

# ***The Dust Bowl***

**An Interdisciplinary Curriculum  
for Grade 11 to Teach  
History, Soils Science, English  
in accordance with State Curricula**

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## DUST BOWL CURRICULUM

The following proposed curriculum is adaptable for the following grade levels, with adjustments for level of books read and levels of inquiry of questions:

Grades 5-6, level 1; Grades 7-9, level 2; and Grades 10-12, level 3.

The curriculum can be taught as a part of American History, English, Science, and Agriculture classes. It is even more effective if taught as an interdisciplinary class, including these three disciplines, plus English, at each of these grade levels. It should be incorporated into classes over a nine-week period. The teachers of each inter-discipline should share in grading different activities, combined into one grade for the project, as well as separate grade for separate activities. For example: The history teacher could teach how and why the land was plowed up as part of the Homestead Act movement; the science and agriculture teachers can incorporate soils science information; and the English teacher teach the speaking and writing skills. It does incorporate state standards and Core Curriculum requirements.

### SYLLABUS FOR GRADE 11

GOAL I: Students will acquire a knowledge and understanding of the necessity of conservation of soil and water in order to grow crops for human consumption, to preserve drinkable water, and to have clean air.

GOAL II: Students will learn to research information appropriate to grade level comprehension and then formulate the information into written form and draw conclusions from his/her findings.

GOAL III: Students will acquire knowledge of appropriate and accurate sources of information and how to verify its accuracy

GOAL IV: Students will learn how to present information to the public arena, especially as it pertains to soil and water resources.

### Week One:

#### OBJECTIVE ONE:

Students will learn the consequences of unwisely using land and water resources.

#### ACTIVITY ONE:

Students will view film *The Dust Bowl* by Ken Burns that shows the dire consequences of abuses of land and water. View first hour of *The Dust Bowl* film. (Show one hour of the film every 2 weeks so that other activities and readings can support the information in the film.) Students will take double-entry notes at the end of each showing of the film.

Begin reading first assigned novel, *Whose Names Are Unknown*

(Or if teaching grades 9 or 6, use the novel appropriate to grade level: see list at end of syllabus for grade level titles). Take double-entry notes.

### Week Two:

ACTIVITY ONE: Students will each interview a survivor of the Dust Bowl about a severe dust storm in their area or a human-caused flood. They will present their findings to the entire class. Teacher will assign interviewees to individual students and help them make appointments for interview. At the end of the first week, students will give oral presentations to the class about their findings.

ACTIVITY TWO: Students will learn to organize the information they gain and write a short report from that information. Report will be no longer than 1000 words, typed, double-spaced, including a bibliography listing the source of information.

ACTIVITY THREE: Students will learn to speak effectively in front of their classmates in order to share the interview information. This will be accomplished with the oral interview report and by reading their essays to the class.

ACTIVITY FOUR: Students will learn spelling and meaning of vocabulary associated with the Dust Bowl: This week's words are *Great Plow-up*; *homestead* (as both noun and verb); *erosion*

### Week Three:

ACTIVITY ONE: Students will view the 2<sup>nd</sup> hour of *The Dust Bowl* film, taking notes at the end of the film.

ACTIVITY TWO: Students will learn spelling and meaning of vocabulary relating to the Dust Bowl experience: Word List for this week: *mould board* *plow*; *conservation*; and two different spellings of the words *drought* and *drouth*

OBJECTIVE TWO: Students will read print books such as those listed in the curricula syllabus, taking double-entry notes, as well as use electronic books and devices to find information and take notes from sources. They will verify their sources as to source and author.

#### ACTIVITY ONE:

Students will each be assigned a source to investigate. They may work in pairs or teams of three, with each having a different task but making a common report for the team. These sources should include the following: *Whose Names Are Unknown* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, as well as on-line and print encyclopedias, with the exception of Wikipedia. If the school has a 4-H or FFA Program, they should ask the instructors and sponsors for books and information to verify other information.

(Each student will also pass a written test over each of the two novels at the end of the grading period.)

Divide the books into weekly sections, with both being finished by the ninth week, at which time the test will be administered.)

### Week Four:

#### ACTIVITY ONE:

Students will interview various business people in the community to see if they have experienced a drought, a flood, or a dust storm and what their reactions are to that experience; as well as local extension agents; soil and water conservation employees; and farmers and ranchers in the community.

ACTIVITY TWO: Students will write a report of their findings as to how the Dust Bowl affected businesses and the decline in population, using a bibliography and proper format for a formal report. They will also inquire as to how the Great Depression played a part in how people survived the Dust Bowl.

ACTIVITY THREE: Students will learn the following vocabulary words as to spelling and meaning: *terraces; no-till farming; small dams;*

### Week Five:

#### OBJECTIVE THREE:

Students will learn how to verify sources from both print and electronic sources, as well as from their interviews.

ACTIVITY ONE: Students will view the 3rd hour of *The Dust Bowl*, taking notes when they finish the segment.

ACTIVITY TWO: Students will divide into groups and write a comparison report of life in the migrant camps of California as depicted in Steinbeck's book and film, Babb's book, and in the Ken Burns' film. (Remind students that Steinbeck used Babb's notes for this section in his book.)

ACTIVITY THREE: Students will learn to recognize and verify the authorship of articles in reports and encyclopedias, as well as the credentials of the Encyclopedia authors. (They will learn the difference in **scholarship** of articles in *Wikipedia* and *Britannica* or *Americana* sources, for instance, with emphasis on who can put information on *Wikipedia*, as opposed to the others.)

ACTIVITY FOUR: Students will learn to spell and define the following words pertaining to the Dust Bowl era: *commodities; Okies; foreclosure; migrant camp;*

### Week Six:

ACTIVITY ONE: Finish viewing *The Dust Bowl* film, taking Double-Entry notes.

#### ACTIVITY TWO:

Students, working in teams of two to three students, will compare Dust Bowl **topics** in *Wikipedia*, *Britannica*, and *Americana*. They will prepare a short written report of the likenesses and differences, then determine which is the most reliable and accurate.

ACTIVITY THREE: Students, working in teams, will compare one of the encyclopedia sources with either Steinbeck or Babb relating the same event, other than the migrant camps, or effects of the Dust Bowl. They will prepare a short written report, citing sources within their papers, as well as making a bibliography.

ACTIVITY FOUR: Students will be divided into 3 groups. Each group will be assigned either Ken Burns, John Steinbeck, or Sanora Babb to write a biography of their assigned source and to prove how qualified each is/was to write about the Dust Bowl. They are to include the kind of research each did, as well as their personal lives, to make them "authorities" on the subject.

#### Week Seven:

OBJECTIVE FOUR: Students will present information effectively to a community audience.

#### ACTIVITY ONE:

Students will use photos, electronic recordings, television and public speaking to plan, produce, and present a program to the local community. Each student should be part of a total of four-to-five presentations according to the following topics:

- Causes of the Dust Bowl
- Effects on family life
- Effects on area population
- Migrations and life after migrations
- How farming practices changed as a result of the Dust Bowl:
- Rise of U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, Soil and Water Conservation Service, and Extension Services

#### Week Eight:

#### ACTIVITY ONE:

Students will plan and present a meal that would have been appropriate in a home of a Dust Bowl farmer in 1935 in the Oklahoma Panhandle; Southwest Kansas; or surrounding Dust Bowl areas. Guests for this meal will include local Dust Bowl survivors, as well as their area representatives from the Soil Conservation Service and Extension Agents from land grant universities (such as OSU).

## ACTIVITY TWO:

Students will learn to define the following terms as they apply to the Dust Bowl:  
*farm programs; CCC; WPA; The Great Depression*

Week Nine: Final exam over the Dust Bowl unit. Essay exam, with student using his/her Double-Entry notes. This test will include questions about how the student was affected by the suffering of the people, as well as factual material. (I always give my students practice essay tests ahead of time to help them learn to organize the information and learn how to express their ideas. Then at the end of the practice test session, they read their papers aloud in small groups and criticize each other's papers.) I also let my students use their OWN Double-entry notes! If they didn't take them as you instructed, they will learn a valuable lesson about note-taking and following your instructions!

Following are sample test questions to be answered essay form, one side of the paper only in legible writing and with numbered pages with the writer's name at the top of the page:

1. Explain the causes of The Dust Bowl:
2. List and describe the geographical areas that The Dust Bowl covered and list years it persisted?
3. How did The Dust Bowl affect the people who lived there in both personal and economic ways?
4. Describe what happened to those who left The Dust Bowl?
5. Summarize what you learned from the interview you conducted.

## SUGGESTED READINGS and FILM:

- Babb, Sanora. *Whose Names Are Unknown*. University of Oklahoma Press. 2004  
(This is a "must-read" for all students in grades 7-12!)
- Duncan, Dayton and Ken Burns. *The Dust Bowl*. Film and Accompanying Book. Florentine Films. 2012. Available from PBS Distribution and Paramount Home Media Distribution. [www.pbs.org/dustbowl](http://www.pbs.org/dustbowl).
- Frantz, Virginia. *Keepin' It Together*. Booklocker Press. Port Charlotte, FL. 2012.  
(especially appropriate for Grades 5-8, although high school students can relate to it also.)
- Bilbro, J. D. *The Dust Bowl Kid*. self-publication by the author who, for many years, was an agronomist and soils scientist for the USDA near Lubbock, Texas.  
Information about obtaining copies of this book may be found by contacting the author at [jdbilbro@suddenlink.net](mailto:jdbilbro@suddenlink.net)
- Hesse, Karen. *Out of the Dust*. Scholastic Press. 1997. Newbury Winner 1998.  
(Appropriate for Grades 7-12, especially.)
- Kansas Humanities Council. *Stories from the Dust Bowl*. 2004.  
Film available on DVD from Smoky Hills Public Television, P. O. Box 9, Bunker Hill, KS 67626. 1-800-337-4788
- Phillips, F. Dwain and Harrison, Mark S. *Out of the Dust*. Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2004.

Steinbeck, John. *Grapes of Wrath*. Random House. 1939. (if you use this one, either use only the part about the actual journey and the migrant camps, not why they left Oklahoma, since the early part of the novel is set near Checotah, Oklahoma, in the eastern part of the state, not the Dust Bowl at all. The main characters left because their farm was foreclosed due to the Depression. Also, point out that the author Steinbeck borrowed notes from Sanora Babb for the part about the migrant camps.)

#### ASSESSMENT:

Students will be assessed by the following ways:

1. Paper and pencil or on-line tests over the content of the assigned books.
2. Oral presentations to the class and to the public with the grading by a rubric assessing content, plus speaking skills.
3. Written reports and research assignments.
4. A subjective essay by the student evaluating what s/he learned from this project about conservation, and about reading, writing, speaking skills.

**\*\*Materials for the book sources should be chosen by grade level, as well as by level of proficiency of students and level of difficulty of subject matter. (I have used effectively all of the syllabus material in Grade 11 many times to teach this inter-disciplinary unit. For junior high or intermediate level, I found that using the preview film clips was more in keeping with level of development. These are available at little or no cost from your Soil and Water Conservation office.) However, I did have all students research the sources, both the novels they read and their school encyclopedias, to make them aware that sources are critical for accuracy.**

It is important for high school juniors to know that Steinbeck did not begin his novel *Grapes of Wrath* in the Dust Bowl but in Eastern Oklahoma near the Arkansas line, and that the farm was foreclosed because of the Depression, not the Dust Bowl. However, the trip to California and their experiences in the camp are invaluable for senior high students in order to understand what happened in those nine years of no crops within a 5-state area.)

## *USING THE DUST BOWL FILM WITH INTERMEDIATE AND JUNIOR HIGH LEVELS*

By Intermediate Level of school students are old enough to learn the concepts taught in this curriculum. The major adjustments should be made in the following ways:

Use the book by Virginia Frantz, *Keepin' It Together*, for sixth grade. Also, make the books by Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns, and by Dwain Phillips and Mark Harrison available for students to view the pictures.

The vocabulary words should be within their capability if you explain them in relation to the Dust Bowl, not a generic dictionary definition.

Other assignments should remain the same, except for your expectation for the level of ability for expository writing. But this is a teachable moment in that you don't expect them to be proficient, but in the learning stage and to revise. The written assignments should be about 500 words long. Keep their interview questions on the personal level: did you have to move? what did you eat? did you have to walk in the dust to get to school?

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For ninth grade, use Karen Hesse's book *Out of the Dust*, instead of the ones by Babb and Steinbeck. I have also added the one by Frantz to this level if I felt they needed more personal text. Keep the same writing assignments, but you should do more instruction about how to write expository text and how to compare and contrast. Keep the same vocabulary list, but you should expound about the origin of the word "Okies" by the New York reporter and its derogatory use. You will probably need to do that for some juniors, also. Keep the same interview assignments, but make their interview less technical farming questions and more about the personal affects of the time. However, they do need to know about farm foreclosures, migrants, etc. in detail.