

Year 5

Danger on the Prairie 1

Inference 2d

In 1862, I was 10 years old. My family moved to the prairie that year. I was upset about leaving Virginia, the only place I had ever lived. I knew I would miss it terribly.

I blamed the United States government for my problem. Congress had passed a law that year, called the Homestead Act. The act promised free land to almost anyone who wanted it. But the land was located out West on the American frontier, far from my home in Virginia.

Pa told me that a frontier was unexplored land. He said it would be a great adventure. To me, moving to an unknown place wasn't an adventure. It seemed more like a punishment!

Still, I could understand why my father was so excited. We rented our land in Virginia and grew only a small number of crops. The Homestead Act provided about 160 acres to anyone older than 21 who wanted it. The only conditions were that you had to build a house on the property and farm the land for five years.

It seemed like a dream come true for my Pa. He had always talked about owning his own land one day.

Ma and Pa decided to uproot from Virginia and settle out West. My brother, Jacob, was 13 years old when we moved, and my little sister, Mary, was only three.

Ma and Pa had saved money over the years. By 1862, they had enough to buy a covered wagon, oxen and some supplies for the trip. It was dangerous to make the journey alone. Out on the trail, there were bandits, buffalo herds and animal stampedes. There were also storms, flooding and bumpy paths to contend with.

We joined a group of travellers who planned to settle in Kansas. By travelling in a caravan, everyone could help one another and, we hoped, stay safe. The wagon journey was long, hard and, at times, boring. The weather always seemed to be either very hot or freezing cold. Mary was restless from being confined to a hot wagon crammed with supplies. She was too little to walk alongside the wagons like some of the other travellers did.

At the end of each day, before settling down for the night, we would draw the wagons into a tight circle. This formed a corral to keep the travellers, as well as the horses and livestock, well protected. When we stopped, Jacob would go off with Pa and the other men to hunt or fish for something to eat for dinner. I would stay behind with the women and other children to prepare a fire, help with the cooking and mind the baby.

We also unpacked the supplies we would need. We had water barrels that we refilled whenever we passed a spring or mountain stream. We had food that wouldn't spoil, such as salted pork, cornmeal, dried beans and honey. We also made use of anything we could find on the way, including seeds and berries.

Questions

1 Look at the first three paragraphs. The main character was unhappy about moving away from Virginia. Give **one** piece of evidence that shows this.

2 Read from 'Pa told me that a frontier was unexplored land' to 'He had always talked about owning his own land one day.'

Tick **two** statements that are true about Pa.

Tick **two**.

He was happy with life in Virginia.

He wanted a smaller plot of land.

He is adventurous.

He was looking forward to moving.

He was worried about moving.

3 Read the paragraph that starts with 'We joined a group of travellers who planned to settle in Kansas.'

How can you tell the main character did not like travelling in a wagon?

Give **three** ways.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4

Draw **three** lines to match each character to the most suitable description.

Mary

helpful

Pa

enthusiastic

Jacob

unsettled

5

What **impression** do you get of what the journey in the wagon was like?

Give **two** impressions, using evidence from the text to support your answer.

1. _____

2. _____

Answers

- 1 Look at the first three paragraphs. The main character was unhappy about moving away from Virginia. Give **one** piece of evidence that shows this.

Any one of the following quotes (also accept a paraphrase).

I was upset about leaving Virginia / The character was upset about leaving Virginia.

The character says, 'I knew I would miss it terribly' / The character says she would miss Virginia terribly.

To me, moving to an unknown place wasn't an adventure / The characters says it wasn't an adventure.

She says, 'It seemed more like a punishment!'

- 2 Read from 'Pa told me that a frontier was unexplored land' to 'He had always talked about owning his own land one day.'

Tick **two** statements that are true about Pa.

Tick **two**.

He was happy with life in Virginia.

He wanted a smaller plot of land.

He is adventurous.

He was looking forward to moving.

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- 3 Read the paragraph that starts with, 'We joined a group of travellers who planned to settle in Kansas.'

How can you tell the main character did not like travelling in a wagon?

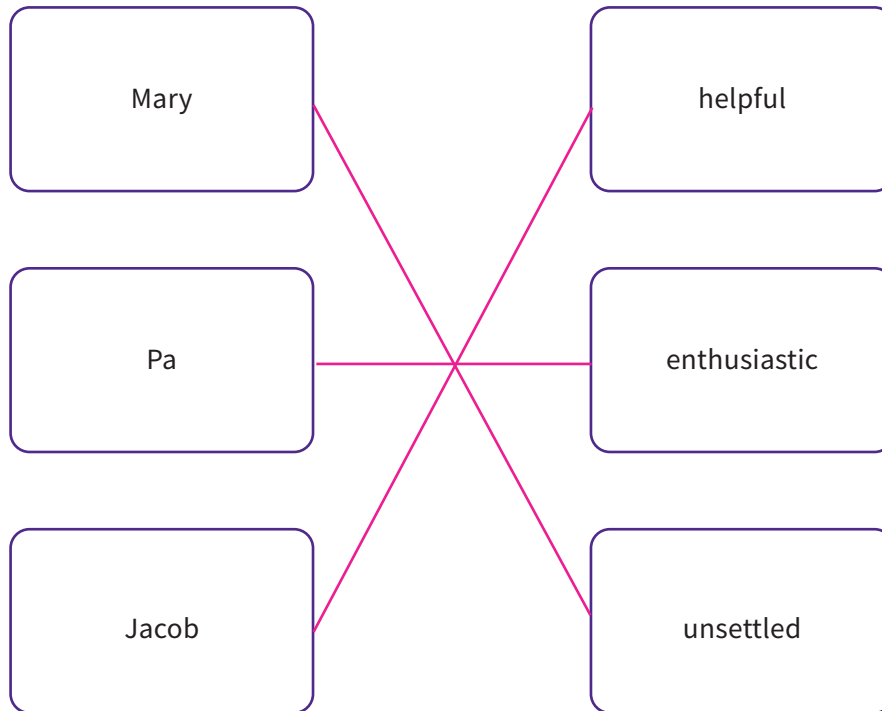
Give **three** ways.

The wagon journey was long, hard and, at times, boring.

The weather always seemed to be either very hot or freezing cold.

Mary was restless (from being confined to a hot wagon crammed with supplies).

4 Draw **three** lines to match each character to the most suitable description.



5 What **impression** do you get of what the journey in the wagon was like?

Give **two** impressions, using evidence from the text to support your answer.

Any two of the following:

Dangerous/risky/perilous – with an explanation referencing one or more of the following: bandits, buffalo herds and animal stampedes. There were also storms, flooding and bumpy paths to contend with.

Long and/or hard – it was either very hot or freezing cold or there were storms, flooding and bumpy paths (to contend with).

Boring – Mary was restless and too young to walk alongside the wagon.

Uncomfortable – it was either very hot or freezing cold.

Safe - we would draw the wagons into a tight circle. This formed a corral to keep the travellers, as well as the horses and livestock, well protected.