

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Writing Prompts

Prologue: The Great Plow-Up (1880s-1920s)

MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

A NOTE TO THE EDUCATOR:

You will need to decide how best to share these writing prompts with your students. You might share them all and ask students to choose one to respond to. You may assign one or more to the entire class. You might make one or more of the topics the basis for in-class discussions. Where there are multiple questions in a single prompt, choose the question or questions that best suits your students. Make your decisions according to the needs of your group.

You may notice that many of the topics contain some version of the phrase, "Write about a time in your life..." The intent of these prompts is twofold: first, since students remember the content of their own lives, they can more easily respond to the questions, and they are more likely to want to express themselves if they feel competent to do so; second, these questions can form a meaningful bridge between what happens in the lives of ordinary people today and the lives of people in history. For these reasons, you might decide to use some of the prompts before students encounter the history, because thinking about them sets the students up to understand and relate to it better.

Since students vary in their degree of comfort and skill in writing, you should decide when and how much students should write. We suggest that since students need to share their writing with each other to make personal and historical connections, you should encourage them to focus on content rather than mechanical skills. Pieces can be revised and edited later if you decide they should be shared formally (such as on a bulletin board or in a newsletter).

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Read through all the topics first, and then choose one of them to write about. Write the title of the piece at the top of your page. Write in complete sentences. After you are finished, proofread your work for correctness.

THE LAND YOU LIVE ON. During the Prologue, Ginny Dunn gives a lot of background information about the history of the land where her family farm is. She mentions the Civil War, the building of transcontinental railroads, Indian wars, ranching, and farming. What is the history of the land where YOU live? Who were the earliest inhabitants? When did the first Europeans arrive, and who were they? How has your area, neighborhood, town, or city changed over time? You will need to do some research to complete this Writing Prompt.

HOME SWEET HOME. The Dunn family lives in Texas, on a farm located in the southern part of the Great Plains. Describe the farm and compare and contrast its appearance to the place where you live. Consider the environment, the technology, and the people in your answer. What is similar? What is different?

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK. During the farm tour, Frank mentions the chores that he and Ginny must complete to help their parents keep the farm running. From tending the livestock to keeping "varmints" out of the wheat field to watering the vegetable garden, everyone in the Dunn family has work to do. How are work and chores divided among members of your family? What are you asked to do at home to help out? Does everyone in your home have specific tasks to do? Do you think that Frank and Ginny's chores are more or less difficult than your chores? Why? What would Frank and Ginny think about your chores, based on what you know about them so far?

THE TIMES, THEY ARE A-CHANGING. During the farm tour, Frank mentions that the Dunn family has a radio, and has recently started using a tractor rather than horses to plow their land. The technology available to the family is changing. How has technology changed during your lifetime? Are there devices and gadgets that were once a part of your life that you no longer use? Ask an older friend or family member how technology has changed during their lifetime, and how those changes have impacted peoples' lives.

TAKE YOUR CHANCES. Mr. Dunn tells Frank that "farming is always a gamble," and it depends on things like how much it will rain and the price of wheat. If the weather and other forces aren't in their favor, they could stand to lose their income and even their home. Each year that the Dunns farm, they are taking a risk. Write about a time in your life when you took a

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gamble or made a risky decision. What was the decision? Did the gamble pay off for you? Why or why not?

A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITY. When Mr. Dunn asks Frank to help make decisions about the best ways to farm, he gives his son a lot of responsibility. Frank's decisions will have a big impact on all of the Dunns, from the work they do to the amount of money they have in the bank. Do you think a parent today would give a child Frank's age this much responsibility? Why or why not? What is the biggest responsibility you have been given? How did that responsibility make you feel?

GINNY OR FRANK'S JOURNAL. Through either Frank or Ginny's eyes, think about your circumstances from the beginning to the end of this part of "Up from the Dust." Think about your emotions and feelings about life on the farm and with your family. Think about your father's remark that "the boom times" have ended, and what might lie ahead. Think about the choices you made and the consequences of those choices. Now write a diary entry from either Frank or Ginny's point-of-view summarizing what happened to you in the Prologue. You may choose to illustrate one aspect of your entry.