

Comprehension Questions: “Letters From the Dust Bowl” (complete)

1. Reread paragraph 1. What hardship does the author describe that we may not have considered before?

The author describes the fact that she and her husband find it impossible to plan ahead to perform standard maintenance tasks like painting because they never know when a dust storm might hit.

2. Reread paragraph 2. What are the two types of land tracts the author saw on her drive? What “most difficult problem” does she point out?

The first type of land tract the author describes is one that is being lived on and taken care of by its owner. The other type of land tract is the one where the sand and thistles have been left to take over, and there is little hope of reclaiming it. The “most difficult problem” she mentions is that the second type of land tract is a “menace” to the first type, presumably because the sand will blow from them onto the better tracts.

3. Reread paragraph 3. The author describes two different types of Dust Bowl residents. Describe them briefly.

The author describes two types of residents: the ones who have given up and abandoned their land, and the ones who have stayed on the land, learned from their mistakes, and are working hard to change their farming methods.

4. Reread paragraph 4. Which of the two types of resident does the author describe in this paragraph?

In this paragraph, the author describes the type of resident who has given up, because they have even sold the pipe from the well on their property, undoing the work that someone did to put it there and making it harder for the next person to rehabilitate the land.

5. Reread paragraphs 5-7. What major problem does the author describe in these three paragraphs?

The author describes how many of the properties surrounding them are no longer owned by farmers living on the land, but by “banks, mortgage companies, assurance societies, and investment partnerships or corporations” which have taken them back from people unable to pay their mortgages. When the land isn’t being lived on, no one is taking care of it.

6. What does the author mean when she says “remote control stands in the way of constructive efforts toward recovery” in paragraph 7?

When the land is left without people living on it who care for it, rehabilitation of the soil doesn’t take place. For instance, there is no one to plant trees and native grasses or remove the dust and tumbleweeds from the fences.

7. Reread paragraphs 8-11. List two signs of hope the author mentions.

One sign of hope is that people seem to be enjoying the same activities they always have: going to school, church, basketball tournaments, etc. Another sign of hope is that the local produce market was full of activity, with people buying and selling things like eggs and cream and butter.

8. Reread paragraph 12. What does the author mean when she says “We instinctively feel that the longer we travel on a straight road, the nearer we must be coming to a turn.”

She means that people are naturally optimistic that the drought will not last forever. They believe that eventually it will rain, so they should stay on course and continue to work their land because the “turn” must be soon.

9. Reread paragraphs 14. The author lists several erosion control experiments. List 3 of them.

Some of the experiments involve planting trees in various locations, testing grasses to determine which ones will thrive best, and establishing a system for crop rotation so the soil will have a chance to recover between crops. Others have to do with surveying the land to establish the best planting lines.

10. What is the author’s point of view toward the erosion control experiments? What details does she include to support her opinion? Locate three pieces of text evidence, and write them down.

The author’s opinion is that the experiments are positive. In paragraph 13, she says “to me the most interesting and forward-looking government undertaking in the dust bowl centres about the group of erosion control experiments scattered over a wide area.” Later in the same paragraph, she says “If the methods employed succeed in checking the drift and in restoring productivity, much will have been accomplished.” In paragraph 14, she says that “no one can predict yet the result of these experiments, but they seem to be abundantly worth while,” so she agrees that the experiments are good.