2 COACHED EXAMPLE

Read the passage.

Background Information about the Dust Bowl

Starting in 1929, the United States plunged into the Great Depression. This time of high unemployment and low wages lasted through the 1930s into the 1940s. People found themselves jobless, penniless, hungry, and with little to look forward to. To add to the terrible economic times, the southern Great Plains suffered a prolonged and dangerous drought beginning in 1931 and lasting until 1939. The devastating results of so little rain were huge dust storms that swept through states like Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. The region became known as the Dust Bowl. Farmers had no means to cultivate crops or shield their cattle. People could not venture outside or breathe the air. Multitudes of families packed their meager belongings and headed to California, hoping to pick up the pieces of their lives.

To document this near decade of tragedy, the government hired photographers and film directors to record images of the times. The program was part of the Resettlement Administration, a New Deal program. Pare Lorentz was selected to produce a film revealing what had developed in the Dust Bowl region.

excerpt from

"The Plow That Broke the Plains" *from* the Documentary Film Script

by Pare Lorentz

PROLOGUE

This is a record of land . . . of soil, rather than people
a story of the Great Plains: the 400,000,000 acres of windswept grasslands that spread up from the Texas Panhandle to Canada . . .
a high, treeless continent, without rivers, without streams . . .
a country of high winds, and sun . . . and of little rain . . .

CATTLE

First came the cattle . . . an unfenced range a thousand miles long . . .
an uncharted ocean of grass, the southern range for winter grazing
and the mountain plateaus for summer.
It was a cattleman's Paradise . . .
For a decade the world discovered the grasslands and poured cattle into
the plains.
The railroads brought markets to the edge of the plains . . .
land syndicates sprang up overnight and the cattle rolled into the West.

HOMESTEADERS

The railroad brought the world into the plains . . . new populations, new
needs crowded the last frontier.
Once again the plowman followed the herder and the pioneer came to the plains.
Make way for the plowman!
The first fence.
Progress came to the plain.
Two hundred miles from water, two hundred miles from home, but the land is
new. High winds and sun . . . a country without rivers and with little rain.
Settler, plow at your peril!

DROUGHT

A country without rivers . . . without streams . . . with little rain . . .
Once again the rains held off and the sun baked the earth.
This time no grass held moisture against the winds and the sun . . . this time
millions of acres of plowed land lay open to the sun.

DEVASTATION

Baked out—blown out—and broke!
Year in, year out, uncomplaining they fought
the worst drought in history . . . their stock choked to death on the barren land . . .
their homes were nightmares of swirling dust night and day.
Many went ahead of it—but many stayed
until stock, machinery, homes, credit, food, and even hope were gone.
On to the West!
Once again they headed for the setting sun.
Once again they headed West.
Last year in every summer month 50,000 people left the Great Plains and hit the highways for the Pacific Coast, the last border.
Blown out—baked out—and broke . . .
nothing to stay for . . . nothing to hope for . . .
homeless, penniless and bewildered they joined the great army of the highways.
No place to go . . . and no place to stop.
Nothing to eat . . . nothing to do . . .
their homes on four wheels . . . their work a
desperate gamble for a day's labor in the fields along the highways . . .
The price of a sack of beans or a tank of gas.
All they ask is a chance to start over
and a chance for their children to eat
to have medical care, to have homes again.
50,000 a month!
The sun and winds wrote the most tragic chapter in American agriculture.

Answer the following questions.

1 This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A

How is the section "Homesteaders" organized?

A. in time-order sequence

B. by cause and effect

C. by compare and contrast

D. by problem and solution

Part B

Underline examples in the passage that support your answer to Part A.

Hint Look for words that tell whether the events are told in order, are compared, or explain how one event led to other events. If you can find any one of those relationships, you can then identify the structure.

2 Read these phrases from the passage and the question that follows.

a high, treeless continent, without rivers, without streams . . .
a country of high winds, and sun . . . and of little rain . . .

Why does the author use these phrases to describe the Great Plains?

A. to predict the outcome of storms

B. to explain that the area is unprotected from the effects of nature

C. to compare the region to areas with water

D. to provide background about the event that affects the area

Hint The passage describes the land as exposed. Why would the author want the reader to know that information about the land?

4 This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A

What is "The Plow That Broke the Plains" mostly about?

A. what happened to the people of the Midwest in the 1930s

B. a record of the lands of the Great Plains in the 1930s

C. an explanation of the causes of the Great Depression

D. the story of why people moved to the Great Plains

Part B

Which line from the text **best** supports the answer in Part A?

A. This is a record of land . . . of soil, rather than people
a story of the Great Plains.

B. The railroads brought markets to the edge of the plains . . .

C. Once again the rains held off and the sun baked the earth.

D. . . . land syndicates sprang up overnight and the cattle rolled into the West.

Hint The main idea of a text is often stated at the beginning or in a prologue.