

## Overview

This lesson provides a brief background of the rise of the People's Party or Populism and focuses on the role this party played in helping Kansans in need. Students will analyze primary source documents including a letter from a farmer's wife and Governor Lorenzo Lewelling's Executive Circular. If students have previous knowledge of Populism, the teacher may choose not to use the **The Populist Party** *Read Kansas!* card with the lesson. This would shorten the lesson from two days to one.

## Standards

Current standards can be found on [kshs.org](http://kshs.org).

## Objectives

Content:

- The students will identify social and economic issues that led to the growth of the Populist movement in Kansas.
- The students will recognize ways in which the people brought change to government.
- The students will describe the Populist governor's reaction to the situation of the homeless.

Skills:

- The students will use expository text to identify cause and effect relationships.
- The students will listen to a persuasive letter and identify the phrases that appeal to emotion.
- The students will read historical documents for the purpose of identifying main ideas and supporting details.

## Essential Questions

- How do ordinary people effect change in government?
- What responsibility does government have to those who are poor or without resources?

# Activities

This activity uses the following *Read Kansas* cards:

- **The Populist Party**
- **Letter to Governor Lewelling from Susan Orcutt**
- **The People's Governor: Lorenzo Lewelling's Executive Circular**

## Day 1

1. Introduce the lesson with a short discussion of political parties today by introducing the idea of two major political parties and raising the prospect of a third political party.
2. Have students pair-read **The Populist Party** *Read Kansas!* card. As they read they should discuss among themselves the issues Kansas farmers faced in the 1880s (disillusionment with big Eastern business, railroads, government corruption, and the plight of the farmer).
3. Once students have completed reading the card, give each student a copy of the **A Call for Change** and **People Take Action** graphic organizers to complete by linking cause and effect.
4. Conclude the lesson by conducting a discussion based on these main points and record the students' answers on the board:
  - issues that led to Populism, both nationwide and specifically in Kansas (based on students' recognition of cause and effect)
  - how people effected change
  - ways the Populist Party helped ordinary people

**Extended Activity:** Ask students to discuss with an adult, if possible, the issues facing farmers in the 1880s and the formation of the Populist Party. Have students ask the adult to help them identify similarities between the 1880s and today. Students should return to class the next day prepared to discuss some of these similarities.

## Day 2

1. Conduct a short review of the problems faced by farmers in the late 1880s. Ask students how people back then could get government officials to listen to them. Do Americans face similar situations today? How do we attempt to bring about political and economic change?
2. Give each student a copy of the **Letter to Governor Lewelling from Susan Orcutt** *Read Kansas!* card. Use this to show students an example of persuasive writing that is full of emotion showing the disillusionment Orcutt experienced as a farmer's wife. Read the letter aloud to students. While you are reading have them write down the statements Orcutt uses to appeal to the governor's emotions.
3. Conduct a discussion about the purpose of the letter and the emotional appeal that Orcutt uses to explain their situation to the governor. List the purposes on the board. They should include:
  - unemployment her husband faces
  - lack of foodFor discussion purposes examples of emotional appeal may include:
  - "Starving to death"
  - "pretty hard to do without any thing to eat"
  - "God for saken country"

- “if the hail hadn’t cut our rye down and ruined our corn and Potatoes”
  - “my husband went a way to find work”
  - “would have to Starve”
  - “he has bin in ten countys and did not Get no work”
  - “pretty hard for a woman to do without any thing to eat when She doesn’t no what minute She will be confined to bed”
  - “if I was In Iowa I would be all right”
  - “I havent had nothing to eat to day and It is three oclock”
4. Using a map of Kansas ask a student to locate Ellis County, the location of Mendota.
  5. Divide the class into five groups. Give each student a copy of **The People’s Governor: Lorenzo Lewelling’s Executive Circular** *Read Kansas!* card. Allow time for students to read the information.
  6. Explain to the class that each group will be assigned one portion of Governor Lewelling’s Executive Circular to examine. Provide each student in the group a copy of his/her assigned section of the **Finding the Main Idea** graphic organizer set—there are five different graphic organizers in this set.
    - Have each group read the section of the circular that is on its graphic organizer. Have students discuss among themselves any phrases or terms they don’t understand. If they cannot reach a consensus as to the meanings, have them highlight these. As students work through the assignment, visit with each group to help students with these troublesome words and phrases.
    - Students are to find the main idea and the details that support this main idea. Each section’s graphic organizer has questions to direct students.
    - Provide each group with a large sheet of construction paper and a marker to record the section number, main idea, and supporting details for the section assigned to them.
    - After students have finished, have each group report the main idea and supporting details of their sections to the rest of the class beginning with Section 1. Post the construction paper summaries on the board in sequence.
  7. Provide discussion time to answer the essential questions:
    - How do ordinary people effect change in government?
    - What responsibility does government have to those who are poor or without resources?
  8. Have students create an “exit ticket” before leaving the room. Each student must write a few sentences demonstrating his or her understanding of how ordinary people can impact government.

## Assessment

1. Evaluate the students' ability to complete the cause and effect worksheet.
2. Evaluate the students' ability to identify the descriptive statements in Orcutt's letter.
3. Evaluate the students' ability to find the main idea and supporting details in the executive circular.
4. Evaluate the students' ability to write about how ordinary people can affect government.

## For the Teacher

If you are using the textbook, *The Kansas Journey*, this lesson can be used with pages 172-179. The text of the letter from Susan Orcutt is included in the textbook, but this lesson is purposely designed to use the letter in an activity based on specific history and reading standards.

The letter from Mrs. Orcutt was written from a farm near Mendota, Kansas. Mendota was in the northwestern corner of Ellis County in north central Kansas and the Orcutt farm was across the county line in Trego County. This area was suffering from a severe drought at the time Mrs. Orcutt wrote the letter and many farmers were forced to look for work elsewhere. Mrs. Orcutt mentions being "confined to bed" soon, which probably meant that she was pregnant and would soon give birth.

### **Background of The People's Governor: Governor Lewelling's Executive Circular.**

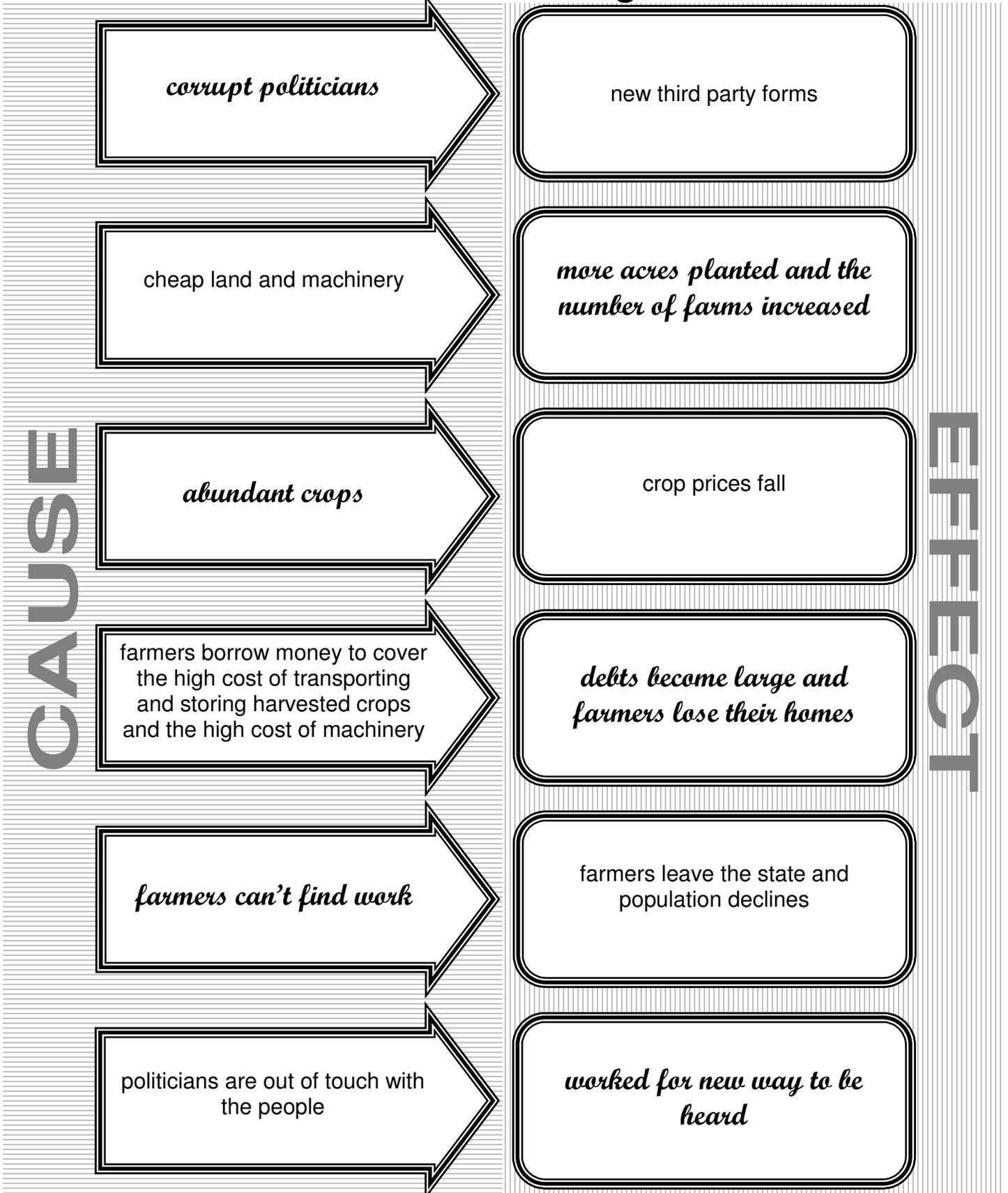
This was an executive circular sent to metropolitan police commissioners. The circular refers to vagrancy laws of first class cities as written in the General Statutes of Kansas 1889. The General Statutes is a compilation of all Kansas laws, including the session laws of 1889. The statute that is referred to in Governor Lewelling's Executive Circular is found in Chapter 18—Cities of the First Class; Article 3—General Powers of Mayor and Council; Number 571.

***Firearms; vagrants.** (23). The council shall prohibit and punish the carrying of firearms, or other dangerous or deadly weapons, concealed or otherwise, and cause to be arrested and imprisoned, fined or set to work, all vagrants, tramps, confidence men and persons found in said city without visible means of support, or some legitimate business.*

Students need to be aware that it was very common for frontier farmers to seek employment off their farms during certain times of the year, especially during the years right after settlement or during periods of hard times. This search for off-farm employment might take farmers to nearby towns or distant locations to look for work with railroads or other businesses and could lead to weeks and months away from home. Often this added to the hardship and isolation of family members, specifically wives, left behind for long periods of time.

Answer Keys

# A Call for Change



# People Take Action

CAUSE

Republicans were dominated by the railroad companies and by corruption

by promising to get rid of corruption

*Populists run for office*

*the Populist campaign during the 1892 election*

Democrats combine with Populists and nominate William Jennings Bryan for president

*Democrats and Populists combined*

*Populists formed to get the government to help with the railroad problem and to obtain political justice*

*Populists were elected to Congress*

gained control of the Kansas House of Representatives

caused Governor Lewelling to be elected

*Republican William McKinley won the election*

the Populist Party lost its identity

EFFECT

## Gov. Lewelling's Executive Circular, Finding the Main Idea

<b>Section 1 Vocabulary</b>	
<b>Vocabulary/terms</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
reign of Elizabeth	Elizabeth I of England
sturdy vagrants	capable of withstanding considerable hardship while wandering from place to place without a job
incorrigible vagabonds	people incapable of being reformed or corrected who wander from place to place without jobs
France, just previous to the revolution	just before the French Revolution of 1789, when France was in a state of bankruptcy; the nobility continued to live a life of conspicuous consumption while the peasants were starving
term of years in the galleys	a convict sentenced for a number of years to man an oar on a large warship
the monopoly of labor-saving machinery and its devotion to selfish instead of social use have rendered more and more human beings superfluous	exclusive control of machines by the wealthy for their own monetary gain; machines reduce the number of men needed to complete a task

<b>Section 2 Vocabulary</b>	
<b>Vocabulary/terms</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
classed with "confidence men"	a person who cheats someone through deception
city ordinances of similar import	laws of various cities that are similar in meaning
languished in the city prisons	to become very weak or feeble (wasted away) while confined to jail
performed unrequited toil on "rock piles"	punishment that consists of manually breaking big rocks into little ones without pay
municipal slaves	being forced to do manual labor for the city without pay
litigate with their oppressors	to engage in legal proceedings with a harsh ruler or authority
appellate court	a court that can review decisions made by a lower court

<b>Section 3 Vocabulary</b>	
<b>Vocabulary/terms</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
power becomes fiendish	power causes people to become cruel
laws are faithfully executed	laws are consistently carried out
instrumentality of the state	agent of the state government
person within its jurisdiction	person within the government's area of control
inhuman vagrancy law	cruel laws against those without jobs

### Section 4 Vocabulary

Vocabulary/terms	Definitions
sleeping in a box car	people without homes would often spend the night in open railroad cars
heinous crime	wicked crimes
usurped a sovereign power	laid claim to the power given to the highest ranking official
highest functionaries of the states	top ranking officials of the state
peremptorily 'ordered to leave town'	commanding someone to leave town
obedience to a mere whim	following a sudden idea
voluntary idleness	the willing act of passing time without working; relaxing
Diogenes	third century Greek philosopher who searched for an honest man
some legitimate business	lawful business
let simple poverty cease to be a crime	stop punishing people for being poor

### Section 5 Vocabulary

Vocabulary/terms	Definitions
ordinance	law
culprit	a person charged with a crime
municipal slave	someone forced to work for the city with no pay
"rock piles"	punishment that consists of manually breaking big rocks into little ones without pay
"bull pens"	a place for the temporary detention of prisoners
flagrant violation of constitutional prohibition	disgraceful breaking of laws established by the constitution
degrading	reducing in value
relics of a departed auction-block era	something that has survived from the times when slaves were sold to the highest bidder

### Section 1 Main Idea

What is the assumption of the law?

*Able-bodied people who are willing to work can always find work to do.*

Supporting details:

- *British called the unemployed poor vagrants and whipped them*
- *French punished those without work by assigning them to ships*
- *Americans have more than one million unemployed and punish them*

### Section 2 Main Idea

Who are the victims of the law?

*The poor and humble that are without work.*

Supporting details:

- *guilty of no crime but poverty*
- *intent upon no crime but seeking employment*
- *cannot give bond and appeal*
- *too poor to litigate*

### Section 3 Main Idea

Whom should government protect?

*Everyone should have equal protection under the law including the millions who are without jobs.*

Supporting details:

- *first duty of government is to the weak*
- *governor's duty is to see the laws are faithfully executed*
- *persons shall not be denied equal protection of the law*

### Section 4 Main Idea

What is guaranteed by the Constitution?

*The right to go freely from place to place.*

Supporting details:

- *personal liberty guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution*
- *no power in legislature or city council allows denial of right to seek happiness as long as he harms no other*
- *let simple poverty cease to be a crime*

### Section 5 Main Idea

What does Governor Lewelling want?

*He wants the rock pile and bull pen to become unused in Kansas cities.*

Supporting details:

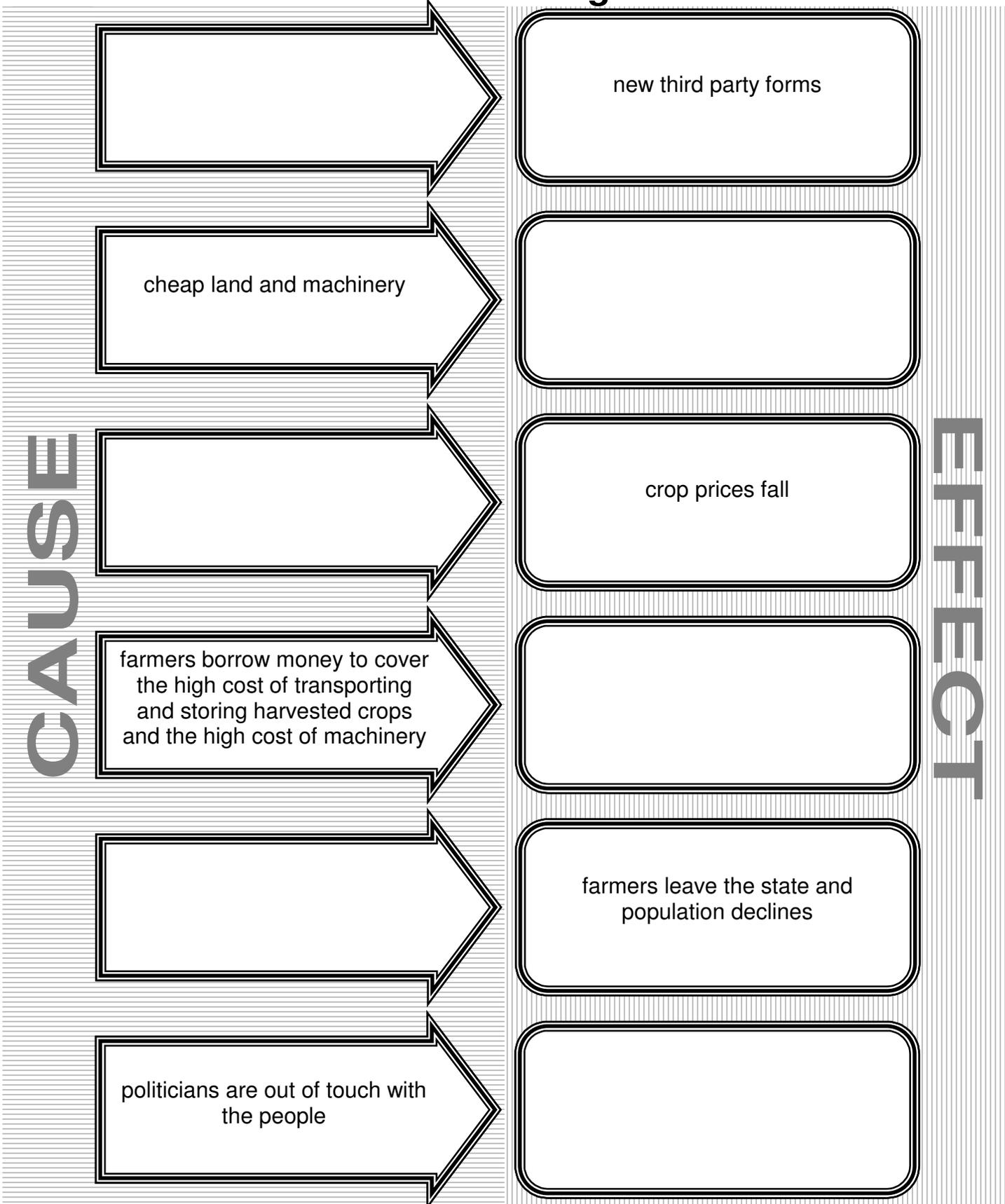
- *if police court fines are not paid, the person must work out the amount as a municipal slave*
- *rock piles and bull pens are used to enforce these ordinances*
- *slavery is imposed as a means of collecting a debt*

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Resources for this lesson are from:

- Kansas Historical Society collections

# A Call for Change



# People Take Action

CAUSE

Republicans were dominated by the railroad companies and by corruption

by promising to get rid of corruption

gained control of the Kansas House of Representatives

caused Governor Lewelling to be elected

Democrats combine with Populists and nominate William Jennings Bryan for president

the Populist Party lost its identity

EFFECT

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Finding the Main Idea

Executive Circular from L. D. Lewelling, Governor (1893)

### EXECUTIVE CIRCULAR, SECTION 1

*In the reign of Elizabeth, the highways were filled with the throngs of the unemployed poor, who were made to "move on," and were sometimes brutally whipped, sometimes summarily hanged, as "sturdy vagrants" or "incorrigible vagabonds." In France, just previous to the revolution, the punishment of being poor and out of work was, for the first offense, a term of years in the galleys, for the second offense, the galleys for life. In this country, the monopoly of labor-saving machinery and its devotion to selfish instead of social use, have rendered more and more human beings superfluous, until we have a standing army of the unemployed numbering even in the most prosperous times not less than one million able-bodied men; yet until recently it was the prevailing notion, as it is yet, the notion of all but the work people themselves, and those of other classes given to thinking, that whosoever being able bodied and willing to work can always find work to do, and section 571 of the General Statutes of 1889 is a disgraceful reminder how savage even in Kansas has been our treatment of the most unhappy of our human brothers.*

#### Section 1

What is the assumption of the law?

Supporting details:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Finding the Main Idea

Executive Circular from L. D. Lewelling, Governor (1893)

### EXECUTIVE CIRCULAR, SECTION 2

*The man out of work and penniless, is by this legislation, classed with "confidence men." Under this statute and city ordinances of similar import, thousands of men guilty of no crime but poverty, intent upon no crime but seeking employment, have languished in the city prisons of Kansas or performed unrequited toil on "rock piles" as municipal slaves, because ignorance of economic conditions had made us cruel. The victims have been the poor and humble for whom police courts are the courts of last resort. They cannot give bond and appeal. They have been unheeded and uncared for by the busy world which wastes no time visiting prisoners in jail. They have been too poor to litigate with their oppressors, and thus no voice from this underworld of human woe has ever reached the ear of the appellate court, because it was no body's business to be his brother's keeper.*

#### Section 2

Who are the victims of the law?

Supporting details:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Finding the Main Idea

Executive Circular from L. D. Lewelling, Governor (1893)

### EXECUTIVE CIRCULAR, SECTION 3

*But those who sit in the seats of power are bound by the highest obligation to especially regard the cause of the oppressed and helpless poor. The first duty of the government is to the weak. Power becomes fiendish if it be not the protector and sure reliance of the friendless to whose complaints all other ears are dulled. It is my duty to see that the Laws are faithfully executed, and among those laws is the constitutional provision that no instrumentality of the state "shall deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." And who needs to be told that equal protection of the laws does not prevail where this inhuman vagrancy law is enforced? It separates men into two distinct classes, differentiated as those who are penniless and those who are not, and declare the former criminals. Only the latter are entitled to the liberty guaranteed by the constitution. To be found in a city "without some visible means of support or some legitimate business" is the involuntary condition of some millions at this moment, and we proceed to punish them for being victims of conditions which we, as a people, have forced upon them.*

#### Section 3

Whom should government protect?

Supporting details:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Finding the Main Idea

Executive Circular from L. D. Lewelling, Governor (1893)

### EXECUTIVE CIRCULAR, SECTION 4

*I have noticed in police court reports that "sleeping in a box car" is among the varieties of this heinous crime of being poor. Some police judges have usurped a sovereign power not permitted by highest functionaries of the states or of the nation, and victims of the industrial conditions have been peremptorily "ordered to leave town." The right to go freely from place to place in search of employment, or even in obedience to a mere whim, is part of that personal liberty guaranteed by the constitution of the United States to every human being on American soil. If voluntary idleness is not forbidden; if a Diogenes preferred poverty; if a Columbus choose hunger, and the discoverer of a new race, rather than seek personal comfort by engaging in "some legitimate business" I am aware of no power in the legislature or in city councils to deny him the right to seek happiness in his own way, so long as he harms no other, rich or poor; but let simple poverty cease to be a crime.*

#### Section 4

What is guaranteed by the Constitution?

Supporting details:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Finding the Main Idea

Executive Circular from L. D. Lewelling, Governor (1893)

### EXECUTIVE CIRCULAR, SECTION 5

*In some cities it is provided by ordinance that if police court fines be not paid or secured the culprit shall be compelled to work out the amount as a municipal slave; and "rock piles" and "bull pens" are provided for the enforcement of these ordinances. And so it appears that this slavery is not imposed as a punishment but solely as a means of collecting a debt.*

*Such city ordinances are in flagrant violation of constitutional prohibition. The "rock pile" and the "bull pen" have only been used in degrading the friendless and poor, and are relics of a departed auction-block era which have not ceased to disgrace the cities of Kansas.*

*And let the dawn of Christmas day find the "rock pile" and the "bull pen", and the crime of being homeless and poor, obsolete in all the cities of Kansas governed by the metropolitan police act.*

*It is confidently expected that their own regard for constitutional liberty and their human impulses will induce police commissioners to carry out the spirit as well as the letter of the foregoing suggestions.*

L. D. LEWELLING,  
Governor

#### Section 5

What does Governor Lewelling want?

Supporting details: