When Soil Blew Away

Trace how economic hardship and land use shaped the Dust Bowl.

OKH.C.7 "Examine the challenges and accomplishments of Oklahomans as they encountered periods of economic depression and engagement in world conflict..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two economic pressures, circle two causes of soil loss, and number three steps from damaged land to migration to trace how the crises connected.

Two Crises on the Plains

1. In the early 1930s, an Oklahoma farm family could face two crises at once. Cotton and wheat prices had fallen, and the national banking collapse made loans harder to get. Families who depended on selling crops struggled to pay debts or buy supplies. At the same time, years of plowing had removed much of the native grass that held Plains soil in place. When drought dried the ground, strong winds lifted loose topsoil into dark clouds. Drought alone did not create the Dust Bowl: farming practices made the land more vulnerable to it.

2. Dust buried seeds, damaged lungs, and left some fields unable to produce enough for a living. Farm workers and families, including tenants who owned no land, joined a westward migration in search of wages. People sometimes called these migrants "Okies," even when they came from other Plains states. Leaving home did not guarantee a job: California employers often had more workers than positions. For those who stayed, a failed crop meant lost income at a time when other work was scarce. The disaster therefore connected environmental damage to unemployment and displacement.

3. Federal New Deal programs tackled different parts of the crisis. The Civilian Conservation Corps paid young men to do conservation work, including planting trees and building erosion controls. Works Progress Administration projects paid workers to build or repair public facilities. The Agricultural Adjustment Act paid landowners to cut crop production in hopes of raising prices, but some owners then needed fewer tenant workers. These efforts provided wages and helped protect soil, yet they did not give every displaced family a secure farm or job. Judging their success requires asking who benefited and who was left out.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did falling crop prices and the banking collapse put different kinds of pressure on Oklahoma farm families?

2. Why did drought cause more soil damage on land where native grass had been plowed up?

3. Trace how damaged fields could lead a farm family to leave Oklahoma. Why might moving west fail to solve their problem?

4. How could the Agricultural Adjustment Act help a landowner but hurt a tenant worker?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a county where tenant families have lost farm work and topsoil is blowing from fields. In five sentences, recommend an employment response and a soil-conservation response from the passage, identify someone these responses might leave out, and propose one additional local action of your own.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.7

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two economic pressures, circle two causes of soil loss, and number three steps from damaged land to migration to trace how the crises connected. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did falling crop prices and the banking collapse put different kinds of pressure on Oklahoma farm families?	**Lower crop prices reduced families' income, while the banking collapse made loans harder to get. Both made it difficult to pay debts or buy supplies.**
2	Why did drought cause more soil damage on land where native grass had been plowed up?	**Native grass had helped hold the soil in place. After plowing removed it, drought dried the exposed soil and wind could lift it away.**
3	Trace how damaged fields could lead a farm family to leave Oklahoma. Why might moving west fail to solve their problem?	**Damaged fields might not produce enough to support a family, leading them to seek wages elsewhere. In California, there were often more workers than available jobs.**
4	How could the Agricultural Adjustment Act help a landowner but hurt a tenant worker?	**A landowner could receive payment for cutting crop production and might benefit if prices rose. With less land in production, the owner might need fewer tenant workers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The county should seek a Works Progress Administration project to provide paid work repairing a public building. It should also seek a Civilian Conservation Corps project to plant trees and build erosion controls where soil is blowing away. These responses would address lost wages and damaged land at the same time. Tenant families might still need help if no adult in the household gets a project job. The county could organize a food pantry for families with no income while they look for work.

For the marking job, accept any three correctly ordered links from soil damage to lost income and migration. For the recommendation, accept other feasible local actions if students explain whom the action would help.