

*ODE TO BILLY JOE* – Bobbie Gentry

It was the third of June, another sleepy, dusty Delta day.  
I was out choppin' cotton and my brother was balin' hay.  
And at dinner time we stopped and walked back to the house to eat  
And Mama hollered out the back door, "Y'all remember to wipe your feet."  
And then she said, "I got some news this mornin' from Choctaw Ridge  
Today Billy Joe MacAllister jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge."

And Papa said to Mama as he passed around the black-eyed peas,  
"Well, Billy Joe never had a lick of sense, pass the biscuits, please.  
There's five more acres in the lower forty I've got to plow."  
And Mama said it was shame about Billy Joe, anyhow,  
"Seems like nothin' ever comes to no good up on Choctaw Ridge  
And now Billy Joe MacAllister's jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge."

And Brother said he recollected when he and Tom and Billie Joe  
Put a frog down my back at the Carroll County picture show  
And wasn't I talkin' to him after church last Sunday night?  
"I'll have another piece of apple pie, you know it don't seem right.  
I saw him at the sawmill yesterday on Choctaw Ridge  
And now you tell me Billie Joe's jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge."

And Mama said to me, "Child, what's happened to your appetite?  
I've been cookin' all morning and you haven't touched a single bite.  
That nice young preacher, Brother Taylor, dropped by today,  
Said he'd be pleased to have dinner on Sunday, oh, by the way,  
He said he saw a girl that looked a lot like you up on Choctaw Ridge  
And she and Billy Joe was throwing somethin' off the Tallahatchie Bridge."

A year has come 'n gone since we heard the news 'bout Billy Joe  
And Brother married Becky Thompson, they bought a store in Tupelo.  
There was a virus going 'round, Papa caught it and he died last Spring  
And now Mama doesn't seem to wanna do much of anything.  
And me, I spend a lot of time pickin' flowers up on Choctaw Ridge  
And drop them into the muddy water off the Tallahatchie Bridge.

## TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

- What was each member of the family's **attitude** to Billy Joe's death?
- **Justify** your thoughts and motivate them by **quoting evidence from the text**.
- The textual evidence **must link directly** to the justification you have used.
- Select from the options below the text.

Character	Attitude	Justify attitude	Textual evidence
papa		1) 2) 3)	a) b) c)
mama		1) 2)	a) b)
brother		1) 2)	a) b)
narrator		1) 2)	a) b)

**Attitudes:** Slightly concerned, Quietly devastated, Nostalgic but unconcerned, Completely indifferent

**Justify attitude:** His death wasn't a priority, Remembers fun times, Battled to forget, More interested in work, No respect for Billy Joe, Loss of appetite, More interested in food x 2, Did see it as a loss.

**Textual evidence:** "Five more acres...to plough", "Never had a lick of sense", "You haven't touched a single bite", "Pass the biscuits" "Put a frog down (sister's) back", "Wipe your feet and THEN she said", "I'll have another piece of apple pie", "Pickin' flowers ... and drop them into the muddy waters" "It was a shame... anyhow".

## Memorandum

Character	Attitude	Justify attitude	Textual evidence
papa	Completely indifferent	More interested in food More interested in work No respect for Billy Joe	"Pass the biscuits" "Five more acres...to plow" "Never had a lick of sense"
mama	Slightly concerned	His death wasn't a priority Did see it as a loss	"Wipe your feet and THEN she said" "It was a shame... <u>anyhow</u> "
brother	Nostalgic but unconcerned	Remembers fun times More interested in food	"Put a frog down (sister's) back" "I'll have another piece of apple pie"
narrator	Quietly devastated	Loss of appetite Battled to forget	"You haven't touched a single bite" "Pickin' flowers ... and drop them into the muddy waters"