



**Read the story. Then answer the questions that follow.**

*In the 1930s, the United States was stuck in a deep economic depression that left millions of people without jobs. In part of the Great Plains, an environmental disaster known as the Dust Bowl added to the hard times. A long drought combined with years of poor farming practices made the land vulnerable to extreme wind erosion. Farmers watched helplessly as the topsoil that had once nourished their crops blew away. In this fictional selection, a boy and his family struggle with the hardships of the Dust Bowl.*

# Dust

*by Charles Grayson*

1 As Edwin rested his cheek against the side of his cow, Nelly, he could hear the wind whistling through the barn walls and see the air begin to darken with dust. Annie and Jewel were giggling as they played in the hayloft above him when one of the girls began to wheeze. Edwin quickly finished milking the cow and called to his sisters. “Hurry up, girls,” he said, “another black blizzard is coming.”

2 The wind suddenly picked up strength, and before Edwin’s eyes, the farmhouse—only 50 feet away—became nearly invisible. Without hesitation, Edwin grabbed two pieces of heavy twine, tied one around each girl’s waist, and then tied the two girls together. He took Annie’s hand and instructed her to hold tightly to Jewel. Leaning into the blinding wind, Edwin slowly navigated them back to the house.

3 Inside, Ma was relieved to see the children. With a sigh, she took the milk from Edwin, eyeing the familiar dust that she would try to skim off before serving the milk to her family. Although it was early morning, the dust storm outside made the small farmhouse dark and dismal. Edwin slapped the dirt from his jacket with his hands. He was weary of the dust, too, but he was smiling inside because tomorrow his father was coming home.

4 The next morning dawned clear and calm. Edwin swept the house while his mother worked in the yard, rescuing her daffodils from the dust that had drifted against the foundation of the house like gritty snow. The clatter of a rundown automobile heralded the arrival of Edwin’s father, and the boy raced outside.

5 The family gathered around Pa, who hugged each one of them tightly. He had been in Arizona for three weeks picking cotton. This spring the ground was hard and barren, and the constant dust storms made it impossible to cultivate crops. Pa had to find some way to earn money—his children were wearing tattered hand-me-downs, and his small herd of cattle was slowly starving.



6 When Ma asked about the work, Pa said that the wages he earned were far less than what had been promised. Still, he'd brought home enough money to see them through another month. Eventually, the joy of being reunited with his family faded, and the careworn expression returned to Pa's face.

7 After Pa had been home a few days, Edwin overheard his parents having a serious discussion. "I just don't know if I can leave our home," Ma said, a note of grief in her voice. Pa had heard there was work on commercial farms in California, where cotton, oranges, and other crops grew nearly year round.

8 "I know it's not like owning our own farm, but what choice do we have?" Pa pleaded. Afterward, Ma went into the yard and stood for a long time by her beloved lilac bush, staring out at the desolate fields.

9 Later, Pa asked Edwin to ride the horse into town to purchase provisions. Edwin rode at a slow pace, thinking. He didn't like it when his parents argued, and he didn't like it when his father had to leave home to work. Most of all, Edwin wished there was something he could do to assist his family. At the store, he walked past the half-empty shelves to the back counter and asked Mr. Harburger for beans and flour.

10 As Edwin waited, something bright and orange caught his eye. It was an old advertisement on the shelf in front of him—a photograph of a glistening orange grove with the words "Sunny California" splashed across the top. Edwin had never seen an orange grove before. Studying the picture, Edwin's face brightened. "Take it," Mr. Harburger said with a wink. At home, Edwin tacked the picture up next to his bed. One day, Edwin even caught his mother examining the photograph of the orange grove, smiling for the first time in a long time.

11 When autumn arrived, Edwin's parents learned the government was offering to buy starving livestock for slaughter. Most farmers knew their animals could not survive another winter, so they accepted the offer in exchange for some much-needed cash. After a long discussion, Edwin's parents did the same. Edwin sensed a change was coming.

12 The cow Nelly remained, but Edwin could see that she was becoming desperately thin. The next day, Edwin sold Nelly at the Baileys' farm. The Baileys were doing better than most folks, though Edwin couldn't say why. He returned home with 16 dollars in his pocket and a little relief knowing that Nelly would be cared for.

13 Later that evening, Edwin's parents made an important announcement: they would be packing whatever would fit into their old automobile and moving to California. Then Edwin made his own announcement. "Here," he said, handing his father the 16 dollars. "We can buy fuel with this!"



1

Read this sentence.

Edwin wants to help his family during this difficult time.

Which of the following sentences from the story **best** supports this statement?

- A "After Pa had been home a few days, Edwin overheard his parents having a serious discussion."
- B "Later, Pa asked Edwin to ride the horse into town to purchase provisions."
- C "At home, Edwin tacked the picture up next to his bed."
- D "The next day, Edwin sold Nelly at the Baileys' farm."

## Answer Form

1 (A) (B) (C) (D)

2 (A) (B) (C) (D)

3 (A) (B) (C) (D)

4 (A) (B) (C) (D)

5A (A) (B) (C) (D)

5B (A) (B) (C) (D)

Number  
Correct

6

2

Which statement **best** supports the idea that the Dust Bowl made it difficult for families to survive?

- A "With a sigh, she took the milk from Edwin, eyeing the familiar dust that she would try to skim off before serving the milk to her family."
- B "Although it was early morning, the dust storm outside made the small farmhouse dark and dismal."
- C "He was weary of the dust, too, but he was smiling inside because tomorrow his father was coming home."
- D "Edwin swept the house while his mother worked in the yard, rescuing her daffodils from the dust that had drifted against the foundation of the house like gritty snow."

3

Which statement **best** expresses the theme of this story?

- A Don't rely on others for help.
- B You can't make a person change.
- C Try to find the good in every situation.
- D Be content with what you have.



- 4** The family in the story demonstrates the idea that people are adaptable, or willing to change when needed. Which sentence from the passage **best** shows this idea?
- A** "Annie and Jewel were giggling as they played in the hayloft above him when one of the girls began to wheeze."
  - B** "Although it was early morning, the dust storm outside made the small farmhouse dark and dismal."
  - C** "Most farmers knew their animals could not survive another winter, so they accepted the offer in exchange for some much-needed cash."
  - D** "He returned home with 16 dollars in his pocket and a little relief knowing that Nelly would be cared for."

- 5** Answer Parts A and B below.

**Part A**

Based on the passage, how do Ma's feelings about moving change over time?

- A** She becomes more and more resistant to the idea of moving.
- B** She grows more comfortable with the idea of moving.
- C** She likes the idea of moving initially, then comes to dislike it.
- D** She becomes more confident that the family should not move.

**Part B**

Which sentence from the passage **best** shows Ma's changing feelings about moving?

- A** "With a sigh, she took the milk from Edwin, eyeing the familiar dust that she would try to skim off before serving the milk to her family."
- B** "'I just don't know if I can leave our home,' Ma said, a note of grief in her voice."
- C** "Afterward, Ma went into the yard and stood for a long time by her beloved lilac bush, staring out at the desolate fields."
- D** "One day, Edwin even caught his mother examining the photograph of the orange grove, smiling for the first time in a long time."



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What evidence in the story helped you to know that the family would move to California, even before Edwin's parents made their announcement? Describe how the events in the story support this inference.

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Write a summary that includes the conflict in the story and how it is resolved. Use details from the story to support your answer.

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Answer Parts A, B, and C below.

**Part A**

Circle only **one** word that describes Edwin based on evidence from the text. There is more than one correct choice listed below.

thoughtless

resourceful

timid

observant

optimistic

stubborn

**Part B**

Find **one** sentence in the passage with details that support your response to Part A. Write that sentence on the lines below.

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**Part C**

Find a **second** sentence in the passage with details that support your response to Part A. Write that sentence on the lines below.

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What inferences can you make about Edwin's character based on his actions in the story? What events and details from the text helped you make those inferences? Write an essay of two to three paragraphs explaining your answer.

- explain what inferences you made about Edwin while reading the story
- explain what events and details from the text support your inferences
- cite evidence from the story in your answer

[illegible]

