

Step-by-step, whiteboard-ready

SCHOLASTIC  
**SCOPE**  
 DIGITAL LESSON

# The Dust Bowl: The Land, the People



Approximate  
 time to  
 complete  
 lesson: three  
 to four class  
 periods

## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is the relationship between human beings and the Earth?

## SUMMARY

Students will watch and discuss a *Scope* video that introduces them to the Dust Bowl. They will then read an article and a poem about that terrible environmental disaster. After answering critical-thinking questions and completing a graphic organizer, students will write a reflective essay about the relationship between land and people.

## MAIN OBJECTIVES

- to learn about the Dust Bowl, one of America's worst environmental disasters
- to think critically about the connection between land and humans
- to gather information and ideas from multiple texts and media types
- to participate in class discussion
- to write a reflective essay

## MATERIALS

Click the links below.

- student copies of the article “The Dust Bowl: A True Teen Story from History” from the March 12, 2012, issue of *Scope*
- Dust Bowl [map](#)
- *Scope* video [“Life in the Dust Bowl”](#)
- [homesteader poster](#)
- complete text of [“Hope”](#) by Karen Hesse (optional)
- *Scope* worksheet [“Critical-Thinking Questions”](#)
- *Scope* worksheet [“The Land, the People”](#)
- [answers](#) to worksheets

### 1 VIDEO VIEWING AND DISCUSSION

**Duration:** 20 minutes

Ask students to share what they know about the Dust Bowl. If students are unfamiliar with it, tell them that the Dust Bowl was a major environmental disaster centered in the southern Great Plains, that took place in the 1930s. Explain that “Dust Bowl” refers to the area where the disaster occurred as well as to the event itself. What do students imagine the affected area was like, given its moniker, “Dust Bowl”?

Project the Dust Bowl map to show students the areas most severely affected by the disaster.

Then show students our video “Life in the Dust Bowl,” which features a collection of astonishing photographs from the period. As a class, discuss the question presented at the end of the video: “How did the environment impact people’s lives during the Dust Bowl?” *Answers may include that the environment ruined people’s homes, health, and way of life; that it affected people’s food sources and livelihoods; and that it created fear and anxiety.*

### 2 CLASS READING: NONFICTION

**Duration:** 30 minutes, or one class period

Have students read the article as a class or independently. Pause after students read the section “Dust Everywhere” and ask why they think people moved to the Great Plains prior to the Dust Bowl. Project the homesteader poster; explain that thousands of pioneers started moving west as a result of the Homestead Act of 1862, which offered 160 acres of free land in exchange for living on it for five years and making improvements to it. In 1909, a new act offered 320 acres of less desirable land, including the drier areas of the lower Great Plains. With this incentive, thousands more people, like the Osteens, flocked to the region.

### 3 CLASS READING: POEM

**Duration:** 15 minutes

Invite a student to read the poem “Hope,” on page 9, aloud to the class. (Optional: Project and read the full-length poem instead.) Discuss the question in the magazine: Why do you think this poem is called “Hope”? *The fall of snow and rain in the midst of the Dust Bowl gave people hope that eventually the dry, dusty conditions would relent and the land—and people—would recover.*

## 4 CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS

**Duration:** 15 minutes

Project the critical-thinking worksheet and moderate a class discussion of the questions.

## 5 “THE LAND, THE PEOPLE” WORKSHEET

**Duration:** 25 minutes

Project or distribute the worksheet “The Land, the People.” Have students work individually or in pairs to complete it. Review the answers as a class.

## 6 WRITE A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

**Duration:** 20 minutes

Ask students to write an essay in response to the writing prompt on page 9: *How does the suffering of the Earth during the Dust Bowl mirror the suffering of those who lived through it?* Students should support their responses with details from the video, article, and poem.