Evidence Cards

When Evacuation Becomes Migration: Mapping Population Change After the 1927 Flood

Student Directions

Your group will receive several evidence cards.

For each card:

1. Read the evidence carefully.
2. Decide whether it represents a **PUSH**, **PULL**, or **PATHWAY**.
3. Some cards may fit more than one category. Be prepared to explain your reasoning.
4. Place the evidence on your migration map where it matters.
5. Use at least **three evidence cards** when making your household's final decision:

RETURN • RELOCATE NEARBY • MIGRATE FARTHER AWAY

EVIDENCE CARD 1

A Home Under Water

Floodwater damaged homes, furniture, tools, food supplies, and clothing throughout the Delta. Even after the water receded, families faced mud, damaged buildings, and the cost and labor of rebuilding.

What might this evidence make a family consider?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 2

The Crop Is Gone

Many farming families lost most or all of the year's crop. Returning to the Delta did not mean immediately returning to a normal income. Fields had to dry, farms had to be repaired, and another crop had to be planted.

How could the loss of a crop affect a migration decision?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 3

Starting Again in Debt

Many Black farmers in the Delta worked as sharecroppers or tenant farmers. Families often depended on landowners or merchants for land, housing, seed, food, and supplies purchased on credit. After the flood, rebuilding could mean borrowing again.

Would returning restore a family's old life—or restore an old system of dependence?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 4

“We Need Our Labor Back”

The plantation economy depended heavily on agricultural labor. After the flood, landowners needed workers to return so that fields could be restored and cotton production could resume. Some workers, however, saw the destruction caused by the flood as another reason to consider leaving.

Could “economic recovery” mean different things to employers and workers?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 5

Restricted Mobility

During the flood, some Black refugees experienced restrictions on their movement and pressure to perform labor. For people who had already experienced limited political and economic freedom, the disaster could add another reason to consider opportunities elsewhere.

How might this experience affect someone's willingness to return?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 6

Jim Crow Did Not Wash Away

The flood destroyed buildings and crops, but it did not eliminate racial discrimination. Black families returning to the Delta still faced Jim Crow segregation, limited political power, discriminatory institutions, and unequal economic opportunities.

Did the flood create these conditions?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 7

Another Flood?

A family's home can be repaired. But the family remembers how high the water rose, and they remember waiting to see whether the levee would hold. They must now decide whether rebuilding means accepting the possibility of another flood.

How does future environmental risk enter a migration decision?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 8

The Railroad Station

Railroad lines connected Mississippi and Louisiana communities with Memphis, St. Louis, Chicago, Houston, Detroit, and other cities. A family did not need its own automobile to imagine leaving the region.

Does a reason to leave matter if there is no practical way to go?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 9

Someone Went Before You

Thousands of Black Southerners had already migrated to northern and midwestern cities before the 1927 flood. That meant some Delta families already had relatives or friends living outside the region.

How might earlier migration make later migration easier?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 10

A Letter From Chicago

A relative writes from Chicago. Factory work is difficult; housing is expensive. Winters are unbelievably cold. But, wages are paid in cash, and the writer knows employers who sometimes hire Black workers.

Is this simply a pull factor, or is the person writing the letter also part of a pathway?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 11

Memphis as a Gateway

For many migrants leaving the Mississippi Delta, Memphis was not necessarily the final destination. Its railroad connections made it a gateway to cities farther north, including St. Louis and Chicago.

On your map, should Memphis be a destination, a pathway, or both?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 12

Cash Wages

A sharecropper's income depended partly on the crop, debts, and the final settlement with a landowner or merchant. Industrial jobs in cities could offer wages paid directly in cash. The work might still be difficult and discriminatory, but the economic relationship was different.

Why might cash wages matter to someone deciding whether to return to a plantation?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 13

A Place to Sleep

Moving to an unfamiliar city costs money and creates risk. But a migrant who has a brother, cousin, church member, or friend in the destination city may have somewhere to stay temporarily. That person may also know where jobs are available.

Why are social networks part of migration infrastructure?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 14

Churches and Communities

People who migrated earlier established churches, neighborhoods, businesses, clubs, and community organizations. These institutions could help newcomers find housing, employment, information, and social connections.

How can a community make migration easier even if it cannot guarantee success?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 15

Houston

Some Louisiana families moved west toward Houston rather than north toward Chicago or Detroit. Existing transportation connections, employment opportunities, relatives, and earlier Louisiana migrants could make Houston a realistic destination.

What does this tell you about the shape of the Great Migration?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 16

Not Everyone Could Leave

A person's home might be destroyed, but that did not mean migration was easy. Some people had little money, no distant relatives, limited information about jobs elsewhere, children or older family members to care for, or strong connections to their local community.

Can someone experience strong push factors and still stay? Why?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 17

A New Job During Displacement

Imagine that a displaced parent stays temporarily with relatives outside the flooded region. Several months pass and the parent finds a job while the children begin attending a new school. The family establishes new routines and then they find out their old house can eventually be repaired.

At what point does evacuation become displacement—and displacement become migration?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

EVIDENCE CARD 18

Recovery for Whom?

A landowner says: The Delta needs its workers back so farms can reopen. A displaced worker asks: Would returning mean returning to the same debt, discrimination, and restricted opportunities that existed before the flood? Both people say they want “recovery.”

Are they describing the same thing?

PUSH • PULL • PATHWAY • MORE THAN ONE

Challenge Cards

These are especially useful for Grades 9–12 because they complicate a simple push/pull model.

EVIDENCE CARD 19

Cause or Catalyst?

Black migration out of the South had begun well before 1927. The flood therefore did not create the Great Migration. Instead, destruction, displacement, labor conflict, and uncertainty could change the calculation for people who already had reasons to consider leaving.

Decide

Which statement is strongest?

THE FLOOD CAUSED MIGRATION

THE FLOOD ACCELERATED MIGRATION

THE FLOOD CREATED AN OPPORTUNITY TO ACT ON EXISTING PRESSURES

Use other cards to defend your answer.

EVIDENCE CARD 20

Choices Are Unequal

Two families experience the same flood. One owns land, has savings, owns an automobile, and can obtain bank credit. The other rents or works someone else's land,

has little cash, owes money, and depends on an employer for housing. Both technically have the choice to stay or leave.

Ask: Do they actually have the same range of choices?

Identify the evidence that supports your answer.

EVIDENCE CARD 21

A Pathway Can Become a Pattern

One person migrates. That person finds housing and employment. Later, a sibling follows, and then a cousin comes. Friends receive letters with information about jobs. Church members help another family relocate. Over time, repeated individual decisions produce a recognizable migration route.

Ask: How can one person's migration change the choices available to people who remain behind?

EVIDENCE CARD 22

The Destination Changes Too

Migrants do not arrive in a city carrying only their labor.

They also bring music, foodways, religious practices, family relationships, language and accents, political traditions, businesses, stories, and community institutions.

Ask: If migration changes the place people leave, how does it also change the place where they arrive?

Teacher Key

These classifications are not intended to be rigid. One purpose of the activity is for students to recognize that migration factors interact.

Card	Strongest Classification	Important Secondary Connection
1	PUSH	—
2	PUSH	—

3	PUSH	Economic constraint
4	PUSH	Labor system
5	PUSH	Mobility
6	PUSH	Existing structural condition
7	PUSH	Environmental risk
8	PATHWAY	—
9	PATHWAY	PULL
10	PULL + PATHWAY	—
11	PATHWAY	Possible destination
12	PULL	Economic independence
13	PATHWAY	PULL
14	PATHWAY	PULL
15	PULL + PATHWAY	—
16	CONSTRAINT	Shows limits of push/pull model
17	PULL / PATHWAY	Displacement → migration
18	PUSH	Competing definitions of recovery
19	SYNTHESIS	Cause vs. catalyst
20	CONSTRAINT	Differential mobility
21	PATHWAY	Chain migration
22	CONSEQUENCE	Demographic/cultural change

Recommended Sets

Grades 6–8: Core 10

Use: 1 • 2 • 3 • 6 • 7 • 8 • 9 • 10 • 12 • 13

These provide a clean mix of environmental, economic, social, and transportation evidence without overwhelming students.

Grades 9–12: Full Analysis Set

Use: 1–18, then distribute 19–22 after students have constructed the first version of their migration map.

The challenge cards should make students revise their initial model rather than simply add more information.

Suggested Evidence-Card Rule

Do not let students simply place cards on the map. For every card placed, require the group to complete:

> This evidence matters because _____.

For migration arrows:

> We think people could move from _____ to _____ because Evidence Card ___ shows _____.

For household decisions:

> Our household will RETURN / RELOCATE / MIGRATE because Cards ___, ___, and ___ show _____.

This keeps the map from becoming a coloring exercise and makes it an evidence-based geographic argument.