prices dropped, and drilling companies reduced jobs. A dry spell beginning in 1930 also hit Oklahoma farms. On the western plains, drought and wind stripped soil from fields, making crops fail and leaving some families with no harvest to sell. The drought did not start the national Depression, but it made hardship worse in Oklahoma. A laid-off oil worker and a farm family facing a ruined field both confronted the same urgent questions: how to pay for food and where to find work.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did a national problem with factory goods lead to unemployment?

2. How could bank failures cause hardship for families and businesses?

3. What conditions made Oklahoma cotton families vulnerable, and what happened when cotton prices fell further?

4. Identify two Oklahoma conditions besides falling cotton prices. How did each reduce work or income?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are writing a report for a 1933 Oklahoma town council deciding where to offer emergency aid. In four or five sentences, connect one national economic condition and two Oklahoma conditions from the passage to lost work or hardship, then propose one specific type of aid.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.7.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline national economic conditions, circle Oklahoma conditions, and number three effects on people's work or daily lives. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did a national problem with factory goods lead to unemployment?	**Factories had made more goods than many customers could afford. Falling sales led businesses to cut production and dismiss workers.**
2	How could bank failures cause hardship for families and businesses?	**Some families lost savings, while businesses found it harder to borrow money.**
3	What conditions made Oklahoma cotton families vulnerable, and what happened when cotton prices fell further?	**Some growers owed money, and tenant farmers depended on one crop to pay rent and debts. Further price drops left some unable to cover costs, and farmworkers and tenant families lost income or land.**
4	Identify two Oklahoma conditions besides falling cotton prices. How did each reduce work or income?	**Excess oil on the market lowered prices, so drilling companies reduced jobs. Drought and wind ruined crops, leaving some farm families with no harvest to sell.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Failed banks left some families without savings and made loans harder for town businesses to get. Falling cotton prices cut farm income, so tenant families struggled to pay rent. Low oil prices caused drilling companies to cut jobs, leaving workers without wages. Together, these pressures left more households unable to buy food. The council should open a food pantry for farm and oil-field families.

Accept other accurate connections between passage conditions and unemployment or hardship. For Part 3, look for one national condition, two Oklahoma conditions, their effects, and a specific aid proposal.