When Soil Blew Away

Trace the causes, effects, and responses to the Dust Bowl.

USH.C.4.3.E "Identify the natural and man-made factors resulting in the environmental disaster known as the Dust Bowl, analyzing its effects on agricultural production, migration, and the national economy, as well as New Deal response (e.g...."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline natural causes of the Dust Bowl and circle human actions that made it worse. Write P, M, E, and R beside one detail each about agricultural production, migration, the economy, and a New Deal response so you can trace the crisis from causes to consequences.

The Dust Bowl: More Than a Drought

1. In April 1935, a vast dust storm crossed the southern Great Plains and darkened skies far to the east. The storm was part of the Dust Bowl, years of blowing soil and failed crops centered on areas such as Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas. Drought left the ground dry, and strong winds lifted loose topsoil. But weather alone did not create so much exposed earth. During earlier wet years, farmers had plowed native grasslands to plant wheat. Rising wheat prices and new tractors encouraged more plowing. Deep grass roots had once held soil in place, even when rain was scarce.

2. When drought struck in the 1930s, wheat plants failed and fields lost their cover. Wind carried away fertile topsoil, so farmers could grow less food and earn less money. Dust also covered fields and damaged equipment. Families already struggling with low crop prices during the Great Depression faced debts they could not pay. Some left their farms, traveling west to California or seeking work elsewhere. They did not all move for the same reason, but ruined harvests and lost income pushed many to leave. As farms failed, rural stores and banks lost customers and payments, adding strain to the national economy.

3. The federal government responded through New Deal programs. The Soil Conservation Service, created in 1935, taught farmers methods such as planting grasses and rows of trees to slow erosion. The Farm Security Administration, established in 1937, offered loans to low-income farmers and ran camps for migrant farmworkers. Its photographers documented rural hardship for the public. These steps could not end the drought or restore every farm. Still, conservation methods addressed exposed soil, while loans and camps helped some families cope with lost income and migration. The crisis showed how land use, weather, and financial trouble could combine.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did drought and wind work together with earlier plowing to produce the dust storms?

2. Trace how losing topsoil could hurt both a farm family and businesses beyond the farm.

3. Why did some families leave the Great Plains, and where did some of them go?

4. How did two New Deal programs address different problems caused by the Dust Bowl?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a six-sentence letter to a farm family in 1938 deciding whether to stay or move. Explain how weather and land use caused the crisis, compare a benefit and a limit of staying with conservation help versus moving with Farm Security Administration help, and explain what either choice could mean for the family's income.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.4.3.E

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline natural causes of the Dust Bowl and circle human actions that made it worse. Write P, M, E, and R beside one detail each about agricultural production, migration, the economy, and a New Deal response so you can trace the crisis from causes to consequences. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did drought and wind work together with earlier plowing to produce the dust storms?	**Plowing removed deep-rooted grasses that held soil in place. Drought dried the exposed ground, and strong winds lifted its loose topsoil.**
2	Trace how losing topsoil could hurt both a farm family and businesses beyond the farm.	**Without fertile topsoil, farmers grew less food and earned less money. Farm failures then cost rural stores customers and banks payments.**
3	Why did some families leave the Great Plains, and where did some of them go?	**Ruined harvests and lost income pushed some families to leave. Some traveled to California, while others sought work elsewhere.**
4	How did two New Deal programs address different problems caused by the Dust Bowl?	**The Soil Conservation Service taught methods to reduce erosion. The Farm Security Administration offered loans to low-income farmers and ran camps for migrant farmworkers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Dear Miller family, drought and strong winds lifted soil after years of plowing removed the grasses that held it down. If you stay, planting grasses with help from the Soil Conservation Service could reduce future soil loss. Yet conservation cannot make rain fall, so another failed harvest could leave you unable to repay debts. If you move to California for farmwork, a Farm Security Administration camp could provide safer living conditions. But work might be scarce or poorly paid, so moving would not guarantee steady income. I would ask about a farm loan first, then move if another failed harvest made staying impossible.

Accept other accurate cause-and-effect chains grounded in the passage. For the letter, look for a comparison of both choices, a realistic limit to each, and an explanation of possible income effects.