

Remember to annotate as you read.

# DUST BOWL REFUGEES

Notes

- 1 Beginning in 1931, the Great Plains region began suffering from drought. After months without rain, soil that used to be fertile became arid and barren. Crops that were once lush soon wilted and died. Then heavy winds caused a series of dust storms to ravage the Midwest.
- 2 In 1933 alone there were around thirty-eight documented dust storms, or black blizzards. By 1934, the area seemed like a desert. Then on April 14, 1935, Black Sunday happened. Winds began to blow and the worst black blizzard hit. Skies filled with dust. Houses were buried under mounds of sediment. Families tied rope to each other as they tried to make it from their barns to their houses.

The storms were like blizzards, covering everything in their path with dust.



a family relocating to California

*“The land just blew away; we had to go somewhere.”*

— Kansas preacher, June 1936

*“Suddenly there appeared on the northern horizon a black blizzard, moving toward them.”*

— Donald Worster, author, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*.



Notes

- 3 Finally, when the blizzard stopped, more than 400,000 people had lost their homes and farms. These “dust bowl refugees”— many of them from the hard-hit state of Oklahoma— had no choice but to flee the Great Plains and relocate. They packed their cars with whatever they could carry and left their old lives behind. Many hit the road and migrated to the Northwest, emigrating to California, Washington, or Oregon. They hoped the open roads would lead to a better life.

## DUST BOWL TIME LINE

**1931:** Drought hits the Plains; crops die; dust storms begin.

**1933:** Number of dust storms increases to 38 in the year.

**1934:** Dust storms spread, affecting 27 states.

**1935:** On April 14, Black Sunday, the worst black blizzard occurs.

**1938:** Replowing of land, tree planting, and other conservation methods begin; drought continues.

**1939:** Rain comes in the fall, finally ending the drought.

Notes

**Woody Guthrie (1912–1967)**

4 Woody Guthrie was an American singer and songwriter. Like others from Oklahoma, when the dust bowl hit, Guthrie took to the road. He traveled Route 66 seeking work in order to support his family. He became one of the many “dust bowl refugees.” Guthrie wrote about his experiences on the road. Guthrie’s songs tell of life on the road and the hope for better times.



**“Dust Bowl Refugee”**

music and lyrics by Woody Guthrie

1 I'm a dust bowl refugee,  
Just a dust bowl refugee,  
From that dust bowl to the peach bowl,  
Now that peach fuzz is a-killin' me.

5 'Cross the mountains to the sea,  
Come the wife and kids and me.  
It's a hot old dusty highway  
For a dust bowl refugee.

10 Hard, it's always been that way,  
Here today and on our way  
Down that mountain, 'cross the desert,  
Just a dust bowl refugee.

We are ramblers, so they say,  
We are only here today,

15 Then we travel with the seasons,  
We're the dust bowl refugees.

From the south land and the drought land,  
Come the wife and kids and me,  
And this old world is a hard world

20 For a dust bowl refugee.

Yes, we ramble and we roam  
And the highway that's our home,  
It's a never-ending highway  
For a dust bowl refugee.

25 Yes, we wander and we work  
In your crops and in your fruit,  
Like the whirlwinds on the desert  
That's the dust bowl refugees.

I'm a dust bowl refugee,

30 I'm a dust bowl refugee,  
And I wonder will I always  
Be a dust bowl refugee?

Notes

*“There’s a feeling in music and it carries you back down the road you have traveled and makes you travel it again.”* –Woody Guthrie

