

Letters Through Dust

Analyze how Dust Bowl conditions shape a narrator's letter.

10.RL.3.A “Explain and analyze the influence of the historical and cultural context of a text on its form, style, characters, and point of view.”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that reveal the historical or cultural setting. Circle nearby words that show how those conditions shape the letter's form, style, characters, or narrator's point of view.

Letter West, 1936

- ① April 15, 1936. Dear Ruth, The sky turned brown before supper again. Ma laid wet towels along the window sills, but grit still clicked between my teeth. Since the drought began, the wheat has failed, and Pa says the bank may take our rented acres. I keep this letter because you left for California last fall, where growers were said to need pickers. Here in the Oklahoma Panhandle, neighbors trade canned beans and news of roads west. I write small and close on this page, saving paper the way Ma saves flour.
- ② Pa will not say we are running away. He calls the truck a “new start,” although its bed is stacked with quilts, a wash tub, and the seed catalog he cannot throw out. I believe him when he says California will be green, yet I notice how he studies the gasoline gauge before he buys coffee. At school, Mr. Dyer has stopped assigning long essays. Most of us miss days to help our families pack or to sweep dust from sheds. His short questions feel kinder than speeches about hard work.
- ③ Tonight, I copied the address Ruth sent from a camp beside an orchard near Bakersfield. I do not picture movie stars or beaches, though the posters in town do. I picture rows of trees and strangers deciding whether we belong. Ma says we must act cheerful when we arrive because people already blame migrants for low wages and crowded camps. I want to sound brave in this letter, but the dust has taught me to distrust promises. Still, I fold the page carefully. A letter can travel ahead and make a place seem less unknown.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

- 1 How do the drought and the family's separation influence the form of this text? Use two details from the passage.

- 2 How does the narrator's style reflect the family's economic conditions? Use one example of word choice or detail.

- 3 How does the Dust Bowl migration shape Pa as a character? Explain how one of his actions or statements reveals this influence.

- 4 How do attitudes toward migrants shape the narrator's point of view about California?

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Write one 70 to 90 word first-person letter paragraph set after the family reaches California. Use at least two context details from the passage, and show through the narrator's word choice and thoughts how migration shapes the narrator's point of view. Do not add outside historical facts.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline details that reveal the historical or cultural setting. Circle nearby words that show how those conditions shape the letter's form, style, characters, or narrator's point of view. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the drought and the family's separation influence the form of this text? Use two details from the passage.	The text is a letter to Ruth because she has already gone to California, and the narrator writes small and close to save scarce paper.
2	How does the narrator's style reflect the family's economic conditions? Use one example of word choice or detail.	Concrete, careful details such as saving paper like flour and watching the gasoline gauge reflect scarcity and financial worry.
3	How does the Dust Bowl migration shape Pa as a character? Explain how one of his actions or statements reveals this influence.	Pa calls the move a “new start” instead of running away, showing that he tries to protect his family's hope despite losing the farm.
4	How do attitudes toward migrants shape the narrator's point of view about California?	The narrator expects strangers to question whether the family belongs and distrusts promises, so California seems uncertain rather than simply hopeful.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Dear Ruth, We reached the orchard camp after dark, and the rows looked black against the hills. Ma told me to smile when the woman at the gate asked where we came from, so I did, though my hands shook. I will not write that California is green yet. The tents are close together, and everyone watches the job lists. Still, I saved a peach pit for Pa. He says seeds mean we expect tomorrow.

Accept equivalent explanations that connect a specific historical or cultural condition to a choice in form, style, characterization, or point of view. For the open response, check for 70 to 90 words, first-person letter form, at least two passage-based context details, and a clear migration-shaped perspective.