

A lesson from the past

Lack of water can affect much of our environment. Here we look at the effect of dry soil being blown from the ground in America during the 1930s.

Q1. Look at the pictures on pages 4 and 5 of *The Water Book*. What can you see in the sky behind the houses?



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Q2. How can you tell it is not the cloud from a thunderstorm?



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Q3. If you were in one of those houses when the cloud arrived, what do you think might happen?



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Q4. This kind of soil blow was common in the years when rain was scarce. The part of America where it happened was known as the Dust Bowl. Why do you think it got this name?



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Q5. This kind of thing could not happen in the UK – or could it? When do we have bare fields and strong winds?



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Q6. How could you hold the soil in place when the weather is dry?



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Answers

1. **A cloud of dust.**
2. **It hugs the ground.**
3. **The sky would appear to darken and dust would start seeping into the rooms even if you had the doors and windows shut.**
4. **Because the soil that was whisked up into the air had to be as fine as dust or it would not have stayed in the air. (The bowl part comes from the fact that the area was restricted to states near Oklahoma.)**
5. **Arable fields are bare in winter, and the winds are strongest from late autumn through to spring.**
6. **By keeping the soil covered with grass or some other kind of plant.**

Notes

You might like to consider when to use this worksheet. You may use it at the beginning of the course just to make sure children think of the water supply as more than just water from the taps, or you might use it at the end for the same purpose. It can also be linked to page 30 as an example of the devastation that can happen in a developed country faced with drought.

Children should be encouraged to think of the dust seeping in under the doors and then getting in their eyes, their ears and their mouths. They should imagine having to put a handkerchief over their mouths – and this lasting for days on end. It is a scary result of poor land management, and lots of imagination can be used. How would children stay clean (they wouldn't). What might it feel like to be dusty all of the time?

LINK: *This could also form an adjunct to literacy work. You may care to read out, or get children to read, photocopied versions of extracts from *The Grapes of Wrath* by Steinbeck. This classic story of people forced from their homes is one which is brought about by a combination of poverty, ignorance of the best conservation farming practices and a drought-prone climate where the land is flat and strong winds common.*

If the land is planted, the plant roots prevent the wind from picking up the soil. Furthermore, any plant cover also helps to retain moisture in the soil by keeping the wind from blowing over it (especially important in the winter when the plants are not growing and so not taking up moisture themselves). Plants also help to provide humus, which binds the small particles together. You can therefore also link this to science (Making plants grow well).