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**Geography Standard:** Understands how human actions modify the physical environment

**Benchmark:** Knows ways that people alter the physical environment

## The Dust Bowl

During the 1930s, the people who lived in the Midwest had a big problem: Oklahoma and parts of Kansas, Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico had terrible dust storms. A reporter called the area the Dust Bowl. The name stuck. With so much dust in the air, sheep and cattle choked to death. People got very sick. Some even died. If enough dust collected in a home's attic, the ceiling fell in. Many farms were completely ruined. So farmers packed up their families and left. They headed to California, hoping to find work. More than 500,000 people left the Dust Bowl.

What caused the Dust Bowl? It wasn't just one thing. During the 1920s, farmers got tractors for the first time. That meant that they could plow much more land than ever before. They got rid of all the trees. And they plowed miles and miles of straight rows to plant their crops. Then there was a lack of rain. Everything got very dry. The crops died. To make things worse, winds up to 70 miles per hour picked up lots of the dry dirt. Since there were no trees to slow down the wind, tons of dirt blew away. Sometimes the dirt landed as far away as Washington, D.C.!

After years of bad dust storms and no rain, the government decided to help the farmers. The Department of **Agriculture** told farmers to plant crops in rows that ran against the wind. The government gave the farmers money to plant trees between fields. It also helped them to find ways to water their crops when the rains didn't come.



# The Dust Bowl

## Comprehension Questions

Fill in the bubble next to the best answer. You may look back at the story.

1. Which state was not a part of the Dust Bowl?

- (a) California
- (b) Oklahoma
- (c) Kansas
- (d) New Mexico

2. What happened first?

- (a) The crops died.
- (b) The Department of Agriculture helped farmers.
- (c) Farmers got rid of all of the trees.
- (d) There were dust storms.

3. What happened because the farmers plowed straight rows in line with the wind?

- (a) No rain fell.
- (b) Crops died.
- (c) It got too hot.
- (d) The wind picked up the soil and blew it away.

4. Another word for *agriculture* is

- (a) health.
- (b) farming.
- (c) money.
- (d) water.

5. How did tractors help bring about the Dust Bowl?

- (a) Tractors kept water from reaching the crops.
- (b) Tractors let farmers plow much more land than they could before.
- (c) Tractors made crops die.
- (d) The tractor wheels picked up the dust and threw it in the air.

6. Picture yourself standing in the Dust Bowl after a dust storm. No matter where you look, what color do you see?

- (a) white
- (b) green
- (c) red
- (d) brown

7. If you were a farmer living in the Dust Bowl, would you have stayed? Explain.

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