

Letter Activity One

These are three parts of letters that were all written in the spring of 1939. Read all three carefully and answer the questions. Words in [] were added to help explain words in the letters.

Tobacco Bag Stringing Operations in North Carolina and Virginia. North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Written by Mrs. H.S. Jones from Leaksville, NC.

For one thing it has been a spare time work A mother with young children, who could not leave home to work...could string bags at home in spare time and earn enough to provide herself and children with sufficient [enough] clothes. Even provide [give] money for school books and hot lunches for children in school.... Two mothers that I know of have bought scout uniforms and provided vacations for their children which they could not have had any other way...

A school teacher in Leaksville graded school strings bags in her spare time to buy books for the under privileged [poorer] children in her grade who haven't been able to get them before.

Written by Mrs. Kate Pulliam of Leaksville, NC.

For two years I have stringing bags. If the bags were taken away from us I would not be able to pay my insurance. I have two children and myself to clothe. I am too old to get a job in the mill. The bags help my children and me in every way.

Stringing of bags is a big help to our community. It helps the older people who are too old to work on public job. There are young girls stringing bags, they keep them at home off the street. There are several blind people stringing bags that can't get anything else to do.

Written by Rosebud Morse Garriott of East Bend, NC.

My mother and father, as far back as I can remember, have worked with tobacco bags... I know personally the families that do this work and know of mothers that have to solely [only] depend upon the work for the spending money for their children...Most of the people that string these bags own small homes or rent farming land from other farmers and the only money crop we have is tobacco...I do not know how some of the people could meet their demands [pay their bills] without the bags to help them. There are years when the tobacco crop is a failure and then the bags help the farmers to supply necessary groceries and quite often they have told me that in bad crop years they have saved their bag money to pay the tax on their property.

Questions

1. What are the letters about?
2. What are four facts that you can tell about what this time was like from reading these letters?
3. Who do you think these women are writing to? Why do you think that?
4. Why do you think the woman might be writing these letters?
5. How would you describe what these women might be feeling at this time?
6. What can a historian learn from these letters?

Letter Activity Two

The letters you read in Letter Activity One were written by the women to try to convince people to allow the tobacco bag stringers to still do their work. Imagine that you are tobacco bag stringer. You need the money that you make to help buy food and other items for your family. A group of people may take your tobacco bag-stringing job away.

Write a letter to make them understand why you need this job. Include why the job is so important to you.