

In this lesson you will learn about the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. You will learn what caused it as well as the affects it had on the land and people who lived there.

Where Did the Dust Bowl Occur?

The Dust Bowl happened in the southwestern area of the Great Plains in the United States throughout the 1930s. The areas most affected were the panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas, along with parts of Colorado, Kansas and New Mexico. People had been moving into the Great Plains area since the 1860s as the United States expanded west. As people moved there and built homes, they used the land to **graze** cattle (cows), meaning the farmers allowed their cows to roam and eat the prairie grass. The farmers also plowed over the prairie grass to plant wheat. Let's look at how these actions set the scene for the Dust Bowl.

Dust Storm in Texas, 1935



Causes of the Dust Bowl

Seeing all of that beautiful prairie grass led the farmers to believe that the Great Plains must have rich soil. Unfortunately, this was not the case. The soil was actually very fine and the prairie grasses were what was holding the soil in place. Once the prairie grass had started to disappear, it was unable to grow back quickly, especially since the farmers continued planting wheat and grazing cattle. The Great Plains area is also a place that gets very high winds, and, during the 1930s, the area also experienced a drought, causing the wheat to not grow. A **drought** is when it does not rain for a while and the area

becomes dry.

So, the lack of prairie grass to hold the soil in place, the drought, and the winds combined to cause major dust storms throughout the area. Since there was no longer prairie grass, and everything was extremely dry, the high winds picked up the dust and blew it away, sometimes forming huge dust clouds.

What Problems Did It Cause?

One problem was that the crops were killed by the drought or the dust storms. This caused the farmers and their families to not have enough food to eat. Many times, the dust was so thick that it would choke and kill the cattle along with other animals and sometimes even people. People started calling these dust storms 'black blizzards' because when a dust storm would come, the sky would turn almost black. The dust would blow over everything in its path, including homes, barns, animals, and people. It would leave dust covering everything once it was gone. People living in the area were unable to survive or make a living. Many families had to leave their farms, and most of those traveled west (especially to California) to find work, becoming migrant workers.

Oklahoma Dust Storm, 1935



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