

Near Algodones (Level 2 Reader Version — about 20 minutes)

1) The lonely bank

The wind blew across a wide, flat land.
There were no trees. No houses. No people.
Only dry grass, dust, and a gray sky.

In the middle of this empty place, one small building stood alone.
It was made of brown adobe, like hard earth.

Above the door, a wooden sign said:

FIRST FEDERAL BANK & TRUST OF TUCUMCARI

Under it, a smaller sign moved in the wind.
It knocked against the door again and again.

Clunk. Clunk. Clunk.

The smaller sign said:

AND NOTARY

Near the bank there was a well.
A bucket hung from a rope, and the wind made it swing.

Creeeak... creak...

On the well, someone had nailed another sign:

BAD WATER

A man stood in front of the bank.
He wore a long coat that reached his boots.
He had a hat low over his eyes.
Behind him was his horse, waiting.

The man looked at the bank.
Then he looked at the well and the sign “BAD WATER.”
The horse made a nervous sound.

The man let go of the reins and walked to the door.

2) Inside the bank

Inside, the bank was only one room.
It was quiet.
There was a counter with iron bars, like a cage.

Behind the bars stood the bank teller.
He was old.

He had white hair and a white mustache.
He wore a black eyeshade, like a man who reads a lot.
He also wore sleeve garters on his arms.

The cowboy walked to the counter.
His boots were heavy.
His spurs made a small sound.

“Big name,” the cowboy said. “Small place.”

The teller smiled.
“It makes people feel safe,” he said.

The cowboy looked around.
“People?” he asked. “What people?”

The teller nodded seriously.
“We have depositors,” he said. “From different towns. From far places too. Not many, but enough.”

He leaned forward, enjoying his own story.

“One time,” he said, “people got scared. They rushed here. They wanted their money. It was noisy. Not pretty.”

He laughed.
“I had to stand on the counter with my shotgun,” he said. “I told them to calm down.”

He shook his head like a proud man.
“Banking is crazy business,” he said. “Crazy business.”

The cowboy listened.
Then he asked, “Have you ever been robbed?”

The teller’s eyes opened wide, like this was a good question.
“Oh yes,” he said. “Twice. Two times!”

The cowboy raised his eyebrows.

“One man,” the teller said, “I shot him dead. Just like that.”

He made a sound with his mouth.
“Bingo,” he said.

“And the other one,” he continued, “I shot his legs. Not dead, but hurt bad. I locked him in the vault. The marshal only comes once a month. So the robber stayed in that vault a long time.”

The teller started talking slower, then stopped.
He stared into space, trying to remember something.

The cowboy was not smiling anymore.

Because the cowboy now had a gun in his hand.

He pointed it at the teller.

Outside, the wind moaned.

The teller froze.
His mouth hung open.

The cowboy tossed a rough burlap sack onto the counter.

“Put the money in the sack,” he said.

The teller blinked.
Then he slowly nodded.

“Okay,” he said. “Okay. You got me.”

He disappeared under the counter, and his voice came from below.

“I need to bend down,” he said. “To get the big bills...”

The cowboy waited.

He frowned.

Then he heard a sound.

A hard, sharp sound.

Clack.

The cowboy knew that sound.

It was a shotgun being prepared.

His eyes widened.

He moved quickly to the side—

BOOM!

Wood exploded where he had been standing.

The teller had tricked him.

BOOM!

Another shot hit the counter.

The cowboy grabbed the iron bars and pulled himself up.
He climbed over.

The teller stopped shooting.

Smoke floated in the air.
Everything went quiet.

The cowboy looked behind the counter.

No teller.

The old man was gone.

The cowboy's jaw tightened.

He began to fill the sack with money anyway.
He stuffed bills inside with fast hands.

Then he walked toward the front door.

3) The well and the trap

The door creaked open.

The cowboy stepped outside carefully.
He held the money sack in one hand.
He held his gun in the other.

The land looked empty.
His horse stood nearby, calm, eating a little grass.

The well bucket creaked again.

Creeek...

The cowboy took one step forward.

Then—

BOOM!

A shotgun blast hit the ground near his feet.
Dust jumped up.

The cowboy dropped the sack.
He threw himself down and rolled behind the well.

His horse jumped and moved away.
Now it stood far out in the open—about thirty yards away.

The cowboy hissed and waved his hand.

“Come here,” he whispered.

The horse looked at him.
Its ears moved.
But it did not come.

The cowboy looked back at the bank.

Nothing.

No movement.

Only wind.

Only the bucket creaking.

Then the cowboy looked at the money sack on the ground.
The wind lifted the mouth of the sack.

Bills fluttered out.
They rose and danced like small birds.
Then they twisted away in the air.

The cowboy felt angry.
He stared at the bank door.

Suddenly—

The bank door burst open.

The old teller ran out like a wild man.
He was laughing loudly.
He held his shotgun up high.

And something was strange about him.

He was clanking.

The cowboy fired at him—

CLANG!

The teller did not fall.

He shouted, “Pan shot!”

The teller ran closer.

The cowboy fired again—

CLANG!

The teller shouted again, “Pan shot!”

Now the cowboy understood.

The teller’s body was covered in pots and pans.
They hung from strings around his chest and back.
One big pot sat on his head like a helmet.

The cowboy stood up and fired again and again.

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!

Each bullet hit metal.

The teller laughed harder.

Then the teller fired.

BOOM!

The shot hit the cowboy's shoulder.

Pain exploded through him.

His gun flew out of his hand and landed in the dust.

The cowboy tried to move, but he was slow now.

The teller was right there.

Still laughing.

He lifted the shotgun like a club.

And swung it down.

Everything went black.

4) A rope around his neck

A voice spoke in the dark.

“Do you have anything to say?”

The cowboy opened his eyes.

He was moving gently, back and forth, like a slow boat.

He blinked at the bright light.

The same voice said again, closer now:

“Do you have anything to say?”

The cowboy licked his dry lips.

“What?” he asked.

He looked down.

There was a rope around his neck.

A noose.

The rope went up to a tree branch above him.

His hands were tied behind his back.

He was on a horse, but he was not really sitting.
The rope held him.

In front of him sat a man on a horse.
The man wore black clothes and a black hat.
Other men stood nearby on horses too.

The man in black looked calm.

“Do you have anything to say,” he asked, “before we carry out the sentence?”

The cowboy swallowed.

“What... what’s my sentence?” he asked.

Some of the men laughed.

The man in black did not laugh.
He spoke like a judge.

“Son,” he said, “we had a trial for attempted bank robbery. You were sick and confused, but the trial was fair. These men decided you were guilty. I gave the sentence. Death.”

He pointed at the tree.

“We found this tree. Now you can speak.”

The cowboy breathed hard.

“Well,” he said slowly. “That old man at the bank... he didn’t fight fair. With all those pans.”

The man in black nodded, like he understood.

“Okay,” he said. “Anything else?”

The cowboy thought.
Then he said, “No. That’s all.”

One of the men in the group spoke up.

“Can I have your horse?” he asked.

Another man said, “No. Me.”

The man in black looked at the cowboy.

“Do you want to give one of them your horse?” he asked. “It will stop them fighting later.”

The cowboy frowned.

“I don’t want any of them to have it,” he said.

One man muttered, “Selfish bastard.”

Then suddenly—

THIP!

An arrow flew through the air.

It hit the man in the neck.

His eyes went wide.

He fell forward, choking.

From the distance came shouting.

Horses thundered.

A group of Comanche riders swept in fast, like a storm.

The posse pulled out their guns.

The horses screamed and jumped.

The cowboy tried to calm his horse, but he could barely move.

“Easy...” he whispered. “Easy...”

Gunshots rang out.

Arrows flew.

Men fell from their horses.

Dust filled the air.

The cowboy’s horse stamped and moved.

The rope pulled tight.

The cowboy’s throat burned.

“Easy...” he whispered again.

The fight did not last long.

The Comanche riders were too many, too fast.

They drove the posse away from the tree.

Soon the land grew quiet again.

Bodies lay on the ground.

A few horses ran free.

The cowboy was still there.

Still alive.

Still hanging.

A Comanche chief rode near him and looked up at the rope.

Then he looked at the cowboy.

The chief did not speak.
He just watched for a moment.

Then he turned his horse and rode away with his people.

The wind returned.

The cowboy's horse began to eat grass again, like nothing happened.

5) A slow, cruel problem

Time passed.

The cowboy leaned back as far as he could.
He tried to give the rope less pressure.

But his horse kept eating.
And slowly, the horse stepped forward.

Each step pulled the rope tighter.

The cowboy made a small sound.

“Nnnngh...”

He could not speak.
His mouth was too dry.
His throat hurt too much.

The sun moved across the sky.

One wounded man on the ground moaned for a long time.
Later, he stopped.

Insects buzzed in the heat.

The cowboy's body shook.

The horse chewed grass.

Then the cowboy heard a new sound.

Many hooves.

A moving river of animals.

Cattle.

A cattle drive.

The cowboy forced out a sound again.

“Nnnngh!”

A lone drover rode behind the cattle.
He heard the sound.
He looked toward the tree.

He saw the dead bodies.
He saw the rope.
He saw the cowboy hanging there.

The drover rode closer and stopped.

He stared.

Then he asked one simple question.

“Comanche?” he said.

The cowboy could only make a small sound.

“Nnngh.”

The drover nodded, like he understood the whole story.

He took out his gun and aimed at the rope.

He fired.

BANG!

He missed.

The horse jumped and stepped forward.

The rope pulled tight.

The cowboy’s body slipped.
His legs moved, trying to find balance.

The drover cursed softly.

“Ah, damn,” he said.

He aimed again.

BANG!

He missed again.

The cowboy swung a little.

The drover called out, “Hold still!”

But the cowboy could not hold still.

The rope moved.
The horse moved.
The wind moved everything.

The drover fired again.

Miss.

Again.

Miss.

Then he fired three quick shots.

The last one hit.

The rope broke halfway.

The cowboy dropped hard to the ground.

He lay there, breathing like a man who had been underwater.

The drover helped him sit up.

After a while, the cowboy could finally speak.

“Thanks,” he said in a rough voice.

The drover nodded.

“Come with me,” he said. “You can help drive these cattle.”

The cowboy stood slowly.

His shoulder still hurt.

But he could walk.

So he followed.

6) The cattle drive

Later, the two men rode side by side.
Cattle moved in front of them like a noisy sea.

The drover talked a lot.
He told jokes.
He laughed at his own jokes.

He told a long story about a ranch with a crazy name.
Then he laughed loudly.

The cowboy smiled politely.
He nodded, even when the joke was not very funny.

The drover kept talking.

“I’m glad you’re helping,” he said. “I had two helpers, but they left. They didn’t like the heat. Bad friends.”

He looked at the cowboy.

“You seem okay,” he said. “Maybe you can work with me for a long time. A good sidekick is a reliable man.”

The cowboy listened.

The drover continued.

“A sidekick watches your back,” he said. “And you watch his. You must trust each other.”

He started another story.

“One time I was walking a fence,” he said, “and I saw a... a...”

His voice stopped.

His eyes fixed on the horizon.

A thin line of dust rose in the distance.

The drover’s mouth opened.

“Damn,” he whispered.

Now the cowboy saw it too.

Men on horses.

Riding fast toward them.

The drover did not think.

He turned his horse quickly.

Then he kicked it hard and rode away at full speed.

The cowboy stared at him.

“Hey!” he wanted to say.

But the drover was already far.

The cowboy looked forward again.

The riders were close now.

The ground shook with their hooves.

The cowboy sat there, confused.

Then the riders reached him.

Hands grabbed him.

Someone pulled him down.

Someone tied his hands.

The world spun again.

7) Judge Hobby

When the cowboy could stand again, he was in a dusty town street.

His hands were tied behind his back.

A man pushed him forward.

In front of him was a saloon.

Men stood on the wooden boardwalk, watching.

A man sat behind a rough table made from planks.

Two barrels held the planks up.

The man had a huge mustache.

It hung down like an old brush.

He wore buckskin pants.

He wore an old uniform top.

He looked like a judge, but not a clean one.

The man who had pushed the cowboy knocked the cowboy's hat off.

"No hats in front of Judge Hobby," the man said.

Judge Hobby looked down at the cowboy.

"What did this son of a bitch do?" the judge asked.

The cowboy tried to speak.

"Sir, I—"

The man next to him hit him.

"Quiet," the man said.

Then the man spoke to the judge.

"This one is a cattle thief," he said.

Judge Hobby lifted a finger.

“Alleged,” he said, like he was being careful.

“Yes, Your Honor,” the man said.

The cowboy tried again.

“Sir, I didn’t—”

He got hit again.

“Quiet,” the man said.

“He was caught driving stolen cattle,” the man told the judge.

Judge Hobby nodded.

“Good enough,” he said. “Hang him.”

The cowboy’s eyes widened.

“Sir, I never—”

Hit again.

Judge Hobby waved his hand.

“I don’t want excuses,” he said. “I don’t have time. One size fits all.”

Then he leaned back like the case was finished.

“Next!” he shouted. “God! You think you’re the only one?”

8) First time?

Later, the cowboy stood on a gallows.
A wooden platform.

Three other men stood beside him.

All of them had ropes around their necks.
All of them had hands tied behind their backs.

The cowboy looked at the crowd.

He saw many faces.
Some were excited.
Some were serious.

One man beside him was shaking.
He was whispering, crying.

The cowboy turned his head and looked at him.

He gave him a small smile.

“First time?” the cowboy asked.

The shaking man looked at him, too scared to answer.

A hangman came and pulled a black hood over one man’s head.
Then he moved to the next.

The cowboy looked out again.

And he saw her.

A young woman in a bonnet.
Beautiful and quiet.

Her face looked sad, like she was praying for the men.

The cowboy stared at her for one moment.

“She’s pretty,” he whispered to himself.

Then the hood came down over his own head.

Everything became dark.

He could hear his own breathing inside the hood.

He could hear the crowd, far away.

He could hear the terrified man beside him.

Then—

CLACK.

The trapdoor opened.

And—

SNAP.

The sound was sharp.

Final.

The crowd roared.

And the sound of the crowd faded fast.

Near Algodones — Vocabulary Recycling & Retention Sheet (Level 2)

A) Vocabulary Bank (learn + review)

Learn these words/expressions from the story. Write a **translation** in your language next to each one.

1. **lonely** = alone, with no people
2. **wind** = moving air
3. **flat land** = land with no hills
4. **dusty** = full of dust
5. **adobe** = sun-dried mud brick (brown building material)
6. **sign** = a board with words on it
7. **knock (against)** = hit again and again (clunk!)
8. **creak** = a long noisy sound (old wood/rope)
9. **well** = deep hole for water
10. **bucket** = container for water
11. **reins** = straps to control a horse
12. **teller** = the person who works in a bank
13. **counter** = long table in a shop/bank
14. **bars** = metal/iron lines like a cage
15. **rob / robbery** = steal money by force
16. **shotgun** = a gun that fires many pellets
17. **smoke** = gray air after fire/shooting
18. **drop** = let something fall
19. **cover** = a safe place to hide
20. **step forward** = move one step ahead
21. **rope / noose** = rope used for hanging
22. **trial** = court meeting to decide guilty/innocent
23. **sentence (law)** = punishment

24. **guilty** = responsible for a crime
25. **posse** = group of men helping law officers
26. **arrow** = sharp weapon shot from a bow
27. **riders** = people on horses
28. **cattle** = cows/bulls kept on a farm
29. **drover** = person who moves cattle (cattle driver)
30. **gallows** = wooden place for hanging
31. **hood** = cloth covering the head/face
32. **trapdoor** = door in the floor that opens down

Useful expressions (must know):

- 33) **Calm down.** = relax, stop panicking
- 34) **Good enough.** = sufficient / okay
- 35) **Hold still!** = don't move
- 36) **Watch my back.** = protect me / help me stay safe
- 37) **One size fits all.** = same rule for everyone
- 38) **First time?** = is this your first experience?

B) Activity 1 — Match (Words → Meaning)

Write the correct letter.

1. **lonely** ____
2. **creak** ____
3. **reins** ____
4. **teller** ____
5. **cover** ____
6. **noose** ____
7. **trial** ____
8. **sentence** ____
9. **drover** ____
10. **gallows** ____

- A) punishment decided by a judge
- B) straps to control a horse
- C) a sound from old wood/rope

- D) place to hide and stay safe
- E) person who works in a bank
- F) court meeting to decide guilty/innocent
- G) rope used for hanging
- H) person who moves cattle
- I) alone; with no people
- J) wooden structure for hanging

C) Activity 2 — Fill in the blanks (Use the Vocabulary Bank)

Choose the best word.

1. The land was wide and _____.
2. A wooden _____ knocked against the bank door.
3. The _____ over the well moved in the wind.
4. The cowboy held the horse's _____.
5. The bank _____ stood behind the bars.
6. The teller tried to trick him with a _____.
7. The cowboy rolled behind the well for _____.
8. Later, the cowboy woke up with a _____ around his neck.
9. A _____ happened, and men decided his punishment.
10. The cattle _____ saved him by shooting the rope.
11. The judge said, "Hang him. That's _____."
12. On the platform, the cowboy stood on the _____.

D) Activity 3 — Collocations (Words that "go together")

Match the words to form collocations

1. **dusty** ____
2. **wooden** ____
3. **iron** ____
4. **bad** ____
5. **nervous** ____
6. **line of** ____

7. **full** ____

8. **black** ____

- A) water
- B) hood
- C) bars
- D) speed
- E) dust
- F) town
- G) horse
- H) sign

E) Activity 4 — Synonyms & Opposites

Write **S** (similar meaning) or **O** (opposite meaning).

1. **lonely** ↔ **alone** ____
2. **calm** ↔ **nervous** ____
3. **drop** ↔ **pick up** ____
4. **guilty** ↔ **not responsible** ____
5. **hold still** ↔ **don't move** ____
6. **good enough** ↔ **perfect** ____
7. **wide** ↔ **large** ____
8. **quiet** ↔ **noisy** ____

F) Activity 5 — Expressions in context (Choose the best meaning)

Circle A, B, or C.

1. **“Calm down.”**
A) Run faster B) Relax C) Get angry
2. **“Good enough.”**
A) Not sufficient B) Sufficient/OK C) Dangerous
3. **“Hold still!”**
A) Don't move B) Move quickly C) Sit down only
4. **“One size fits all.”**
A) Different rules for different people

- B) Same rule for everyone
- C) No rules

Now use **2 expressions in mini-dialogues (write 2 lines each):**

Dialogue 1 (Calm down / Hold still):

- A: _____
- B: _____

Dialogue 2 (Good enough / One size fits all):

- A: _____
- B: _____

G) Activity 6 — “Story Sentences” (Recycle the words)

Write **one sentence** for each word. Keep sentences short.

1. dusty: _____
2. creak: _____
3. cover: _____
4. robbery: _____
5. rope/noose: _____
6. riders: _____
7. cattle: _____
8. trapdoor: _____

H) Activity 7 — Retell Challenge (Retention Task)

Write **80–120 words** retelling the story in simple English.

Rules:

- Use **at least 10** words/expressions from the Vocabulary Bank
- Use **2** expressions from section F
- Underline the 10 vocabulary words you used

Your retell:

I) Activity 8 — Memory Plan (so the words stay in your brain)

Do this mini-plan (fast, but powerful):

1) Word Cards (5 minutes):

Make 10 cards:

Front = word (ex: “creak”)

Back = meaning + one example sentence.

2) Quick Reviews:

- Review #1: **after 24 hours** (2 minutes)
- Review #2: **after 3 days** (3 minutes)
- Review #3: **after 7 days** (4 minutes)

3) 3–2–1 Recall (no notes):

- Write **3 nouns** (things) from the story: _____
- Write **2 verbs** (actions): _____
- Write **1 expression** you can use in real life: _____

Answer Key (for the teacher)

B) Match

1-I, 2-C, 3-B, 4-E, 5-D, 6-G, 7-F, 8-A, 9-H, 10-J

C) Fill in

1. flat 2) sign 3) bucket 4) reins 5) teller 6) shotgun 7) cover
2. noose 9) trial 10) drover 11) good enough 12) gallows

D) Collocations

1-F, 2-H, 3-C, 4-A, 5-G, 6-E, 7-D, 8-B

E) Synonyms/Opposites

1-S, 2-O, 3-O, 4-S, 5-S, 6-O, 7-S, 8-O

