

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## How the Dust Bowl Got its Name

Below you will find an excerpt from a book written by Albert Marrin called, *Years of Dust: The Story of the Dustbowl*. Read about one reporter's experience and why we refer to this event as the "Dust Bowl." Answer the questions on page 2 about this excerpt.

In April 1935, Reporter Robert Geiger set out by car across the Great Plains. As he headed east, heat waves made the air shimmer, causing him to squint. Temperatures rose to over one hundred degrees in the shade. There was nothing green visible in the fields; obviously, no rain had fallen for many weeks. Then, while driving across Oklahoma, Geiger encountered a "black blizzard," an immense dust storm. He had never imagined, let alone experienced, anything like it before. It was as if nature had gone insane.

At noon, darkness enveloped the earth. It seemed like an evil spirit had splashed an immense bucket of black paint across the sky. Within minutes, from horizon to horizon, the sun disappeared and noontime became "midnight." But such a midnight! There was no moon, no stars, no meteorites flashing across the heavens. Instead, billowing clouds of dust, some rising more than two miles into the air, whipped across the plains. Driven by howling winds, the clouds easily overtook speeding cars. As the dust fell back to earth, it drifted like dirty crunchy snow, choking roads and bringing trains to a grinding halt. Worse, the dust buried crops and livestock, destroying farmers' homes and livelihoods.

The storm left Geiger shaken. Afterward, he interviewed some farmers. These oldtimers, bony fellows with calloused hands and deep crease lines in their thin faces, seemed desperate. This was not the first dust storm they had experienced, nor, they reckoned, would it be the last. "Three little words," Geiger concluded, "achingly familiar on a Western farmer's tongue, rule life in the dust bowl of the continent—if it rains."

Dust bowl! Geiger used the phrase as a way to make fun of gala sports events, like the Rose Bowl and Orange Bowl, two well-known football games. Geiger's phrase, however, took on a new meaning. It stuck, instantly grabbing the public's imagination. During the 1930's, as today, "Dust Bowl" became a dramatic term for the parts of the Great Plains stricken by the worst environmental disaster in American history.

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## Questions

1. What states are part of the Great Plains region in the US?
  - a. California, Oregon and Washington
  - b. Florida, Georgia and Alabama
  - c. Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma
  
2. What was the “black blizzard” that Robert Geiger encountered in Oklahoma?
  - a. A snow storm with black snow
  - b. An immense dust storm
  - c. A new blizzard flavor at Dairy Queen
  
3. What conditions made the Dust Bowl so severe?
  - a. Hot temperatures, strong winds and no rain
  - b. Cold temperatures, strong winds and snow
  - c. Hot temperatures, no wind and heavy rain
  
4. Why do we call this event the Dust Bowl?
  - a. The dust covered everything – including your kitchen bowls.
  - b. The Great Plains, where the storms occurred, is bowl-shaped.
  - c. Robert Geiger coined the term during his interview with western farmers.
  
5. What is the overall tone of this excerpt?
  - a. Happy & joyful
  - b. Gloomy & threatening
  - c. Entertaining & exciting