Read the short story and answer each question.

The Dust Bowl: A Problem and Its Lessons

In the 1930s, a massive environmental disaster struck the central United States. Known as the **Dust Bowl**, this event turned farms into deserts and forced thousands of families to abandon their land. The Dust Bowl was caused by a combination of natural forces and human mistakes—and the solutions people developed still influence farming today.

The central U.S., especially the Great Plains, had been farmed heavily during the 1920s. Farmers plowed up native grasses to plant wheat, which was in high demand. But these grasses had held the soil in place. When a severe drought hit in the early 1930s, the unprotected soil turned to dust and blew away in powerful windstorms. These storms, known as **"black blizzards,"** darkened the sky and buried homes and crops.

The situation was dire. Crops failed, animals died, and people suffered from lung problems due to dust inhalation. In response, the U.S. government created the **Soil Conservation Service**, which taught farmers better ways to care for the land. New methods like **crop rotation**, planting **windbreaks**, and avoiding overplowing helped reduce erosion and protect the soil.

The Dust Bowl was a major problem, but it also led to better awareness of environmental responsibility. It taught an important lesson: taking care of the land is essential for survival.

Name: _____

The Dust Bowl: A Problem and Its Lessons

1. What type of text structure is used in this passage?

A. The author presents a problem (the Dust Bowl) and explains the solutions created to prevent it from happening again.

B. The author uses a chronological timeline of farming technology.

C. The author compares two types of natural disasters.

D. The author gives only facts without structure.

2. What solution helped farmers reduce soil erosion after the Dust Bowl?

A. They planted windbreaks and rotated crops to protect the land.

B. They moved all farms to a different location.

C. They used stronger machines to plow deeper.

D. They waited for more rain and did not change their farming practices.

3. Fill in the blank:

To fix the problem of soil erosion, farmers began using methods like _____ and planting trees to block wind.

4. How does the problem-and-solution structure help you better understand the cause and effects of the Dust Bowl?

_____

_____

_____

5. What can modern farmers learn from the responses to the Dust Bowl?

_____

_____

_____

Parent and Teacher Guide

Guide Reading Level: V
Lexile Level: 950L–1100L
Grade Level: 5th Grade, End of the Year
Genre: Informational – U.S. History / Environmental Science

Introducing the Text

"This passage uses a problem-and-solution structure to explain the causes of the Dust Bowl and how the government and farmers responded. Students will analyze how the structure of the text supports their understanding of the events and the changes that followed."

Vocabulary: erosion, drought, black blizzard, conservation, windbreak

Before Reading Discussion Questions

1. What do you know about farming in the 1930s or during the Great Depression?
2. What happens when soil is dry and there's a lot of wind?
3. Have you ever read a text that explained a problem and how it was solved?

During Reading Discussion Questions

1. What mistakes made the Dust Bowl worse?
2. What solutions did the Soil Conservation Service teach farmers?
3. How does the author describe the relationship between human actions and natural forces?

After Reading Discussion Questions

1. How does the author use a problem-and-solution structure in this passage?
2. What are the key solutions discussed, and how did they improve farming?
3. Why is it important to learn from past environmental mistakes?

Activity Idea

Have students create a two-column chart labeled **Problem** and **Solution**. In each column, they'll list causes of the Dust Bowl and the farming practices that helped prevent it from happening again. Then write a short paragraph explaining how the structure of the text helps readers understand the topic more clearly.