

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Writing Prompts

Part 3: Riding the Rails

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 END OF A FRIEND. At the beginning of Part 3, the Dunn family can no longer keep Frank's prize-winning cow. There is no grass for her to eat, and the family can't afford to buy her feed. To keep the cow's suffering to a minimum, Mr. Dunn decides she must be killed. Even today, people find themselves in difficult situations with pets that are old and sick. They must confront the awful decision to let their animals suffer, possibly with prolonged deaths, or be put down immediately. How did you react when the cow was killed? Did you agree or disagree with Mr. Dunn's decision? Why? What would you have done if you were in Frank's position?

A SERIOUS SITUATION. As Part 3 begins, the Dunn family is in a serious situation. The drought has continued. Their crops are failing. They are no longer able to feed the animals on their farm. They don't have a lot of money. Ginny and Frank, though only teenagers, have to confront and deal with very real and adult problems. Have you ever had to manage a problem or situation that was difficult, serious, or very adult? What was it, and how did you react to it? If you have not had to manage a serious situation, what do you think your response would be if faced by one? How do you think a person of your age could best react if faced with very adult problems?

WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO VISIT? When Frank is deciding to run away from home, he and Ginny discuss the different places he may want to go. They discuss Chicago, Pike's Peak, and the Grand Ole Opry. If you could get on a train and go anywhere in the United States, where would you go? Why? What would you do once you got there? Do you think your choice would be surprising to your friends and family? Why or why not?

FREE TRANSPORTATION? When Frank decides to "ride the rails," and take trains across the country without paying for tickets, he is stealing. Riding the rails was illegal. People found doing it could be mistreated by railroad security and arrested. Given the situation on the Dunn farm, was Frank justified in deciding to ride the rails? Is breaking the law ever justified? When? Can you think of any situation that would compel you to break the law?

A HELPING HAND. While Frank is riding the rails, he sees people coming together to help each other out in different ways. What are some of the acts of charity and kindness you saw while riding the rails? During the Depression, how did people work together to cause change,



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or at least try to cause change? When people are faced with serious challenges today, such as financial difficulties or natural disasters, how do people come together to help out? Write about a time in your life when people banded together to help out those who were facing difficulty.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. As Frank travels, he hears people with different perspectives and viewpoints on the condition of the United States. The nation is in the midst of the worst economic crisis it has ever faced. Many people are out of work and close to starving. They have very little hope for the future of the country. What are your thoughts on the future of the United States? What are the nation's greatest strengths and greatest challenges today? What would you do to make the U.S. even better?

STAYING ALIVE, STAYING ALIVE. While Frank is riding the rails, he survives by taking charity (people choose to give him food), or working odd jobs for food and shelter. Do you think Frank should feel ashamed because he had to ask people for food? Why or why not? Think about a time in your life when you had to ask for help or assistance. Were you ashamed? Why or why not? Does society have a duty to help those who are less fortunate? Explain your answer.

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 life while riding the rails. Think about 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 Part 3. You may choose to illustrate one aspect of your entry.