

CLOSE READING

Dust Bowl Disaster

(Genre: Personal Narrative)

- 1 My name is Jack Blanchard. I'm an elderly man now, but I'll never forget my childhood during the Dust Bowl. In 1925, my family moved to the Texas Panhandle. I was just 5 years old then. My parents dreamed of farming on their own land, so they bought a farmhouse with acres and acres of land. In a few years, they had transformed the land into great wheat fields. With the profits from the wheat, they were able to buy cows and chickens, too. We were real pioneers!
- 2 But the good times did not last long. By 1930, a severe drought turned the rich fields to sand and dust. The earth cracked and split open. Nothing would grow, not even weeds. Thick, choking dust covered everything.
- 3 Back then, I was just a young boy. I lived with my parents, grandpa, and five sisters. We were simple people who worked long hours, seven days a week. My sisters and I would wake up early before school to milk the cows or plow the fields. We took time off only to go to church on Sunday.

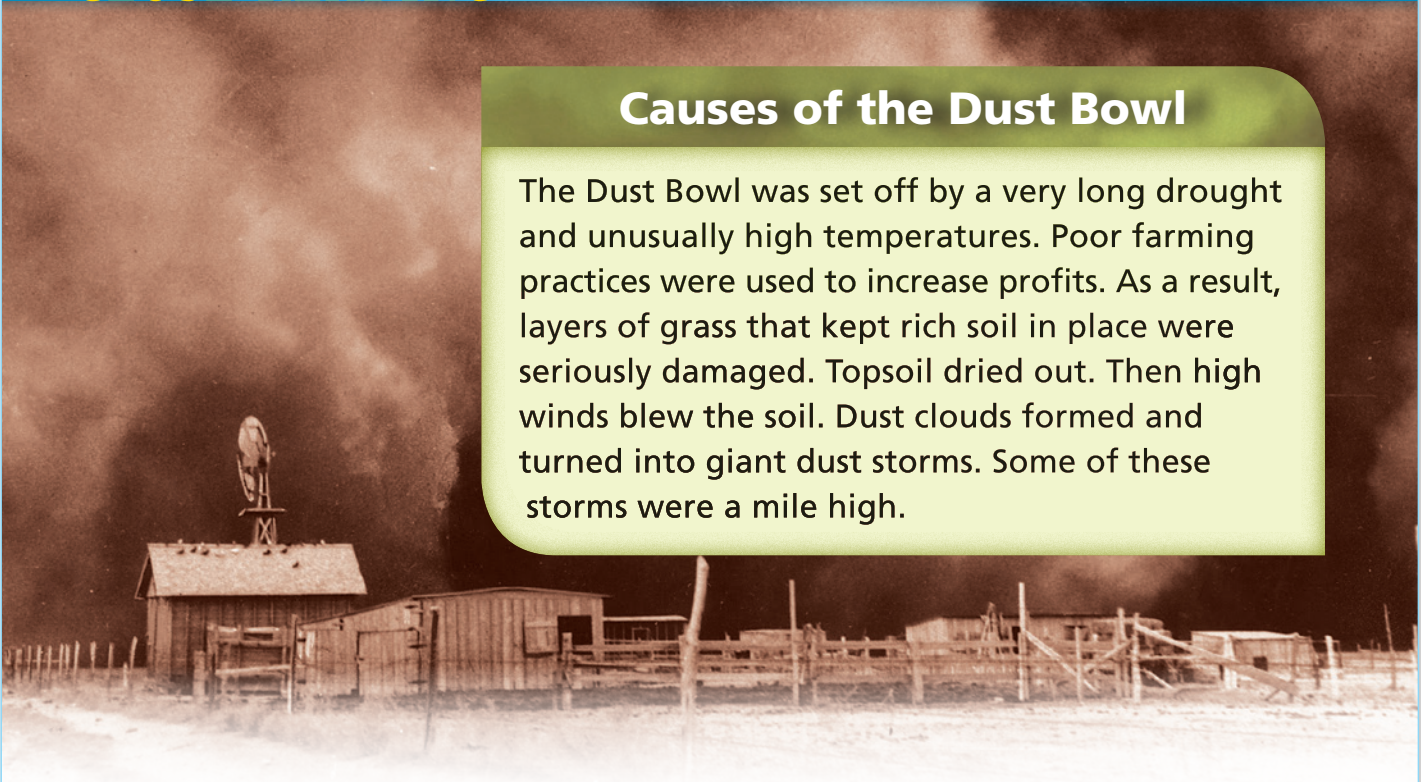
CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

- 4 We took pride in our crops and animals. We weren't rich, but we had what we needed. Or we did until the drought came. The bone-dry conditions were constant and never let up. Those were the worst years of my life.
- 5 With the drought came fearful storms, nicknamed "dusters." The dust storms stung our eyes and itched our hair. It was hard to breathe. It got so bad that we had to cover our noses and mouths with wet cloths to block the dirt. To protect our eyes, we wore goggles to school.
- 6 The worst dusters were called "black blizzards." Those were scary because in the middle of the day, the world was dark. Night seemed to last all day.
- 7 It's hard to explain the impact of this disaster. During it, everyone and everything suffered. Farmers and ranchers couldn't work the land. The bodies of horses, cows, and pigs lay by the roads, filled with dirt. Jackrabbits invaded, eating everything in sight, and the birds flew far, far away. People got sick. Some died of lung disease from breathing in too much dust. Others died from not having food or water.
- 8 Filthy dust settled on buildings, automobiles, people, and animals. Sand piled up high outside homes. Sometimes we had to climb out of windows because it blocked doors. There was no escaping it. We used rags and tape to seal all the cracks in the windows and doors, but the dust still got in.
- 9 We had dust in our food and water. We ate dinner and ended up with grit in our teeth. My sisters and I could draw pictures in the dirt that lay on our dining table. Ma said there was no use hanging laundry out to dry. When we did, it looked dirtier than before it was cleaned!



CLOSE READING**Causes of the Dust Bowl**

The Dust Bowl was set off by a very long drought and unusually high temperatures. Poor farming practices were used to increase profits. As a result, layers of grass that kept rich soil in place were seriously damaged. Topsoil dried out. Then high winds blew the soil. Dust clouds formed and turned into giant dust storms. Some of these storms were a mile high.

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- 10 My teacher, Miss Evans, read us big-city newspaper accounts of what was going on. Our region in the middle of the country became known as the Dust Bowl. Many states, including Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, were affected. But the dusters were so powerful, people as far away as New York and Boston breathed in the dust, too. My grandpa said he felt like he was living in a desert. I said it looked like the moon.
- 11 We tried to stick it out, but it was clear we had to leave. We had survived three years of drought and dust storms. We said goodbye to our farm and friends, then we packed what we could fit in two old cars and left. The dust storms would continue for seven more years.
- 12 We headed west, just like millions of others, including folksinger Woody Guthrie. He also lived in Texas during that period and became famous as the “Dust Bowl Troubadour.” He wrote and sang great songs about his experience in the Dust Bowl and about traveling west to California. His songs really captured what it was like to live through the great dust storms and then to pack up all you have and move west.

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

- 13 During our travels, no one knew what to expect from life out west. Unfortunately, life in California was hard, too. Jobs weren't always easy to find. The days were long and the pay was low. We lived in one-room shacks with no running water. But we escaped the dust, and at least we could breathe clean air.
- 14 My family was in California's Central Valley for 10 years. We picked lettuce, grapes, and oranges—whatever was in season. But we could never call California home. I was 23 and married, and I had two children when we returned to Texas. We rebuilt my parents' house and bought a new herd of cows. Now my children and grandchildren work the land.
- 15 This is Texas. It gets hot, and droughts still come and go. But in 2011, we had the driest year ever recorded. Some were calling it the New Dust Bowl. I just hope we learned a lesson from the Dust Bowl of my childhood. We must all do what we can to care for the earth.

To see more photos of the Dust Bowl, visit:
<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/dustbowl/photos/>

Comprehension Check

- Reread paragraph 11. Use context clues to choose the meaning of the word *stick* below. Circle the correct answer.
 - to remain
 - to poke
 - to fasten
 - a part of a tree
- What information do you expect to find at the hyperlink on page 171?
 - causes of the Dust Bowl
 - Jack Blanchard's Dust Bowl memories
 - images of the Dust Bowl
 - the history of droughts

CLOSE READING

3. How does the text feature on page 170 help you understand “Dust Bowl Disaster”? Support your answer with text evidence.

4. Underline the last sentence of paragraph 4. Why does the author have this opinion? If you were the author, would you agree? Include details from the text to support your answer.
