Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Grade 7

Answer Key

The Day the Sky Went Black

Oklahoma Panhandle, April 14, 1935

For weeks the wind had carried dust into everything we owned. It gritted between my teeth at supper and settled in a gray film on Ma's dishes no matter how tightly she stacked them. So when that Sunday morning dawned clear and still, it felt like a gift. Ma hung the wash on the line for the first time in a month. My little brother Sam chased the chickens around the yard, and Pa sat on the porch with his eyes closed, letting the sun warm his face.

Around four o'clock, I noticed the birds. Hundreds of them were flying south, low and fast, as if something were chasing them. Then I looked north. A wall of black was rolling across the prairie, taller than any cloud I had ever seen. It did not look like weather. It looked like the end of the world.

"Inside! Now!" Pa shouted. Ma grabbed Sam, and I ran for the laundry, but Pa caught my arm. "Leave it, Ruthie!" he yelled, pulling me toward the house. The storm hit before the door was shut. In seconds, the bright afternoon turned darker than midnight. I held my hand in front of my face and could not see it.

Ma soaked bedsheets in the washtub, and we pressed them over the windows and stuffed rags under the door. Pa lit the kerosene lamp, but its glow barely reached the table. The dust found its way in anyway. It drifted through cracks in the walls and coated our hair and eyelashes. Sam coughed until his face turned red, and Ma held a wet cloth over his mouth and nose.

Late that night, when the wind finally eased, Pa spoke quietly. "The Morrisons left for California last week. Said there's work picking fruit out there." Ma did not look up from Sam. "This is our land," she said. "We stay." Pa didn't argue, but I saw him staring at the dark window for a long time.

In the morning, the yard looked like a desert. Dust had piled against the fence in drifts, and Ma's clean laundry was brown and stiff on the line. That night I wrote one sentence in my journal: *The sky took nearly everything today, but it did not take us.*

Historical Note: On April 14, 1935, a massive dust storm swept across the southern Great Plains. Years of drought, along with farming that had stripped away the native prairie grasses, left the soil dry and loose enough for the wind to carry away. The day became known as Black Sunday. During the 1930s, many families left the region, and large numbers traveled west to California in search of work.

Part A: Multiple Choice

Circle the best answer.

1. Why did the family spend the Sunday afternoon outside?

   Answer: b) The weather was finally clear and calm after weeks of dust.

2. What was the first warning sign Ruthie noticed?

   Answer: a) Hundreds of birds flying south, low and fast

3. Why did the family press wet sheets over the windows?

   Answer: c) To keep the dust out

4. What was Pa thinking about after the storm?

   Answer: d) Moving to California to find work

Part B: True or False

Write T for true or F for false.

5. The dust storm arrived in the middle of the night.

   Answer: False

6. Sam coughed badly during the storm.

   Answer: True

7. The family left their farm the morning after the storm.

   Answer: False

Part C: Historical Fiction: Fact and Fiction

Historical fiction places invented characters in a real time and place. The setting and major events are based on history, while the characters and many details come from the author's imagination.

8. Write one detail from the story that is based on real history and one detail that the author most likely invented.

Sample answer: Real history: A huge dust storm hit the southern Great Plains on April 14, 1935 (Black Sunday). Invented: Ruthie, her family, and the Morrisons. (Also accept: families moving to California, drought, wet sheets over windows as real details; Ruthie's journal sentence as invented.)

9. How does the setting (time and place) affect the choices the characters face? Use one example from the story.

Sample answer: Because of the drought and dust storms, the family's farm is being ruined, so Pa considers leaving for California like the Morrisons, while Ma insists on staying on their land.

Part D: Think and Explain

10. The story is told from Ruthie's point of view. How would it be different if Pa told it? What does Ruthie's final journal sentence reveal about her feelings and the story's theme?

Sample answer: If Pa told the story, readers would learn more about his worries over money, the farm, and whether to leave. Ruthie's journal sentence shows that even after losing so much, she feels hopeful and proud that her family survived together. The theme is that families can stay strong and resilient during hard times.