

CHAPTER
14**Section 2****PRIMARY SOURCE** Letter from a Dust Bowl Survivor

The following letter was written by a survivor of the Dust Bowl in McCracken, Kansas. What problems does she attribute to the drought in the Great Plains?

March 24, 1935

Dear Family,

Did some of you think that you had a dust storm? I'll tell you what it was. It was us shaking our bedding, carpets, etc.

For over a week we have been having troublesome times. The dust is something fierce. Sometimes it lets up enough so we can see around; even the sun may shine for a little time, then we have a frenzied time of cleaning, anticipating the comfort of a clean feeling once more.

We keep the doors and windows all shut tight, with wet papers on the sills. The tiny particles of dirt sift right through the walls. Two different times it has been an inch thick on my kitchen floor.

Our faces look like coal miners', our hair is gray and stiff with dirt and we grind dirt in our teeth. We have to wash everything just before we eat it and make it as snappy as possible. Sometimes there is a fog all through the house and all we can do about it is sit on our dusty chairs and see that fog settle slowly and silently over everything.

When we open the door, swirling whirlwinds of soil beat against us unmercifully, and we are glad to go back inside and sit choking in the dirt. We couldn't see the streetlight just in front of the house.

One morning, early, I went out during a lull, and when I started to return I couldn't see the house. I knew the direction, so I kept on coming, and was quite close before I could even see the outline. It sure made me feel funny.

There has not been much school this week. It let up a little yesterday and Fred went with the janitor and they carried dirt out of the church by the scoopful. Four of them worked all afternoon. We were able to have church this morning, but I think many stayed home to clean.

A lot of dirt is blowing now, but it's not dangerous to be out in it. This dirt is all loose, any little wind will stir it, and there will be no relief until we get rain. If it doesn't come soon there will be lots of suffering. If we spit or blow our noses we get mud. We have quite a little trouble with our chests. I understand a good many have pneumonia.

As for gardens, we had ours plowed, but now we do not know whether we have more or less soil. It's useless to plant anything.

Grace

from Deb Mulvey, ed., "We Had Everything but Money" (Greendale, Wis.: Reiman, 1992), 43.

Discussion Questions

1. According to Grace's letter, what problems did people living in the Dust Bowl encounter?
2. How would you describe Grace's attitude about the dust?
3. What qualities or traits do you think helped Grace and her family survive the difficulties that they faced?