Roads and Roots

Trace belief and context in a migration narrative.

11.RL.3.C "Analyze how authors' attitudes, viewpoints, and beliefs reflect larger historical, social, or cultural contexts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three phrases that reveal a character's attitude toward leaving, work, or community. Circle three details that show the larger historical or social setting, then draw a line from each underlined phrase to a detail that helps explain it.

Westward Dust

1 By noon, the wind had sanded the paint from our porch steps and pressed dust beneath the window glass. Mama folded a damp cloth over the baby's face, though the cloth soon turned brown. From the road, I watched Mr. Hale nail a sign to his gate: NO CREDIT. He had once lent seed to half the county. Papa said the sign was not cruelty, exactly. "A man cannot loan what the bank has already taken," he told me, staring at our empty field as the sky darkened.

2 At school, our teacher pinned a map beside the flag and traced the route west with a ruler. California, she said, needed pickers for grapes and cotton. Some boys laughed at the thought of leaving, but no one called them cowards. Families were packing trucks all over the Panhandle. Mama kept a jar of soil on the kitchen shelf. "We are not running from this place," she said. "We are carrying it until it can carry us again." Her words made the road sound less like defeat and more like work.

3 On the first morning in the camp outside Bakersfield, a woman handed Mama a cup of coffee and asked no questions about our clothes. A notice board listed wages, a clinic schedule, and a meeting about clean water. Papa read every line twice. He distrusted promises from officials, yet he listened when the camp nurse explained how the county could be pressed to act. That evening, he repaired a neighbor's axle before touching our own. "If we stand alone," he said, "we are easy to move." Under the lanterns, people began planning as if they belonged to one another.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Papa says Hale's NO CREDIT sign is "not cruelty, exactly." What attitude toward Hale does this statement create, and what larger economic condition explains it?

2. Why does the narrator note that no one called the boys cowards for leaving? Explain what this suggests about the community's view of migration.

3. How do Mama's jar of soil and her statement about carrying the place "until it can carry us again" redefine leaving? What belief do they reveal?

4. How do Papa's distrust of officials and his choice to repair a neighbor's axle develop the passage's viewpoint about institutions and community?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence mini-analysis using one detail from the passage that is not named in Questions 1 through 4. Explain the author's attitude or belief, name the historical or social condition the detail reflects, and explain the connection.

ANSWER KEY

Roads and Roots

GRADE 11 · 11.RL.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three phrases that reveal a character's attitude toward leaving, work, or community. Circle three details that show the larger historical or social setting, then draw a line from each underlined phrase to a detail that helps explain it. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Papa says Hale's NO CREDIT sign is "not cruelty, exactly." What attitude toward Hale does this statement create, and what larger economic condition explains it?	**Papa sees Hale as pressured rather than simply cruel. The bank's taking of property shows that debt and financial loss are affecting the whole farming community.**
2	Why does the narrator note that no one called the boys cowards for leaving? Explain what this suggests about the community's view of migration.	**The detail suggests that leaving is viewed as a necessary response to shared hardship, not as personal weakness. Many Panhandle families are facing the same need to move for work.**
3	How do Mama's jar of soil and her statement about carrying the place "until it can carry us again" redefine leaving? What belief do they reveal?	**They present migration as a temporary effort to survive while maintaining an emotional and cultural connection to home. Mama believes leaving does not erase belonging or loyalty to the land.**
4	How do Papa's distrust of officials and his choice to repair a neighbor's axle develop the passage's viewpoint about institutions and community?	**The passage suggests that displaced families cannot fully rely on official promises, so they need mutual aid and collective action. Papa's actions show that community support gives people more power than isolation does.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The brown cloth over the baby's face reveals the author's alarm at how dust reaches into a family's most private spaces. This detail reflects the Dust Bowl's environmental disaster, when windblown soil threatened daily health and home life. By placing the baby at the center of the scene, the author suggests that the crisis was not merely an economic problem but a human one.

Accept analyses that accurately connect passage details to Dust Bowl migration, farm debt, seasonal agricultural labor, camp services, or collective advocacy. Require a clear, evidence-based link between a stated attitude or belief and a larger historical, social, or cultural context.