

The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl

The "Dust Bowl" was the name given to the region of the United States that was severely affected by a prolonged drought (lack of rain). The Dust Bowl included parts of ten states. The drought began in 1931 in the early years of the Great Depression and greatly increased the problems of the Depression.

No rain fell at all over a large area of the United States during 1933. The damage of the long-lasting drought was worsened by the previous decades of excessive plowing of fields and other poor farming practices. These conditions turned soil into dust, which was likely to blow in the wind. Because of that, huge dust storms were formed.

In 1933, the "black blizzard" dust storms lifted nearly 300 million tons of topsoil into the air and moved eastward, dropping a layer of

dust across the land all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. The black blizzard destroyed crops and drove families from their lands.

The dust storms were massive enough to blot out the sun, and they nearly destroyed life in the affected areas because crops would not grow and families could not feed themselves.

This led to a migration of families from southern plains states, especially from Kansas and Oklahoma, to the West, particularly to California. The Dust Bowl lasted nearly ten years. It ended in 1939, but only after rains returned and new farming practices were used to prevent loose soil and dust storms.

John Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939. This novel and later, the film, gave a realistic picture of life during the great drought.

Did You Know?

Hollywood provided great relief to millions during these hard times.

Hollywood, California, became the center of the moviemaking industry. Because economic and political life was so difficult for so many during the 1930s, Americans used movies and other entertainment, such as radio, theater, and big bands, as a way to escape for a few hours. Stars like Shirley Temple, Fred Astaire, and John Wayne provided relief from the problems of daily life for American people with little hope and few opportunities. During the hardest years, several all-time classic movies appeared, including *The Wizard of Oz*, *Gone with the Wind*, and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which entertained and brought momentary relief from the drudgery of daily life to millions of Americans.

Exercise

1. How did the Dust Bowl start? Describe at least one cause. _____

2. What was the black blizzard and its effects? _____

3. How did the entertainment industry help at this time? _____
