

Assessing with Primary Sources

Grade Level: Middle School (6-8)

Standard(s) or Objectives: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.6 - Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

Library of Congress Resources:

I'D RATHER NOT BE ON RELIEF

Letter Writer
Winter, 1938

We go around all dressed in rags
While the rest of the world goes neat,
And we have to be satisfied
With half enough to eat,
We have to live in load-outs,
Or else we live in a tent,
For when we buy our bread and beans
There's nothing left for rent.

I'd rather not be on the rolls of relief,
Or work on the W. P. A.,
We'd rather work for the farmer
If the farmer could raise the crop!
Then the farmer could plant more cotton
And he'd get more money for goods,
Instead of wearing patches,
We'd dress up in new suits.

From the east and west and north and south
Side a mass of men we come,
The migratory workers
Are worse off than a bum,
We go to Mr. Farmer
And ask him what he'll pay!
He says, "Ten gray workers
Can live on a hole in a day."

I'd rather not be on the rolls of relief,
Or work on the W. P. A.,
We'd rather work for the farmer
If the farmer could raise the crop!
Then the farmer could plant more cotton
And he'd get more money for goods,
Instead of wearing patches,
We'd dress up in new suits.

We don't ask for subsidies
We want a better life,
But we're bound to raise the dikes
While our families are underdike,
Now the winter is on us
And the cotton is long in the field,
What are we going to live on?
While we're waiting for a hole to mend?

(cont'd)

I'd Rather Not be on Relief—Song Lyrics, Published/Created at Shafer FSA Camp, 1938.

<http://www.loc.gov/item/toddbib000454/>

Topic Background:

In the 1930s, disaster struck the southwestern Great Plains region of the United States. In the heartland of the U.S., poor soil conservation practices and extreme weather conditions exacerbated the existing misery of the Great Depression and instigated the largest migration in American history.

Excerpted from: http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/dust-bowl-migration/pdf/teacher_guide.pdf

Source Used:

The source used for this assessment includes excerpts from a folk song about the experiences of migrants during the 1930s Dust Bowl.

Multiple Choice Answer Key:

Question 1 – B

The Dust Bowl (1930s)
Experts from 1930s Song "I'd Rather Not be on Relief"

We go around all dressed in rags
While the rest of the world goes neat,
And we have to be satisfied
With half enough to eat.
We have to live in lean-tos,
Or else we live in a tent,
For when we buy our bread and beans
There's nothing left for rent.

I'd rather not be on the rolls of relief,
Or work on the W. P. A.,
We'd rather work for the farmer
If the farmer could raise the pay;
Then the farmer could plant more cotton
And he'd get more money for spuds,
Instead of wearing patches,
We'd dress up in new duds.

From the east and west and north and south
Like a swarm of bees we come;
The migratory workers
Are worse off than a bum.
We go to Mr. Farmer
And ask him what he'll pay;
He says, "You gypsy workers
Can live on a buck a day."

I'd rather not be on the rolls of relief,
Or work on the W. P. A.,
We'd rather work for the farmer
If the farmer could raise the pay;
Then the farmer could plant more cotton
And he'd get more money for spuds,
Instead of wearing patches,
We'd dress up in new duds.

Question:

- 1) The performer of this song states "I'd rather not be on the rolls of relief" several times throughout the song. "The roles of relief" refer to government aid provided to needy or unemployed people. The performer expresses a specific point of view concerning why it is difficult to get off these "roles of relief." Which statement best describes the authors point of view?

(CCSS - RI.6.6)

- a) The performer feels there are no jobs available to him or her.
- b) The performer feels that farmers are not willing to pay a high enough wages.
- c) The performer feels his or her ragged clothing is limiting employment opportunities.
- d) The performer is simply too exhausted to continue performing farm labor.