

# *The Worst Hard Time*

by Timothy Egan

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“At its peak, the Dust Bowl covered one hundred million acres. Dusters swept over the northern prairie as well, but the epicenter was the southern plains. An area the size of Pennsylvania was in ruin and on the run. More than a quarter million people fled the Dust Bowl in the 1930s. Looking around now, it may seem that most people just hurried through the southern plains or left in horror. Not true. John Steinbeck told part of the story, about getting out, moving somewhere green. Those were the Exodusters. (*The Grapes of Wrath*) But Steinbeck’s exiles were from eastern Oklahoma, near Arkansas – mostly tenant farmers ruined by the collapse of the economy. The families in the heart of the black blizzards were further west, in towns like Guymon and Boise City in Oklahoma, or Dalhart and Follett in Texas, or Rolla and Kismet in Kansas. Not much was heard about the people who stayed behind, for lack of money or lack of sense, the people who hunkered down out of loyalty or stubbornness, who believed in tomorrow because it was all they had in the bank. Yet most people living in the center of the Dust Bowl, about two thirds of the population in 1930, never left during that hard decade.” (9, 10) *This is their story.*

The teachers’ guide employs these thinking skills: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The questions and the activities engage students at all levels. The questions and the activities align with **Colorado’s Content Standards.**

**Reading and Writing Content Standard #3:** Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

**Reading and Writing Content Standard #5:** Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources.

**History Content Standard #1:** Students understand the chronological organization of history and know how to organize events and people into major eras to identify and explain historical relationships.

**History Content Standard #2:** Students know how to use the processes and resources of historical inquiry.

**History Content Standard #3:** Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time.

**History Content Standard #4:** Students understand how science, technology, and economic activity have developed, changed, and affected societies throughout history.

## Key Points

### 1. *“Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.” - George Santayana*

As you read *The Worst Hard Time*, keep a journal of the historic events mentioned and the lessons either that were learned or that should have been learned. What mistakes we are currently repeating that we should have learned from the Dust Bowl?

### 2. *“It was a lost world then, it is a lost world now.” (10)*

Egan believes that there are many parallels between the Dust Bowl and the world today. Make two lists. Label one the Dust Bowl era and the other Today. List parallels.

Dust Bowl	2008
severe weather conditions (dust storms)	severe weather conditions (tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes)

3. *The people who lived during the Dust Bowl era were from an agrarian culture and had the background knowledge to live off the land, to survive the extreme conditions. We don't have that ability today. Are we more vulnerable?* Debate.

### 4. **Ghost towns.** Explore Colorado's ghost towns to create a basis of understanding for the book.

a) Divide into groups with each student selecting a different Colorado ghost town. Research the following aspects: geography; natural resources; ethnic groups that settled there; outside influences; economic base; profiteers vs. their victims; and political issues. Consider the challenges to local government: impact of decisions on the environment and long-term goals. What was the impact of conflicting voices in leadership; moral and ethical issues; racial, cultural, and religious divisions; and prejudices? Discover the reasons the towns thrived or withered.

b) Examine the towns that flourished during the Dust Bowl. Study the XIT Ranch, located in the Panhandle. What was the negative impact of the Capitol Syndicate on small towns of the Dust Bowl era?

c) What about small Colorado towns today? Are they dying? Can they be saved? Look at Fountain, which is thriving due to military expansion. How does Fort Carson impact the area's economy? Check *The Gazette's* archives to review the interrelationship between the military and local economies.

5. **Dream City/Vision 2020.** Learn about Dream City/Vision 2020 and get involved. This activity might count towards community service hours. ([www.DreamCity2020.com](http://www.DreamCity2020.com))

6. Attend a Living Voices presentation at East Library on October 10 at 9 a. m., 11 a. m., or 1 p. m.
7. Attend Timothy Egan’s presentation on October 2 at 3:30 p. m. at the Pikes Peak Community College at Rampart Campus or at 7 p. m. at Armstrong Theater on the Colorado College Campus.

## Overview Activities:

1. Draw a chart to record the experiences of the various cultures mentioned throughout the book.

Jewish	Italian	German-Russians	Cowboys	Indians

2. Keep a record of the statistics. For example, “In September 1929, just over 1.5 million people were out of work; by February of the following year, the number had tripled.” (95) When you finish reading the novel, analyze the statistics and compare them to stats for today. e. g., the unemployment rate
3. As you read, write down the Dust Bowl headlines. For example, on page 73 “RALLY AT CLOSE CHEERS BROKERS; BANKERS OPTIMISTIC.” At the same time, clip current news headlines about major local and national events. Write the year on the back of the headlines. Combine the two stacks, divide into teams, and compete to see how many headlines you can correctly identify according to the year.
4. Using a map of the United States, place flags to indicate where people settled.
5. “It was a lost world then; it is a lost world now.” (10) Record quotations that are meaningful to you. To create posters, collect additional quotes, such as “Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.” – George Santayana.
6. Select a family to track through the book. Make a booklet about the family. On the cover, list the family’s name, family members, and settlement location. On pages two and three list their hardships and experiences. On the back cover, list the outcome for the family. Compare booklets.
7. Keep notes on “then” and “now.” What issues did President Hoover and President Roosevelt face? In the current presidential campaign, what are the issues the candidates face and what are their stands? How are the problems today similar to the ones Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt handled?

8. The people who lived during the Dust Bowl were from the agrarian culture. Most Americans today don't have the skills to be self-sustaining. As a result, are people living in cities more vulnerable than those who live on farms? Research where America's food comes from today. How vulnerable is our food supply? Consider food recalls of tomatoes, chili peppers, beef, etc. What are your solutions for ensuring our food supplies?

9. Superheroes and Greed vs. Vision. Work in a team to create a comic book with superheroes and villains who represent the people mentioned in *The Worst Hard Time*. What is a superhero? Who were the superheroes in the book? Who are the superheroes today? Do Americans overuse the word "hero"? Collect examples of how we use the word "hero." Look at ads, promotions, the political campaign, magazines, and the internet. How often is the word "hero" used? Do we use the word excessively? You decide.

## Introduction

1. Science/weather: "On those days when the wind stops blowing across the face of the southern plains, the land falls into a silence that scares people in the way that a big house can haunt after the lights go out and no one else is there. . .It scared Coronado, looking for cities of gold in 1541. It scared the Anglo traders who cut a trail from Independence to Santa Fe, after they dared let go of the lifeline of the Cimarron River in hopes of shaving a few days off a seven-week trek. It even scared some of the Comanche as they chased bison over the grass. It scared the Germans from Russia and the Scots-Irish from Alabama – the Last Chancers, exiled twice over, looking to build a hovel from over-turned sod, even if that dirt house was crawling with centipedes and snakes, and leaked mud on the children when thunderheads broke. It still scares people driving cars named Expedition and Outlander. It scares them because of the forced intimacy with a place that gives nothing back to a stranger, a place where the land and its weather – probably the most violent and extreme on earth – demand only one thing: humility. (1, 2) Add to Egan's list of ethnic groups who were previously scared when the wind stopped blowing. Even with current technology, we still can't control the weather. What is the importance of having respect for the environment? What is the danger of ignoring environmental issues? Give examples of violent and extreme weather in recent years. Consider prairie fires during the early summer in eastern Colorado, summer fires in California, tornadoes in Holly and in Windsor, Colorado. Interview local people who have first-hand experience with grass fires or tornadoes. Ask them what they learned from their experience. How would they have done things differently? What changes have they made in their lives? What are their priorities now? Share your information with your classmates.

2. Literary reference/allusion: "In other places, scraps of life are frozen in death at midstride, as Lot's wife was petrified to salt while fleeing to higher ground." (2) Explain the biblical reference. Should the bible be taught in public schools as a form of literature? Debate the issue.

3. Art/photography: "Here is a wood-framed shack buried by sand, with only the roof joists still visible. In the distance is a copse of skeletal trees, the bones of orchards dried to a brittleness like charcoal. And is that a schoolhouse, with just the chimney and two walls still standing? Then you see fence posts, the nubs sticking out of sterile brown earth. Once, the

posts enclosed an idea that something could come from a shank of the southern plains to make life better than it was in a place that an Ehrlich, an O’Leary, or a Montoya had left. The fence posts rose six feet or more out of the ground. They are buried now but for the nubs that poke through layers of dust.” (2)

a) Using books or websites, such as American Memories.com, locate historic pictures to match these descriptions. Then, visit a ghost town and take pictures. Compare the pictures with those from the Dust Bowl. Display the pictures side by side.

b) Visit eastern Colorado or mining towns to interview the residents. Record their stories. Are there comparisons with people who lived through the Dust Bowl?

c) List the last names of people in the phone book. Check your telephone book or Google to see how many of those same names are listed today. What is the distribution of ethnic groups? How does it compare to the Dust Bowl era? Write an article for *The Hub* to share your information.

d) Study advertisements from that era and from current publications. What were the basic needs of people then compared with the needs of people now? Compare inventions then with inventions now. What does such a comparison tell us? Discuss with your classmates.

4. Diaries: “Outside Inavale not long ago, an old woman was found burning a Dust Bowl diary written by her husband. Her neighbor was astonished: why destroy such an intimate family record? The horror, the woman explained, was not worth sharing. She wanted it gone forever. (2, 3) For more information about Don Hartwell and his diary, see pages 242 – 248 in Chapter 19, pages 273 – 278 in Chapter 22, and pages 293 – 302 in Chapter 24. “Inavale, Nebraska, where the Hartwells lived, is a ghost town. Webster County, with four thousand people, has lost more than 60 per cent of its population from the 1930s. Years ago, a neighbor found Verna Hartwell burning her late husband’s diary. The diary was rescued and after Verna’s death turned over to the Nebraska Historical Society in Lincoln.” (312) Could she change history by burning sections of the diary? How do we know whether recorded history is accurate? Create a diary using your grandparents’ stories. Review the stories and take out a major section to show how you can distort history by omitting facts. Do the same experiment with the story of your own life. Have you ever avoided getting in trouble by leaving out pertinent details?

5. Geography: “Fence tops lead to small farms, some still pulsing with life, and lead further to towns that service what is left of the homestead sections. Here is Springfield, standing for another day in Baca County, in the far southeast corner of Colorado, with Kansas on its eastern side, the No Man’s Land of the Oklahoma Panhandle to the south, a piece of New Mexico in another corner. For sale signs. A mini-mart. A turkey buzzard perched on a tower near city hall. Springfield is the county seat for Baca, which has about four thousand people spread over its wrinkled emptiness – fewer than two people per square mile. A hundred years ago, a county with population density this low was classified as ‘frontier.’ By that definition, there is far more frontier now in this part of the world than in the day of the sod house. The town has the High Plains look, that slow-death shudder. They have not tried to dress it up or put makeup on battered storefronts. It is what it is.” (3) What is the population of Springfield, Colorado, today? of Baca County? Which Colorado towns have even lower population density? How do they survive? Do you think they will continue to survive? Why?

With the high cost of gasoline today, many people are leaving the suburbs and returning to the heart of the cities. Will this change the community structures? e. g., the demise of malls and the return of neighborhood stores? List the changes you think might happen. Decide whether they are positive or negative. For example, revitalization of old

neighborhoods, less impact on the environment (less driving means less pollution). Study San Francisco's mass transit system. Will that become the model for other American cities?

6. "His (Ike Osteen's) father had followed the old Santa Fe Trail in 1909, the year Congress tried to induce settlement in one of the final frontiers of the public domain – the arid, western half of the Great Plains – with a homestead act that doubled the amount of land a person could prove-up and own to 320 acres. The last homestead act was a desperate move, promoted by railroad companies and prairie state senators, to get people to inhabit a place that had never held anything more than a few native hunting camps and some thirteenth-century Indian villages." (4) What is public domain? Read about the Homestead Act. Could people in the Dust Bowl era make informed decisions? Who manipulated the information available to them? Are people still victimized today by misinformation? How do you make decisions? Practice buying a car; go through the process to make a wise decision. What sources would you rely upon to compare fuel efficiency, prices, safety, and reliability? What is the importance of ethics in journalism? How does reliability affect your decision?

7. "The Osteens had the wind and 320 acres of land. The wind powered a windmill, which pumped water 140 feet up from the Ogallala Aquifer. The water was piped into small storage tanks. Cattle drank from the tanks and fattened easily on the rich grass. That was all you needed to stay alive: water and grass." (5) What do you need to stay alive? With the state of the economy, people are rethinking basic needs. An economist on *The Today Show* advised people to forego the non-essentials, such as manicures and pedicures. Create a list of the non-essentials that people today consider necessities. What would people buy if they no longer had credit cards? How would only a cash basis change the economy? What businesses would disappear?

Go through your house. Pick a room. List items essential to survival in case you had to evacuate due to emergency. List the remaining items. Which ones are non-essential? Total the cost of those items. Could you have used that money more wisely? The families in the book and in *The Grapes of Wrath* had to make these hard decisions. Their main concern was having food, water, and medicine. How does your list of essentials compare to theirs? How much money do you need to survive a week? Depending on the size of your family, what percentage of the bills do you owe? For example, if there are four people in your family, you should pay twenty-five percent of all costs. Using play money, pay your portion of the house payment or rent, utilities, and food. Do you have money left over for recreation? What did you learn from this activity?

8. "There'd be days, you couldn't see your hand in front a' your face," Osteen says, using the exact words that other people from his generation use. They know some people do not believe them, just as many in the East did not believe the initial accounts of predatory dust until a storm in May 1934 carried the windblown shards of the Great Plains over much of the nation. In Chicago, twelve million tons of dust fell. New York, Washington – even ships at sea, three hundred miles off the Atlantic coast – were blanketed in brown." (5) Weather is still an issue. We can't ignore what happens in other places because we are ultimately affected. For example, wildfires in other states create overcast clouds and disperse showers of particles that affect our air quality. How can we be more accountable about environmental issues? Pollution is a major issue. In the past, Colorado required vehicles be tested for emissions. Why was this program discontinued? Why do some people think that it should be reinstated? What is your opinion?

Organize a panel of students to create a practical way of changing public attitudes toward environmental issues. Make policies that will establish sustainable programs rather than temporary solutions. Participate in Dream City/Vision 2020 to share your ideas. Compare the problems with air quality in Los Angeles, Denver, Beijing. What steps were taken to solve the problem of poor air quality? Should public policy be changed into law so that there is a uniform approach to the problem? What can we learn from these examples?

9. Science: “Cattle went blind and suffocated. When farmers cut them open, they found stomachs stuffed with fine sand. Horses ran madly against the storms. Children coughed and gagged, dying of something the doctors called “dust pneumonia.” In desperation, some families gave away their children. The instinctive act of hugging a loved one or shaking someone’s hand could knock two people down, for the static electricity from the dusters was so strong.” (5, 6) Research dust pneumonia. Was there a cure for it? What would be done for victims today? What respiratory illnesses do people deal with currently? How does air quality affect respiratory diseases such as asthma?

What is static electricity? Find dramatic examples of the impact of static electricity on the people of the Dust Bowl era. Does static electricity cause serious problems today? Look at technology. What is the potential for static electricity wiping out huge databases of information? Write a science fiction story where this happens.

10. “Ike Osteen’s life spans the flu epidemic of 1918, the worst depression in American history, and a world war that ripped apart the globe. Nothing compares to the black dusters of the 1930s, he says, a time when the simplest thing in life – taking a breath – was a threat.” (6) Create three separate time lines listing the major events in 1) your grandparents’ life 2) your parents’ life and 3) your life. How do the major events in the life of a generation make one generation different from another?

11. Louise Walton left New York due to health problems. “Doctors prescribed a remedy: go west, to the southern plains, go west to breathe. She took the train from New York, traveling through Chicago, St. Louis, Topeka, Garden City. When at last she landed in Lamar, Colorado, it was as if she had left the planet. There was no green. No lights at night. No buzz of purpose or industry. God, it was flat. Like a brown ocean. . . The prescriptions, geography as therapy, had worked for others. Since the late nineteenth century, the western plains had been a haven for “lungers,” as the pilgrims with respiratory ailments were called. It was not just Doc Holliday, the killer and home-schooled dentist, who came to Kansas to remedy his tuberculosis. Every good-sized town in the arid belt had a sanatorium offering various amenities. For a while, Colorado City was so full of English-accented patients fleeing the foul industrial air of urban Britain that it was known as Little London.” (6, 7) Research the tuberculosis sanatoriums in El Paso County. Include pictures from the Pikes Peak Library’s digital collection. Do any of these buildings still exist? How are they being used? Is tuberculosis a problem today? Look for news articles about the CSU-Pueblo student who died from TB last year. Are there other cases of TB that have made the news in the past five years? Why are there more virulent strains of TB and other diseases today?

A debate rages over whether we should be using so many sanitizers. Does it trigger the adaptability of germs? Research the topic. What are the major issues involved in this argument? Hold a debate.

12. “On the skin, the dust was like a nail file, a grit strong enough to hurt. People rubbed Vaseline in their nostrils as a filter. The Red Cross handed out respiratory masks to schools.

Families put wet towels beneath their doors and covered their windows with bed sheets, fresh-dampened nightly. . . .At school, Jeanne Clark, the New York dancer's daughter, went through dust drills." (7) Throughout history America has organized national drills to deal with anticipated emergencies; for example, during the Cold War schools held drills in the event of atomic warfare; the Red Cross gave advice on stocking bomb shelters. What drills are held in schools and work places today? Sit with your family to create or to review a plan to deal with emergencies. What organizations can you turn to in the event of a major disaster? What is the state of Civil Defense? Is our country well prepared for major disasters? Hold a class discussion.

13. "That was Black Sunday, April 14, 1935, day of the worst duster of them all. The storm carried away twice as much dirt as was dug out of the earth to create the Panama Canal. The canal took seven years to dig; the storm lasted a single afternoon. More than 300,000 tons of Great Plains topsoil was airborne that day." (8). Black Sunday was the result of the government's encouragement of land misuse. Find other major manmade projects that altered nature. (e. g., Hoover Dam, Tennessee Valley Authority, Lake Powell, The Big Dig in Boston) Will these major projects create future problems because man has altered nature? Present your arguments. In solving problems the answers often create different challenges. Study the current proposal to build a rail line to connect the Front Range cities. Select teams of students to be environmental, transportation, and economic advisors. Have the three groups defend their stand either to support or to reject the project.

14. "At its peak, the Dust Bowl covered one hundred million acres. Dusters swept over the northern prairie as well, but the epicenter was the southern plains. An area the size of Pennsylvania was in ruin and on the run. More than a quarter-million people fled the Dust Bowl in the 1930s." (9) ". . .most people living in the center of the Dust Bowl, about two thirds of the population in 1920, never left during that hard decade." (10) Read stories of Coloradoans who stayed during the Dust Bowl. Re-enact one of the stories.

15. "Looking around now, it may seem that most people just hurried through the southern plains or left in horror. Not true. John Steinbeck told part of the story, about getting out, moving somewhere green. Those were the Exodusters. But Steinbeck's exiles were from eastern Oklahoma, near Arkansas – mostly tenant farmers ruined by the collapse of the economy." (9) Have one group of students represent the Joad family and other students represent the families in *The Worst Hard Times*. Tell your stories and compare experiences.

16. "It was a lost world then; it is a lost world now. The government treats it like throwaway land, the place where Indians were betrayed, where Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps during World War II, where German POWs were imprisoned. The only growth industries now are pigs and prisons. Over the last half-century, towns have collapsed and entire counties have been all but abandoned to the old and the dying. Hurricanes that buried city blocks farther south, tornadoes that knocked down everything in their paths, grassfires that burned from one horizon to the other – all have come and gone through the southern plains. But nothing has matched the black blizzards. American meteorologists rated the Dust Bowl the number one weather event of the twentieth century. And, as they go over the scars of the land, historians say it was the nation's worst prolonged environmental disaster." (10) What areas of the U. S. would we consider throwaway land today? Is it used? If so, how? Using a map, note where prisons are built and where Indian reservations are located. Where are the major urban centers? How does discovery of oil alter our attitude

about what land is disposable? Flag the latest oil-producing areas. Does the current embracing of wind power change the attitude towards some of the areas you marked? Discuss your findings with the class.

## I. PROMISE: The Great Plowup 1901 - 1930

### Chapter 1 “*The Wanderer*”

1. The book opens by introducing the readers to Bam White’s family. “They were moving from the high desert chill of Las Animas, Colorado, to Littlefield, Texas, south of Amarillo, to start anew. Bam White was a ranch hand, a lover of horses and empty skies, at a time when the cowboy was becoming a museum piece in Texas and an icon in Hollywood. Within a year, Charles Lindbergh would cross the ocean in his monoplane, and a white man in blackface would speak from the screen of a motion picture show.” (13) Compare and contrast Las Animas with Littlefield. Was Bam’s decision to move a good idea? When was the cowboy an icon in Hollywood? Who were the famous cowboy movie stars of the era? Have Bam give his opinion about movie star cowboys. Have Charles Lindbergh tell the details of his flight and the experiences of flying across the Atlantic. Discuss the whole idea of a “white man in blackface.” Why was that done?

2. “After sunrise, Bam White had a talk with his remaining horses. . .If you all can give me another two or three days, White told his horses, we’ll rest you good. Get me to Amarillo, at least.” (14) Compose what he said to his horses. Have a pep talk with your pet about his/her bad habits.

3. Geography: “The family was not yet halfway into their exodus. Ahead were 209 miles of road over the high, dry roof of Texas, across the Canadian river, bypassing dozens of budding Panhandle hamlets: Wildorado, Lasbuddie, Flagg, Earth, Circle, Muleshoe, Progress, Circle Back. Map the White family’s trip from Las Animas to Littlefield.

4. Art: “They (the Comanche) are the most extraordinary horsemen that I have seen yet in all my travels,” said the artist George Catlin, who accompanied the cavalry on a reconnaissance mission to the southern plains in 1834.” (15) Find and display examples of Catlin’s art.

5. Indian history: “The Comanche hated Texans more than any other group of people.” (16) Give specific examples from history to explain why the Comanche felt that way. (Possible sources include *Being Comanche: A Social History of an American Indian Community* by Morris F. Foster and *Comanches: The Destruction of a People* by T. R. Fehrenbach, [www.comanchenation.com](http://www.comanchenation.com).)

6. Indian history/diet: “To supplement the diet (of bison) there were wild plums, grapes, and currants growing in spring-fed creases of the flatland, and antelope, sage grouse, wild turkeys, and prairie chickens, though many Comanche thought it was unclean to eat a bird.” (16) Why did Comanches think it unclean to eat birds? (See possible sources listed above.) What other cultures have taboo foods? Why are those foods considered taboo? Plan a menu for people who lived there then.

7. “The tribe had an agreement signed by the president of the United States and ratified by Congress, the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867, which promised the Comanche, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, and other tribes hunting rights to much of the Great American Desert, the area south of the Arkansas River.” (16, 17) Using two different maps, block out the areas where tribes had owned their land or had hunting rights. Compare where Indians lived in the Dust Bowl era to where they live today. Report on the Medicine Lodge Treaty to your classmates. (One general source is wikipedia.org.) ) Who was the president of the United States in 1867? What was his stand on Indian affairs? What is the current president’s stand on Indian affairs? Make two charts.

8. “To the Indians would go the land that nobody wanted: the arid grasslands in the west.” (17) Look for current issues regarding Indian affairs. Be a public relations agent to encourage society to be more interested in the issues.

9. “Fifteen years after the end of the Civil War, Texas wanted the biggest statehouse in the union, a palace of polished red granite. To pay for the new stone showpiece, the state offered up three million acres in the distant Panhandle to anybody willing to construct the building . . . In 1882, a company out of Chicago organized the Capitol Syndicate, and this group of investors took title to three million acres in return for agreeing to build the capitol. . .(20) Wheeler dealers took advantage of land grabs and organized into syndicates. Is that still happening today? Are these types of shady deals still happening today? Give examples, e. g., drug cartels.

The book, *The Beef Bonanza; or, How to Get Rich on the Plains*, by Gen. James S. Brisbain is currently offered online by Dumontbooks for \$250.00. . .Brisbain’s book has long been considered the most important promotional work adding fuel to the cattle boom of the late 1880s and was particularly influential on foreign investors. . .he knew little or nothing about the topic and cribbed whole segments of his text from other sources. (www.dumontbooks.com) Unscrupulous people have always profited at the expense of others. Read ads and emails and bring in examples of people who you think might be scamming. Discuss your results.

10. “It was Stephen Long, trying to find something of value in the treeless wilderness, who first used those words (Great American Desert) in 1820, later printed on maps that guided schooners west. It would stay as cartographic fact until after the Civil War, when the Great American Desert became the Great Plains. Zebulon Pike, scouting the southern half of the Louisiana Purchase in 1806 for Thomas Jefferson, had compared it to the African Sahara in his report to the present.” (22, 23) Why was it so critical that this area be populated and developed? Why was there such a push to claim the land? What is Zebulon Pike known for in Colorado? Research more about Pike and his report to Thomas Jefferson.

11. “After conducting an extensive survey, Long wrote in 1820 . . . ‘In regard to this extensive section of the country, I do not hesitate in giving the opinion that it is almost wholly uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence.’” (23) What is the population of the Great Plains today? How do people make their living there today? How do words and phrases influence people’s attitudes? What is the difference between the connotation and the denotation of words? Visit the area.

12. “The answer to the syndicate’s problem was aggressive salesmanship. Why, this wasteland could be England or Missouri, if plowed in the right way. Brochures were

distributed in Europe, the American South, and at major ports of entry to the U. S. . . Twice a month, agents for the syndicate rounded up five hundred people and put them on a train from Kansas City for the Texas Panhandle to see for themselves. The train ride was free. . . Well, sure, it rained less than twenty inches a year, which was the accepted threshold for growing a crop without irrigation, but through the miracle of dry farming a fellow could turn this land to gold. . . That's what Hardy Campbell, the apostle of dry farming from Lincoln, Nebraska, preached – and the government put a stamp on his philosophy through their agriculture office in the Panhandle. No nester was without *Campbell's Soil Culture Manual*, a how-to-book with homilies that all but guaranteed prosperity.” (24) How do you decide whom to believe when dealing with a serious issue? What is the danger in basing your decision on what you want to believe? How were people duped into buying homes they couldn't afford? Were unscrupulous tactics involved? Should the taxpayers bail out people facing foreclosure? Develop an action plan to solve these problems.

13. “The best side is up, the cowboys said time and again – for chrissakes don't plow it under.” (25) Do we listen to the older generation and to people with experience? Why didn't the nesters listen to the cowboys who had experience with the land? Ask your parents about a time they wished they had listened to their parents. Share the stories.

14. “Up north, in Cimarron County, Oklahoma, and Baca County, Colorado, farmers had been growing crown for whisk brooms, but then the vacuum cleaner, in just a few years, ruined the market for broomcorn. Prohibition saved the broomcorn farmers, making grain more valuable as alcohol than the dried stalks had ever been for sweeping.” (28, 29) What other inventions in history caused another item to become obsolete? (cell phones - pay phones) What current forms of technology do you think will become obsolete in the future? Invent an item to replace something that is currently popular.

15. A single still near the Osteen family homestead up in Baca County was turning out a barrel of corn whiskey a day, every day, nearly every year of Prohibition. Some farmers made five hundred dollars a week. At the peak of Prohibition, five counties in a three-state region of the High Plains shipped fifty thousand gallons a week to distant cities.” (27, 28) Study the outcome of Prohibition. How can restrictive laws generate a black market and lead to crime? According to recent news reports, some groups are considering proposing legislation to outlaw alcohol again in the United States. Debate the issue.

16. “Dr. George Waller Dawson (Doc) arrived in 1907, planning to start a ranch and live off his investments. In time, he hoped to breathe like a normal man and lavish attention on the lovely Willie. But he lost nearly everything two years later in a market collapse.” (29) Research the stock market crash. Compare the stock market crash then with the volatility of the stock market today.

17. “Dick Coon was fortunate to live through the Galveston hurricane of 1900, the worst single natural disaster in American history.” (30) Is the Galveston hurricane of 1900 still the worst single natural disaster in American history? Compare it with Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Dolly.

18. “Marooned, Bam made his decision on the spot: the family would stay in Dalhart. . . The way White looked at Dalhart was the way Doc Dawson and Uncle Dick looked at their homes in the Panhandle: as the last best chance to do something right, to get a small piece of

the world and make it work. The wanderer would settle in and see what the earth would bring him in what had been the world's greatest grassland." (31) Collect facts and quotations from one character throughout the book. Listen to a taped interview with a pioneer from Colorado Springs. (available at the Pioneers' Museum.) Compare life in Colorado Springs during the 1930s with life in the Dust Bowl.

## **Chapter 2 *No Man's Land***

1. "Hope died the first time people laid eyes on Boise City, Oklahoma." (32) Pictures of Boise City in the brochures were deceptive. Do people doctor pictures today? Is this ethical? Use Photo Shop to create an appealing ad to sell a product. On the back, show the actual project. What laws protect the consumer from this practice?

2. "It (Boise City) was founded on fraud. . . there was not a single tree in Boise City. Nor was there a city. But that didn't stop the Southwestern Immigration and Development Company from selling lots, at forty-five dollars apiece, in a phantom town in the newly opened Panhandle of Oklahoma. . . The story helped them sell three thousand town lots in 1908, one year after Oklahoma became the forty-sixth state. . . Worst of all, the company did not even own the land it had sold. The developers were arrested for fraud. *Lurid* was the word the government used to describe the lies of the town developers, J. E. Stanley and A. J. Kline. After a two-week trial, the pair was found guilty and sent to Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary. Kline died in his cell – a lesson apparently not passed on in the annals of American real estate." (32, 33) Give examples of recent swindles in American real estate or in investments. Have you ever been to a movie where the trailer was misleading? What recourse does a teenage consumer have?

3. Art: "The company sent fliers all over the country, showing a town as ripe as a peach two days into its blush. The brochures sketched a Boise City with elegantly aged trees lining the streets, a tower of cold, clean water gushing from an artesian well in the center of town, and houses any banker would be proud to call home. The streets were paved. Businesses were chock-a-block on Main Street." (32) Illustrate the scene. Make a poster of two columns marked "Ad" and "Reality." What should happen to people behind deceptive ads? Interview your parents on whether they were ever taken in by deceptive advertising. What did they do about it?

4. History/Art: "Five flags had flown over No Man's Land. Spain was the first to claim it, but two expeditions and reports from traders reinforced the view that the land was best left to the 'humped-back cows' and their pursuers, the Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache. Spain gave the territory to Napoleon. The French flag flew for all of twenty days, until the emperor turned around and sold it to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase. A subsequent survey put the land in Mexico's hands, an extension of their rule over Texas in 1819. Seventeen years later, the newly independent Republic of Texas claimed all territory north to Colorado. But when Texas was admitted to the Union in 1845, it was on the condition that no new slave territory would rise above 36.5 degrees in latitude, the old Missouri Compromise line. That left an orphaned rectangle, 35 miles wide and 210 miles long, that was not attached to any territory or state in the West, and it got its name, No Man's Land. The eastern boundary, at the one hundredth meridian, was where the plains turned unlivably arid, unfit for Jefferson's farmer-townbuilders." (34) Draw or sew the flags that flew over No Man's Land and display them.

5. “A few years before the (Lucas) family arrived, a lightning bolt lit up a field in New Mexico, igniting a fire that swept across the High Plains of Texas and Oklahoma. It burned everything in its wake for two hundred miles. Fire was part of the prairie ecosystem, a way for the land to regenerate itself, clean out excess insect populations, and allow the grass to be renewed.” Compare that fire with the Hayman fire in Colorado in 2002.

([www.wilderness.org/Library/Documents/WildfireSummary](http://www.wilderness.org/Library/Documents/WildfireSummary) or [www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/hayres](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/hayres).)

When pine trees are infested with pine beetles, residents are required to burn the trees. Why can the government mandate such action? Drive with your parents into the mountains to photograph the dead or dying pine trees. How close are these places to where you live? What fire danger does this pose to your neighborhood? Develop a neighborhood conservation plan.

6. “When it wasn’t fire, it was another element on the run in No Man’s Land. The year the Lucas family arrived in the Panhandle, the worst flood in young Cimarron County’s history terrorized a string of ranches and homesteads. Most of the year, the Cimarron River skulks meekly away to the east, a barely discernible trickle in midsummer. But in the spring of 1914, after a week of steady rains, the Cimarron jumped its banks and went on a rampage. The flood knocked out a dam that had just been completed, carried a thirteen-room ranch house into the river, and washed away numerous homes. Two children drowned.” (38) Research the worst floods in American history. Check out the pictures of the 1935 and the 1965 floods in Colorado Springs, available at the Pikes Peak Library District. Where are the flood plains in Colorado Springs? Do you live near one? Research the Stormwater Enterprise and vote on the issue in the November election.

7. “For all of the horror, the land was not without its magic. The first Anglos in the Panhandle used to recite a little ditty:

*I like this country fine  
I think it’s awfully good.  
For the wind pumps all the water  
And the cow chops all the wood.”* (40)

Write ditties about life in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and/or the United States today.

8. “In the fall of 1922, Hazel (Lucas) saddled up Pecos and rode off to a one-room, wood-frame building sitting alone in the grassland: the school-house. It was Hazel’s first job. She had to be there before the bell rang – five-and-a-half miles by horseback each way – to haul in drinking water from the well, to sweep dirt from the floor, and shoo hornets and flies from inside. The school had thirty-nine students in eight grades, and the person who had to teach them all, Hazel Lucas, was seventeen years old. . . . After school, Hazel had to do the janitor work and get the next day’s kindling – dry weeds or sun-toasted cow manure.” (41-42)

Compare a teacher’s duties in 1922 with a teacher’s duties today. With your teacher, list all of the components (white boards, computers, etc.) available to her/him today.

9. “But no group of people took a more dramatic leap in lifestyle or prosperity, in such a short time, than wheat farmers on the Great Plains. In less than ten years, they went from subsistence living to small business-class wealth, from working a few hard acres with horses and hand tools to being masters of wheat estates, directing harvests with wondrous new machines, at a profit margin in some cases that was ten times the cost of production. In 1910,

the price of wheat stood at eighty cents a bushel, good enough for anyone who had outwitted a few dry years to make enough money to get through another year and even put something away. Five years later, with world grain supplies pinched by the Great War, the price had more than doubled. Farmers increased production by 50 percent. When the Turkish navy blocked the Dardenelles, they did a favor for dryland wheat farmers that no one could have imagined. Europe had relied on Russia for export grain. With Russian shipments blocked, the United States stepped in, and issued a proclamation to the plains: plant more wheat to win the war. And for the first time, the government guaranteed the price, at two dollars a bushel, through the war, backed by the wartime food administrator, a multimillionaire public servant named Herbert Hoover. Wheat was no longer a staple of a small family farmer but a commodity with a price guarantee and a global market. . . In 1917, about forty-five million acres of wheat were harvested nationwide. In 1919, over seventy-five millions acres were put into production – up nearly 70 percent.” (42-43) Research the need for, the uses of, and the price of wheat today. Look at price controls, farm subsidies, and government intervention. What do you think about paying farmers to allow acres to lie fallow? What is the historic reason for this? In light of world hunger, is there a better way to handle this? (economics/trade balance, etc.)

10. “If the farmers of the High Plains were laying the foundation for a time bomb that would shatter the natural world, any voices that implied such a thing were muted.” (43) Are there any “time bombs” in the world today? Fully research the issue and report to the class. Members of the class may want to explore different issues, such as NAFTA, immigration, the war in Iraq, and Israel, global warming, overuse of antibiotics, and bottled water, for example.

11. “Women were scarce in No Man’s Land, so much so that a newspaper advertisement was placed in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* by sixty-five ‘lonely men with dugouts and a willingness to work.’ (44, 45) Write a human interest story about how Sadie White got her man. At the end of the story, what was the advantage for Sadie to be married to a big man? Would a woman in 2008 be attracted to Will Crawford? Why or why not?

12. “By sheer will, they (the settlers) would force green on the dry land. The caution of John Wesley Powell, the one-armed Civil War veteran who warned against trying to stamp squares of traditional farms on the High Plains, was thrown to the wind. ‘No part of it can be redeemed for agriculture except by irrigation,’ Powell had written in his 1878 *Report on the Arid Region of the United States*. To do so, he concluded, would be destructive.” (46) Why did no one listen? What else did John Powell explore? Research his life and accomplishments.

13. “With a horse-drawn plow, Fred Folkers produces barely enough to stay afloat. What changed everything for him, and other dryland farmers, was the tractor. In the 1830s, it took fifty-eight hours of work to plant and to harvest a single acre. By 1930, it took only three hours for the same job. . . With his new combine, Folkers could cut and thresh the grain in one swoop, using just a fraction of the labor. Folkers bought an International 22-36 tractor, a Case combine, and a one-way plow – a twelve-foot Grand Detour. The one-way plow would later be cursed as the tool that destroyed the plains because of its efficiency at ripping up grass.” (47) Research the history of farm machinery, particularly tractors, combines, and plows. Did these inventions enhance life in one way and destroy it in another way? Look at the short-

term gains as opposed to the long-term results. Share experiences you've had where a decision that looked good in the short term turned out to be unfortunate in the long run.

14. "What's more, there was now an easy way to get the wheat of Fred Folkers and Carlie Lucas to the rest of the world. In 1925, a train finally arrived in Boise City, almost twenty years after the fantasy locomotives of the Southwestern Immigration and Development Company were promised. Up in eastern Montana, towns that had been built thirty years earlier with the arrival of the railroad were folding. The northern plains homestead experiment was a bust, and no amount of government incentive or railroad promotional schemes could keep it going." (47) Research the significance of the railroad in western expansion. Research the impact railroads on the development of Colorado Springs. How did General Palmer figure into the picture?

15. "The piano cost three hundred dollars – ten dollars down, ten dollars a month. With the piano came a teacher, who charged fifty cents a lesson. The same year, Frederick Folkers went to the car dealership, in Liberal, Kansas, and came home with a spanking new 1928 Dodge – a beauty, with four doors and room enough to carry the whole family." (49) Americans are deeply in debt due to the credit card system. This seriously impacts our country's economy. How are credit card companies regulated? If you could pass stronger regulations for credit card companies, what would those regulations be? For example, should credit card companies be allowed to charge high interest rates? to target high school and college students? For the first time federal legislators will be addressing this issue when they reconvene in January 2009. Work as a group to send an email to your legislator.

16. "People who had come to the Panhandle wanting only to own a small piece of something now realized that through easy loans, they could own a large piece of anything. . . Occasionally, Fred Folkers said it all seemed to be happening too fast. (50) The Dust Bowl was an era of easy loans. Today, easy loans resulted in the mortgage crisis of 2008. Research the mortgage crisis. Do you know any families who were affected? How many homes went into foreclosure in El Paso County?

17. "People were pouring into town, taking up rooms at the Crystal Hotel – suitcase farmers who had no intention of every settling there. They wanted only to rent out a tractor and a piece of ground for a few days, drop some winter wheat into the fresh-turned fold, and come back next summer for the payoff. It was a game of chance called 'trying to hit a crop.' One suitcase farmer broke thirty-two thousand acres in southeast Kansas in 1921. Four years later, he plowed twice that amount. The banks seldom said no. After Congress passed the Federal Farm Loan Act in 1916, every town with a well and a sheriff had itself a farmland bank – an institution! – offering forty-year loans at six percent interest." (50, 51) Research the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916. What has changed in farming since then? The Federal Reserve Bank controls the interest rate now. Has that agency raised or lowered the interest rate over the last couple of years? How does that action affect the economy? Who are the speculators (suitcase farmers) today? Is offshore drilling another example of a quick fix?

18. "The government had already issued its official view of the rapid churning of ancient prairie sod. 'The soil is the one indestructible, immutable asset that the nation possesses,' the Federal Bureau of Soils proclaimed as the grasslands were transformed. 'It is the one resource that cannot be exhausted, that cannot be used up.'" (51) Why did the Federal Bureau of Soils think that the soil could not be exhausted? Cite the agency's position on suburbs,

decrease of family farms, city sprawl, and decrease of open spaces. What percentage of food is derived from the mega-farms? from the smaller farms? What resources are people currently exhausting? What can we all do to preserve resources?

### **Chapter 3 *Creating Dalhart***

1. “There were three kids between him and Lizzie. While living in Dalhart, they had had a baby girl, but she looked bad when she greeted her first minute, not breathing at all, purple. She was stillborn.” (52) In both books, there were stillborn babies. Compare infant mortality rates from the Dust Bowl to today. Study all countries’ infant mortality rate ranking. Where does the U. S. fall? What do we know about prenatal care? What programs are available to indigent expectant mothers? Hold an event to benefit Newborn Hope.

2. “Lizzie White could not shake the feeling that this land was no good for them, and maybe they should have kept moving south. But Bam White was a tomorrow man who fit right into this New Year Country.” (52, 53) What did the author mean by the term “New Year Country”? What places would be in that category today? What countries are prospering today? (e. g., United Arab Emirates, Qatar, China, and Viet Nam) Why? Discuss supply and demand.

3. “Hickman Price came to the Panhandle and said, well, if it’s factory farms that are going to make the wheat pay here, let’s get to it. He had made his money in films, but here, he told people, there were even bigger riches available. By 1929, he had fifty-four square miles, nearly 35,000 acres, wheat coming off the land like Model-Ts. It was the Henry Ford model brought to agriculture, he bragged, econ-o-me of scale. Do the math, friend. The movie man said he could produce his wheat for forty cents a bushel, and if it sold for \$1.30, he could bring in upwards of a million dollars a year.” (53, 54) This era was a shift in economic approach from the original idea of a smaller consumer base with the consumer buying only quality products that would last, recycling and using everything that s/he has, and paying cash instead of using credit and consuming fewer products. Today’s approach features planned obsolescence to maintain a large market; outsourcing to keep prices low due to cheaper labor, and to increase factory farms and chain stores that combine forces to outsell small businesses and control the market. In the long run, which system is more beneficial to the people? Hold a debate.

4. “He (John L. McCarty) bought the *Dalhart Texan*, became its editor and publisher, and made plans to turn it into the loudest, most influential daily newspaper in the Texas Panhandle. McCarty saw himself as a town builder with a pen.” (55) Write one of McCarty’s newspaper articles about the advantages of living in Dalhart. The newspaper industry is another one struggling today. Why are newspapers declining in readership? Explore the history *The Gazette*, and the defunct *Colorado Springs Sun*. What happens when a city has only one major newspaper? Discuss whether newspapers will die out altogether. What would happen if people end up with only one source of news?

5. “About once a week, his column ran next to Will Rogers on page one of the *Texan*, and told folks he was the better writer.” (56) Research Will Rogers and his columns. What do you think of his writing? Visit the Will Rogers’ Shrine in Colorado Springs. Post favorite Will Rogers’ columns in the classroom.

6. “People came to the High Plains now because they had missed out on earlier land grabs, land rushes, land betrayals, and land auctions. They had missed the best homestead land, the best stolen Indian land, the best railroad grant land, the land that was quickly taken in the first Homestead Act of 1862 and the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909. What had started with a rousing slogan that thousands marched to in the 1856 presidential campaign of John Fremont – ‘Free Soil, Free Men, Fremont!’ – was down to the ugliest dirt in the country.” (56) Sound bites are attention getters, using few words to get a point across. Provide sound bites from history and from today. Look at the political campaigns. Which sound bites do you remember? How effective are they in swaying opinion?

7. “Historians had been herded into thinking that the American frontier was closed after the 1890 census, that western movement had effectively ended just before the close of the last century, that settlement had been tried and failed in the Great American Desert. But they overlooked the southern plains, the pass-through country. In the first thirty years of the twentieth century, it got a second look. . .Southern families, field hands, Scots-Irish and Welsh usually came in steady waves . . .Mexicans were drawn by jobs on irrigated beet farms in Kansas and Colorado . . .And more than any other group, they came from a faraway part of Russia. (57) Early America welcomed people from many different areas of the world. Why has the attitude toward immigrants has changed? How is the federal government dealing with immigration and with illegal immigration? Which states are the most affected by immigration issues? How is the economy affected? What are taxpayers’ arguments regarding immigrants’ rights?

8. “When they (the migrants) arrive in Omaha or Kansas City, the scouts, land merchants, and railroad colonists sent them on to the High Plains. It was a different story up in the northern plains, where people were cursing the railroads for perpetuating a fraud that broke many a family. They had taken a gamble, stripped away the grass, put in grain outside places like Miles City, Montana, and Marmath, North Dakota. Then came a few dry years, a killer winter or two, and the wheat glut from the rest of the plains. Just like that, life was gone, main streets shuttered, homesteads left to Front Range Chinooks. Some towns along the northern railroad lines folded barely a generation after they were hatched. But in the southern plains, people welcomed the railroads with open arms and big festivities, as if nothing had happened up north. History might repeat itself, but few bothered to make such a warning. (57) Why did people ignore the warnings? Is history from the 1930s repeating itself now? Migrants and immigrants had an impact on the building of the infrastructure in the U. S. What were their contributions in farming, to the railroads, in inventions, in the armed services? When America was building its infrastructure, immigrants were the backbone of our labor force. Today, America’s infrastructure is crumbling. Without the immigrants, can we field an adequate labor force to rebuild the country? Debate the issue.

9. “Americans are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of the land,” said the new president, Herbert Hoover, who took office in 1929. He had won in a landslide, breaking the Democratic hold on the solid South, taking the prairie states with him.” (58) How could President Hoover have been so wrong? Research poverty in the U. S. today. What is the extent of the problem? Could we solve the problem through education? Present your ideas.

## Chapter 4 *High Plains Deutsch* (Teacher's note: Display a map of this area.)

1. Social Studies re: poverty, hunger: “By the summer of 1929, the United States had a food surplus . . .” (59) The United States again has a food surplus; yet, many people are hungry. The situation in Colorado Springs is desperate, according to agencies like Care and Share. Interview the director of the Marian House soup kitchen to learn the extent of the problem locally and a possible resolution. Draw up a plan for Dream City/Vision 2020. Consider Florida’s solution to the problem. Gov. Charlie Crist signed House Bill 276 in 2008 to remove legal restraints from restaurants and other establishments on donating perishable food to nonprofit organizations that distribute the food to the needy; HB 276 grants immunity to the restaurants and other establishments. Write to your state legislator to get a similar bill passed in Colorado.

2. Economics/stock market: The excess stacks of wheat were a sign of prosperity “but also a warning of things to come. The balance was tipping. Prices headed down, below \$1.50 a bushel, then below a dollar, then seventy-five cents a bushel – a third of the market high point from just a few years earlier.” (59) The stock market was volatile then – and is today. What causes stock market volatility? Invite an economics student to give a presentation so that you can better understand the stock market.

3. Social Studies re: discrimination, racial profiling: “. . .the Anglos could make fun of their (the Russians’) clothes; the sheriff could call them in for questioning; the merchants could refuse them entry into stores; the children could mock their accents; the farmers could laugh at their planting methods; and other immigrants could deride them as “Rooshians.” (61) Discrimination, racial profiling, and bigotry were prevalent during this era. These are still issues in America. What is the best way to deal with these issues today? Give examples of programs that have made a difference.

4. Customs, Christmas. “These nesters preferred high-top *filzstiefel* shoes with soft interior linings to cowboy boots and featherbeds to American mattresses. No house was without schnapps and wurst. In church, they sang “*Gott is de liebe*” and made such a month-long fuss over Christmas that customs in America changed as well. . . When they boarded ships for America, the Germans from Russia carried with them seeds of turkey red – a hard winter wheat – and incidental thistle . . . The thistle was called *perekati-pole*, which meant ‘roll across the field.’ In America, it was known as tumbleweed.” (61, 62) List examples of customs, products, and words in common practice today that originated in other countries.

5. Customs: “The Russlanddeutschen held onto their religion, their food, their dress, their rituals, their epic family narratives, and their seeds of grain. In America, they learned about baseball, jazz, the tractor, and the bank loan.” (63) In your family, which customs have roots from another country? Why do we hold onto family customs?

6. History: Catherine the Great. The readers learn that the Russian Germans would not fight for the Russian czar or fight the Bolsheviks. “They had a promise, dating to a manifesto of July 22, 1763, by Catherine the Great, offering homestead land, tax breaks, cultural autonomy, and no military conscription. When the promise was broken 110 years later, they closed up entire villages and fled to America. Catherine, they always felt, was one of them, a German-born empress who married into Russian nobility just after she turned fifteen. By the age of thirty-three, she had dethroned her husband, Peter, and became ruler of Russia. A

forceful monarch, Catherine reigned for nearly forty years and was as crucial – indirectly – to settlement of the American Great Plains as the railroad.” (63) Research more about Catherine the Great and report to your class. Was she crucial to the settlement of the Great American Plains?

7. Dance. “Back at the wedding, it was time for toasts. . .They danced the Hochzeit, which was like the fox trot, only faster.” (67) Research the Hochzeit and then perform for your classmates.

8. Social Studies: history of discrimination. “The Germans camped near the train station . . .Shopkeepers in Shattuck refused to sell to the Germans; others tried to pass an ordinance prohibiting the language from being spoken in the city limits.” (69) Discuss how the Civil Rights Movement reduced discrimination in America. Give specific examples. However, discrimination still exists today. For example, some people swear that they will never vote for a Black or a female President. What is your opinion? Many people argue about bilingual education. What are the arguments for and against encouraging a bilingual or multi-lingual society?

9. History: the *Titanic* “But the new German villages on the Oklahoma prairie were no stranger than other colonies of outcasts popping up on the High Plains. Oslo, Texas . . .was supposed to be Norway in brown. . .The Norsemen came, about two hundred families. They erected a schoolhouse and a Lutheran church that was to be crowned by a copper bell shipped from Norway. The bell would chime over land that nobody named Brimstad or Torvik had ever before tried to call home, where meals of lefse and lutefisk would break the routine of beef and barley. Alas, the new church bell went down with the *Titanic*.” (69-70) In 1985 and then again in 1986, Robert Ballard and his crew found the *Titanic*. Research the find to determine whether the copper bell mentioned above was recovered. One suggested site is [www.titanic-titanic.com/discovery](http://www.titanic-titanic.com/discovery).

10. “Life in America in September 1929 was almost too sweet, too bountiful, too full of riches the Germans in Volga could not have imagined.” (72) Define the “American dream” today. Is that dream attainable for most Americans? Why or why not? Can we recapture the hope and the stability of the past?

## **Chapter 5 *Last of the Great Plowup***

1. Economics, stock market. “The stock market crashed on October 29, 1929, a Tuesday, the most disastrous session on Wall Street to date in a month of turmoil. . .For someone who had followed the advice of the day and taken their savings out of the bank and put it all into General Electric, say, shares had grown by 500 percent from 1925 to 1929. In a month, they lost it all. More likely, they had bought more shares on margin, borrowing on the bet that stocks were going only skyward. To pay the margin loan after the crash – sometimes as high as 18 percent – they had to sell at a time when many stocks did not get any bids at all.” (73) Research more about the stock market crash and then compare it with the stock market today. Invite a financial advisor to speak to your class to help you make decisions about your future.

2. Economics, bank failures. “When stocks tanked, banks were hollowed out until the money was gone. One company, Union Cigar, went from \$113 a share to \$4 – in a single day.” (74) Research companies whose stocks plummeted in the recent past and predict whether they will

survive. Starbucks' stock fell, and they closed 600 stores across the country. How do economics and trends affect businesses and their stocks?

3. Economics, stock market. "Most Americans did not own stock: at no time in the 1920s did more than 1.5 million people purchase shares of the stock market. At the most, 4 million people owned some stock – through gifts, inheritance, or purchase – in a nation of 120 million." (74) Compare those statistics with stats today of people who own stocks. Is there an increase? In the future, do you plan to invest in stocks? Why or why not? Discuss privately with your parents whether they have been personally affected by fluctuations in the stock market. Ask your parents whether the country is in a recession or headed for a depression.

4. Farming. "What Americans still did was work the land. In 1929, the jobs of nearly one in four people were on a farm." (74) What is the percentage of farm workers today? Why did so many people leave farming? Is there a crisis in farming? In the future, will there be sufficient farmers to feed Americans, enough to ensure adequate food supply? What is the government doing to assist farmers? Should the government subsidize farmers? See the appendix in *The Worst Hard Time*. Display posters showing your research.

5. Economy, automobile industry. " 'Machinery is the new Messiah,' said Henry Ford, and though that sounded blasphemous to a devout sodbuster, there was something to it. Every ten seconds a new car came off Ford's factory line, and some of them were now parked next to dugouts in No Man's Land." (74) What was the ratio of adults to automobile ownership then as compared to now? The American automobile industry has been negatively impacted by foreign imports. Why have Americans chosen foreign cars? Japan is now critically impacted by an exponential increase in the number of automobiles on the road. How is that changing the environment of Japan? Is technology the "Messiah" now? What problems could that portend for the future?

6. Science, the environment. "People throughout the High Plains had been told to plant trees as soon as they got their dugouts in shape. It was said that trees would increase precipitation, diverting moisture upward." (75) Colorado Springs benefited from the tree-planting program. Check the Pikes Peak Library District's photograph file and note the starkness of early Colorado Springs compared to today. What is the value in planting trees?

7. Science, weather: "When two systems struggled – humid east, dry west – it usually meant friction, strong wind, and clattering. . . The hail balls were as big as grapefruits. . . Hail sometimes fell bigger; in Kansas, a storm dropped ice that measured six inches in diameter, big enough to knock a person cold or cause a concussion. Anything above a marble in size could be ruinous, breaking windows, cracking or denting cars and houses." (76) Research hail storms. What is the record for the biggest hailstones? What damage was caused including loss of livestock? Have you ever had hail damage to your property?

8. Science, weather: "Anybody who lived in No Man's Land for long knew about nature's capricious power." (76) Provide examples of nature's capricious power. What are the worst storms to ever hit? e. g., typhoon, tsunami, tornado, hurricane, flood, and earthquake? What was the combined loss of life from the worst of these storms?

9. " 'I'm afraid I'm going to end up with nine kids, three homes, and no dough,' Joseph Kennedy, the patriarch of America's best-known Irish-American family, told a friend." (77)

Research more about the Kennedy clan. Who were the most famous members of the Kennedy clan? Why were they famous? Who are the most famous of that Kennedy family today? Do they still wield influence? Give recent examples. (e. g., Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg endorsed Barack Obama for president and serves on his vetting committee. Also, she is the co-chair of the ServiceNation summit. What influence does she have?)

10. “The country was sick. You could see it in people’s faces, hear it in the cafés and on the train ride back to No Man’s Land. Confidence was shot. Money was tight. People were closing bank accounts, panicked. By the end of 1932, one fourth of all banks would be closed and nine million people would lose their savings. . . The stock market’s loss was up to fifty billion dollars. In three months’ time, two million Americans lost their jobs – a tripling of what unemployment had been at the end of summer.” (77) Is Egan describing the 1930s or 2008? What percentage of the population was impacted? Listen to the political campaigns today. Are these issues being addressed? What turned the country around then? What will it take to turn the country around now?

11. “ ‘No one has yet starved,’ said President Hoover, trying to calm people at year’s end. He spoke too soon. A few months later people rioted in Arkansas, demanding food for their children. Then, it happened closer to home. A mob stormed a grocery store in Oklahoma City, after the mayor had rejected their petition for food. Rioting over food: how could this be? Here was all this grain, food enough to feed half the world, sitting in piles at the train station, going to waste. Something was out of balance. Productivity surged, while wages fell and jobs disappeared. That left too much of everything – food, clothes, cars – and too few people to buy it. At one point, the going rate for corn was listed at minus three cents a bushel.” (78) Today, President Bush is trying to calm people’s fears. Compare what he is saying with what President Hoover said. Do people believe President Bush?

Today, too, jobs are disappearing. Research the number of jobs lost during the last year. What occupations lost the most jobs? (airlines, automobile, technology) Did any companies experience significant gains in jobs available? What is the status of unemployment in Colorado Springs compared to the rest of the country?

12. “The New Hope School was broke. Farmers were drowning in debt and had stopped paying taxes. Without taxes, the school could not pay teacher salaries.” (78) Compare the problem of people not being able to pay their taxes today and the affect on the economy. For example, road repairs are not being completed due to lack of money, and school districts are redrawing boundaries because they can’t afford bus transportation.

13. “Up north across the state line, in Baca County, farmers had taken seriously their boast of making this weather-beaten corner of Colorado, the dry farming capital of the state. . . it was city building time in Baca County. The Santa Fe put a branch line in from Satanta, Kansas, to Baca County, which was completed in 1927. The counties along the rail line grew nearly 200 percent in a few years. In Springfield, Baca’s county seat, new streets were going in, electricity bringing lights on after dark. One town dared to call itself Boston and said it would match that big city in New England someday, you watch.” (80-81) Report on the history of Baca County, Colorado. Which town called itself “Boston”? Why didn’t it ever become like Boston, Massachusetts? What stopped it?

14. History, prohibition. “ ‘A great social and economic experiment,’ President Hoover had called the eighteenth amendment, implementing Prohibition, which started in 1920. A

moneymaker and job-creator was what it was. Cimarron, Dallam, and Baca Counties boomed with the black-market whiskey trade. It was impossible for a hypocrite to blush. In Texas, a still turning out 130 gallons of whiskey a day was found operating on the farm of Senator Morris Sheppard, a Lone Star state political heavyweight, who happened to be one of Prohibition's biggest backers – an author of the eighteenth amendment.” (82)

Research Prohibition. What years did it span? According to law as of July 1, liquor stores can open on Sundays. Debate the decision or predict whether this will change the atmosphere in Colorado Springs.

15. “The price of oil crashed not long after the stock market fell. It went from \$1.30 a barrel to twenty cents.” (83) The price of a barrel of oil is big news today. What is the current price? What was the record high? What caused the increase? decrease? Decreased consumption of foreign oil is often touted as the answer. How did the governors of California and Florida react to President Bush's signing the law allowing offshore drilling? What is your opinion? Debate the issue. Why are energy resources a “hot potato” during the presidential election? What are John McCain's and Barack Obama's stances?

16. As the economy worsened, “the consumer stopped consuming all but basics. The depression was now global.” (84) Compare the statement about consumerism to today. Find examples and interviews in news publications of how people are feeling today about the economy. Has the current situation affected you personally? How has the situation in America today affected the rest of the world? What has happened to the value of the dollar? Can anything be done to reverse the decline?

17. “He heard that a black man had come into town, got out at the railroad station, and tried to get a drink at Dinwiddie's, apparently ignoring the sign warning blacks not to let the sun go down on them in Dalhart.” (85) Since the Civil War was ended in 1865, why were laws discriminating against blacks still in existence during the Dust Bowl era? Discrimination extended well into the second half of the Twentieth Century. How did those discriminatory laws affect black athletes such as Jackie Robinson and Dick Gregory? Eventually, societal attitudes changed. Why? What does it take to induce change?

18. “Why not have the government buy the surplus wheat to feed the hungry? Farmers demanded as much. President Hoover rejected the idea out of hand.” (87) What do you think should be the role of the federal government in meeting the needs of the people? Should the government continue to subsidize farmers? Should the government sponsor food programs to feed the hungry? How involved should the government be in resolving these issues?

19. Math: “President Hoover wasn't going to step in and muddle the dynamics of agrarian capitalism. But congratulations, the government men said. You grew seven times as much wheat as you did a dozen years ago. A new national record. Keep this up and next year you'll do something no nation has yet done: produce more than 250 million bushels. In all the history of the world no country had ever tried to grow so much grain.” (87) Compare the 250 million bushels with the output today. Then, compare the population then with today's population. Could more people be fed then or now?

20. “How could people live like that?” (88) Research different parts of the country in regards to cost of living, climate, population, education, job opportunities, recreation, and quality of life. What are the advantages and the disadvantages of the various regions? Make a practical

choice from the top ten cities in the U. S. according to those factors regarding where you want to live. How does that compare to what you might have originally chosen?

21. “. . . Bam finally put together enough of a nest egg to get his own place. It was a half-dugout, not as deep as the typical hole in the ground; it measured fourteen feet by thirty-six feet, just over five hundred square feet of High Plains habitat for Bam, Lizzie, and the three kids. The roof was tarpaper, which shrieked like a hag in the spring winds. The walls were fingernail thin, and Lizzie said she could not live in a place so cold. Bam and the boys tried to insulate it, tacking pasteboard to the walls. They put in six layers, and now the place was sealed against the more severe exhalations of the High Plains. The dugout was divided into two sides: in one half was a cook stove and table, the eating and cleaning area; in the other half were beds for Bam and Lizzie, a cot that the two boys shared, and a bed for their sister. The house had no water. No toilet. No electric power.” (85) Compare the size of Bam White’s house to your house. How many sodbusters could live in your house if they were allotted the same amount of space Bam White allotted for his family?

21. Weather. “On September 14, 1930, a windstorm kicked up dust out of southwest Kansas and tumbled toward Oklahoma. By the time the storm cut a swath through the Texas Panhandle, it looked unlike anything ever seen before on the High Plains. People called the government to find out what was up with this dirty swirling thing in the sky. . . The strange thing about it, the weather bureau observers said, was that it rolled, like a mobile hill of curd, and it was black. When it tumbled through, it carried static electricity, enough to short out a car. And it hurt, like a swipe of coarse-grained sandpaper on the face. The first black duster was a curiosity, nothing else. The weather bureau observers wrote it up and put it in a drawer.” (88) Write the newscast predicting disaster as informed meteorologists would today. Videotape or present it in person.

## II. Betrayal 1931 – 1933

### Chapter 6 *First Wave*

1. “Doc Dawson had money in the failed bank. He was approaching sixty and was worried about his future. Social Security did not yet exist.” (91) When did Social Security become a national program? What does Social Security do? Today, the Social Security Administration is in financial trouble and may run out of money in the not-too-distant future. Research Social Security and determine whether it will exist when you need it.

2. “The First National Bank of Dalhart did not open for business on June 27, 1931. . . A sign said the bank was insolvent. . . A crowd formed outside the office of the new sheriff. They wanted him to force the bank to open. . . Sheriff Foust tried to calm the mob. There wasn’t much he could do; it was a federal matter. But the national government could not do anything either. Deposits were uninsured. In one month, alone – November 1930 – 256 banks failed.” (91, 92) Then, deposits were uninsured. Created in 1933 in response to thousands of bank failures during the Depression, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) claims that it has covered every insurance deposit since making its first payment to Mrs. Lydia Lobsiger on July 5, 1934, in the aftermath of the failure of the Fon Du Lac State Bank in East Peoria, Illinois. (eurekareporter.com) Research why it took two years for the FDIC to be created. How much money does FDIC insure per account? On July 12, 2008, IndyMac, the third

largest bank in U. S. history, failed. Research why it failed and why the FDIC took it over. What role did nervous depositors play in the bank's failure?

3. "As the ranks of the jobless grew, they took to the rails, going from town to town, dodging Rock Island bulls in the south, Burlington Northern bulls in the other direction, swapping stories about places where the sun shined and a man might still get paid for a day's work. Two million Americans were living as nomads. . . They were family men, farmers, and factory hands, merchants, some professionals among them, writers and bank clerks and storeowners – all broke, people who could not stand to see their kids in rags, hungry. When they arrived in Dalhart – sometimes as many as eighty people a day – at the railroad crossroads that could lead a man north to Denver, west to Santa Fe, or east to Kansas City, Sheriff Foust was supposed to put them back on the train. And if they were black, they weren't even supposed to step off the tracks, or he could arrest them for vagrancy." (94, 95) Compare the number of homeless Americans then with the number today and compare the people's backgrounds. What is the percentage of Vietnam veterans who are homeless? mothers and children? ethnic groups? With the National Democratic Convention in Denver in August, the city wanted to be creative in providing outlets for homeless people so that they would be off the streets during the national convention. What did the city do? Did it work? What does this show about the country's attitude about the homeless?

4. "In September 1929, just over 1.5 million people were out of work; by February of the following year, the number had tripled. . . 'The economy was not fatally ill, President Hoover said; Americans had simply lost their confidence. 'All the evidences indicate that the worst effects of the crash on unemployment will have passed during the next sixty days,' Hoover said on March 3, 1930. By the end of that year, eight million people were out of work." (95) Compare that figure with the number of unemployed people today. When in U. S. history has unemployment been the highest? the lowest? What historic events have directly impacted employment? What can be done to get more people back to work? How has outsourcing affected employment rates and productivity? Does it make the United States vulnerable? Be a politician and write a speech regarding the job outlook.

5. "Some people said Jews were to blame for the bad times – that they did not belong in this country, a place where the *Texan* had boasted that its citizens were 'of the highest type of Anglo-Saxon ancestry.' In Nebraska, four thousand people gathered on the capitol steps, blaming the 'Jewish system of banking' for the implosion of the economy." (96) This is not the first time that Jews have been blamed for problems. Research the history of Jews being blamed for world problems. Why did such thinking become prevalent? Why was it wrong?

6. Art: "In Nebraska, four thousand people gathered on the capitol steps, blaming the 'Jewish system of banking' for the implosion of the economy. They held banners with rattlesnakes, labeled as Jews, coiled around the American farmer." (96) How has art been used as propaganda? How is this different from what the Nazis did? (See pages 97 and 98 for more information on the Jewish community.)

7. "Father Charles E. Coughlin, the mellow-voiced radio priest from Detroit, also blamed Jews for America's stumbles as he spoke to a weekly audience of more than a million listeners. Often, he would read the names of Hollywood movie stars and then 'out' them, revealing their original Jewish names as if detailing a sinister plot." (96) Which radio personalities today have large audiences? (e. g., Rush Limbaugh, Paul Harvey, Don Imus)

What influence do these commentators have? Father Coughlin's "outing" of Jewish movie stars precedes the Red Scare in the 1950s. Compare and contrast the two. Preachers often have considerable influence. List some of the more recognizable religious speakers or leaders who influence(d) people. (Billy Graham, Catholic popes, Jim Bakker, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Jeremiah Wright, Father Michael Pfleger) How have these people influenced public opinion? What local religious groups are influential?

8. Music: "In 1931, over 28,000 businesses failed; it did not matter if they were family-run institutions or big corporations, they were sucked under by the same force. Money did not circulate. Those who had jobs saw their wages collapse by a third or more." (97) Compare the economy of the Dust Bowl era with economic conditions in the U. S. today. Why are businesses currently failing?

9. Music: "People were starving now in parts of the United States, despite what Hoover had said and despite the song that played in the background, Rudy Vallee's 'Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries.'" (101) Research the songs of the day – and then play them for your class. Attend the concert by the Colorado Springs Philharmonic on Saturday, October 11 at the Pikes Peak Center. It will feature music from the 1930s.

10. Hunger: "People were starving now in parts of the United States . . . American families were reduced to eating dandelions and foraging for blackberries in Arkansas, where the drought was going on two years. And over in the mountain of the Carolinas and West Virginia, a boy told the papers his family members took turns eating, each kid getting a shot at dinner every fourth night. In New York, nearly half a million people were on city relief, getting up to eight dollars a month to live on." (101) Was the Dust Bowl era the beginning of welfare? Study the welfare system and whether it is effective. What percentage of people in the U. S. go hungry every day? Cite the statistics on the number of people receiving welfare and food stamps. Relate specific examples of people going hungry. Research the number of countries in Africa where hunger is at a crisis level. Do Americans have an ethical obligation to help? We waste food in our own country. Monitor the trash cans in your school cafeteria for one day. How many people could be fed with the food thrown away? Raise awareness at your school about world hunger.

11. "Simon Herzstein never tired of telling the story about Black Jack's decapitation. It became part of the lore of the store as Simon traveled the High Plains selling fine clothes to nesters, cowpunchers, and their wives. When people would ask him what a Jew was doing peddling stiff collars in No Man's land, he said he was doing the same as anybody else, only taking a different route. He let people buy on credit and never kept a ledger. It was all in his head. He knew they would pay." (99) Today, the staggering amount of money people owe on credit is frequently in the news. Who is to blame – the people who offered the credit or the people who overextended? There is no quick fix to Americans' credit problems. So, what is the answer?

12. "And what came from the transformed land – the biggest crop of all time – was shunned, met with the lowest price ever. The market held at nearly 50 percent below the amount it cost farmers to grow the grain. By the measure of money – which was how most people viewed success or failure on the land – the whole experiment of trying to trick a part of the country into being something it was never meant to be was a colossal failure. Every five bushels of wheat brought in from the fields was another dollar taken out of a farmer's pocket." (101,

102) Since it cost more to grow and to harvest wheat, farmers questioned why they should grow it in the first place. A similar situation exists today. It costs two cents to mint a penny. Some argue that it makes no sense to continue making pennies. What is your opinion?

### **Chapter 7 A Darkening**

1. Farming: “Unless something is done for the American farmer we will have revolution in the countryside in less than twelve months, Edward O’Neal of the American Farm Bureau told Congress at the beginning of 1932. It wasn’t just wheat that had sunk below the cost of producing it; milk, cattle, and hogs were all in the same depressed situation.” (104) Research the American Farm Bureau. When was it created? What was its original purpose and what is its purpose today? Does it impact land use practices or food prices today?

2. Farming: “ ‘Tens of thousands of farm families have had their savings swept away and even their subsistence endangered,’ the Agriculture Secretary, Arthur M. Hyde, wrote the president on November 14, 1931. ‘Usually when weather conditions reduce production, prices rise. No such partial compensation came to the drought-stricken areas because demand and prices declined under the impact of world depression.’ Again, farmers begged Washington for relief. Herbert Hoover knew about toying with the market; as the U. S. Food Administrator during the Great War, he had helped establish the first price guarantee for wheat, at two dollars a bushel, setting off a stampede of planting that would transform the grasslands. But now that all this surplus grain was rotting, he was not about to interfere with the market. Let the system cull out the loser.” (103, 104) If you were one of the people suffering during the Dust Bowl, how would you react to President Hoover’s statement, “Let the system cull out the loser”? Write a letter to President Hoover explaining your circumstances so that he can see that you are not just a problem on paper but a real person... What is the role of government in helping people? Debate how much the government should help people versus people being self-sufficient.

3. “ ‘I feel the capitalistic system is doomed,’ said the head of one farmers’ group.” (104) The economic disaster made it appear as though capitalism wouldn’t work. What are the factors that led to that assumption? How did President Franklin D. Roosevelt help the country to recover? Many people believe that capitalism is in a free fall now. What will it take for the country to overcome our current situation?

4. Medicine: “Folkers complained about stomachache. Deep in his gut, something cried for relief, like an ulcer, growing sharper as the winter wore on. He did not think much of doctors, and it was always trouble to find one. Like most prairie nesters, the Folkers had their own remedies. When a tooth hurt, they sucked on a clove. When the heat of summer became unbearable, they drank sassafras tea to thin the blood. For a severe cold or cough, there was a chest plaster of turpentine and kerosene. . .She (the new doc) had developed a cure for cancer, salve and bandage, the special ointment drawing out the disease. . .But not long after he finished treatment, the cancer doctor left town, never to be seen again, and Folker’s gut burst. Turned out he never had cancer; it was appendicitis.” (106) “Uncle C. C. could not get the milk he normally drew from his dairy cows . . .He examined their udders and found they were sore and reddened from the dust. . .His remedy was one that he heard from another farmer in No Man’s Land – rub a little axle grease on the cows’ udders, just enough to take away the chaffing from the dust. By using grease, he got some milk, even if it came with nondairy drippings.” (120) Research folk medicine and compare it to homeopathy. What are

the differences between homeopathy and the more traditional forms of medicine? Today, patients are more protected against fraudulent practices because state medical boards oversee physicians. However, now there is a flood of malpractice suits. As a result, physicians have to pay extremely high malpractice insurance. Many physicians have decided that they can't afford to practice. We are facing a possible shortage of physicians. Research these issues. What will people do when doctors are no longer available?

5. Barter: "People swapped a hen – live and clucking – for a year's subscription to the *Boise City News*. They bartered a bushel of wheat for an oven stove wick. They brought in fifteen dozen eggs and got back a pair of overalls. They traded turnips for two cans of Franco-American spaghetti. Or they took the quarter they had been staring at for five days and went down to the little café run by Mrs. Skaggs, where two bits could buy a hamburger, a piece of pie, and a glass of milk." (107) According to the Internal Revenue Service, income from bartering is taxable in the year it is performed. Barter exchanges are required to file Form 1099-B for all transactions unless certain exceptions are met. ([www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)) Many people believe that the IRS should stay out of bartering, while others believe that the IRS is correct in collecting taxes on these exchanges. Research the topic further and form your own opinion.

6. Racism: "The new governor of Oklahoma gave people hope, but he also tried to get them to hate. William Henry David Murray had been elected in 1930 after scandal drove the last two governors from office, both of them impeached. With a campaign slogan that railed against what he called 'The Three C's – Corporations, Carpetbaggers, and Coons,' Murray won by a huge margin, 301,921 voted to 208,575. . .Oklahoma, he said at the time, could be a great state only if blacks were separated from whites and kept in the proper jobs – in the fields or factories. . .Blacks were inferior to whites in all ways, Murray said, and must be fenced from society like quarantined hogs. At the start of the twentieth century, many people felt otherwise, but Alfalfa Bill tried to set his view into the proposed constitution. At the same time, he welcomed even black support, if done properly." (108) How did Alfalfa Bill get elected? Fortunately, the sentiments have changed in this country. Yet, racism still exists. What is our responsibility to combat racism? What is your personal responsibility? Research the pros and the cons of affirmative action. Invite Rosemary Harris, president of the Colorado Springs branch of the NAACP, to be a speaker at your school.

7. Racism: "Murray hated Jews as well. Blacks had some virtues, but Jews had none, in his view. Nor did he like the handful of Italians who had come to the High Plains. The 'low grade races' of southern Europe, he said, were a threat to civilization." (109) Not everyone agreed with his platform. In fact, President Roosevelt mandated the terms by which Oklahoma could become the forty-sixth state. What were Roosevelt's terms? How long after the Civil War did Oklahoma become a state?

8. Martial law: "Storming around Oklahoma in 1931, he said he could not make the sun less oppressive, but he promised to use muscle to fix the broken land. His muscle was the National Guard. As governor, Murray ruled by martial law, calling out the guard twenty-seven times in his first two years in office. When oil prices fell to a new low in 1931, the governor sent his troops to the oil fields to force a shutdown of three thousand wells as a way to drive up prices." (109) What is the purpose of the National Guard? Why is the National Guard called into service today? When has the guard been called into service during the last

five years? Throughout history have leaders abused their power to call out the National Guard?

9. Environment: “Alfalfa Bill urged people to fight nature with force. The unemployment rate in his state was 29 percent. To show them what could be done, he plowed up the grass on the grounds of the capitol and let people plant vegetable gardens. And to demonstrate how water could be taken from the ground, Murray went on a building binge, trying to create lakes and ponds in places that had neither. The ground could be mined at the deepest levels for water, using new and powerful centrifugal pumps, to create the garden state of Oklahoma. They could grab onto that underground lake, the Ogallala Aquifer, like the Sooners had grabbed the old Cherokee lands, and so what if the water was nearly seven hundred feet deep and had taken at least a hundred centuries to build up – it was there to be grubstaked.” (110) Research more about the Ogallala Aquifer. Is there a danger in overextending underground water sources? Where are the aquifers in Colorado? Study the water issues in our state. How can we be visionary in our use of water resources? Share your ideas with Dream City/Vision 2020.

10. Politics: “In the spring of 1932, Alfalfa Bill decided to run for president. He would follow the model that got him elected governor. In running for the statehouse, he had campaigned on the Three C’s. Now he ran on a platform of promising people the ‘Four B’s: Bread, Butter, Bacon, and Beans.’ That a governor could run for the highest office of the land with a campaign that offered calories said something about 1932.” (110, 111) What are the campaign platforms for the 2008 presidential election? Go online to read the statements. *The Denver Post* reported in August: “. . .the (Democratic) platform harkens to a New Deal-era style of government, mentioning Franklin Roosevelt three times and calling for greater civic participation.” Read the full article at denverpost.com. How are the candidates addressing the economy? What are the major concerns of the citizens and how are the candidates addressing those issues?

## **Chapter 8 In a Dry Land**

1. Insects: “Insects bred and hatched through months that normally would have killed a generation in colder, wetter years. They emerged in huge numbers. Grasshoppers swarmed over wheat fields, chewing down the tender shoots left in the abandoned grounds, and massed over gardens, consuming in a few minutes food that could provide a nester with a winter’s worth of canned goods.” (115) What practices exist today to protect our food supply from insects? Are poisons used? Are safe practices monitored? Is the consumer protected?

2. Rabbits: “The rabbit drives caught on and became a weekly event in some places. In a single square mile section, people could kill up to six thousand rabbits in an afternoon. It seemed a shame to let all those dead rabbits go to waste when so many people were hungry in the cities. After one drive, in Hooker, Oklahoma, people shipped off two thousand rabbits as surplus meat. But it was hard to keep the meat from spoiling, and the logistics of butchering them proved too much. The rabbits were left to buzzards and insects or shoveled into pits and buried.” (116, 117) Write a news article about the rabbit drive. Be an animals’ rights advocate and what a speech to implore people to be more humane in their treatment of wild life. Has wild animal activity in Colorado Springs changed because of the summer drought? (e. g., bears in garages scouring for food, bears eating bark, deer eating marigolds)

3. Outlaws: “But now some people were saying maybe Black Jack wasn’t such a cur after all. In these days of dust and despair, Black Jack took on new qualities. He had robbed trains, and everybody knew what bastards the railroads were. He had robbed banks, and good for him. And it was a shame, folks said, that he never got a proper resting place. Here he was, perhaps the most famous outlaw of this withered prairie, having ridden with Butch Cassidy and the Hole in the Wall Gang in between his deeds in No Man’s Land. His legend expanded as Hollywood scoured the West for stories of thugs on horseback. . .He wasn’t a dirty, rotten, sniveling, stinking polecat of a gangster . . .Black Jack had his good points when you compare him with the rats modern civilization is having to deal with . . .” (117) Research the outlaws of this period. Did they have any good points? Does Hollywood glamorize criminals?

4. The Cause: “The county agricultural man in Boise City, Bill Baker, was a history buff, and living at the far edge of No Man’s land he was in a place that presented a host of discoveries to a curious mind. Baker found a cave in the corner of Cimarron County. . .a mummy was discovered inside the cave . . .The college archaeologist said the boy was from the Basket Maker period more than two thousand years ago. To Bill Baker this meant people had farmed No Man’s Land well before it was thought anyone had ever put a shoot in the ground. . .No Man’s Land was not an empty plain after all. There *had* been people living on this accursed ground, dating to the time of Christ or earlier. And yet here they were in Boise City, barely a full generation into the life of the town, and everything was going to hell, the place collapsing from within, the land lethal.” (122) Review all of the information Egan has provided regarding the manmade causes of the Dust Bowl. What other mysteries are we still pondering? (e. g., the disappearance of the Anasazis in Mesa Verde) Was drought a factor in their disappearance?

5. Indians: “The Indians knew something, but they were gone, pushed from the plains before they could hand off a guide to living. Sitting Bull had predicted the land would get its revenge on whites who forced the Indians off the grasslands. He saw doom from the sky. During this drought, his nephew, One Bull, tried to reverse Sitting Bull’s prophecy. One Bull sent a letter from the reservation in South Dakota to a professor at the University of Oklahoma, Stanley Campbell, asking him to return the Sioux *wotawe*, a medicine bag with human hair, stones, dried food, and other artifacts. The rightful owners of the *wotawe* could influence the weather, One Bull explained.” (123) Look up famous Native Americans’ speeches. What major points did they make? How accurate were they in predicting the problems Americans would eventually face? Why didn’t people listen to them?

6. Mexicans: “There was another band of people who might have some answers. The Mexicans, like the Indians, were largely invisible. They had some history with the place, at least more than anyone in Boise City.” (123) What did they mean that Mexicans and the Indians were largely invisible? A local author, John Holley, wrote *The Invisible People of the Pikes Peak Region*. Who were they?

7. Deportation: “And though Lujan had lived in the far Oklahoma Panhandle longer than any Anglo, he and his ranch hands feared deportation. Lujan was American, but there were people in Boise City who suspected that the Lujan ranch was a refuge for Mexicans who took jobs away from Anglos. By 1930, there were about 1.5 million Latinos, mostly of Mexican ancestry, living in the United States. Sugar beet farms in southeastern Colorado and Kansas and cotton farms in Texas had attracted them to the southern plains. In the early years of the

Depression, cities were shipping Hispanics out of the country. Los Angeles spent \$77,000 to send 6,024 deportees to Mexico.” (124, 125) Immigration is still a hot potato. Research the similarities and the differences on the issue of immigration during the Dust Bowl era as compared to now. What are the conflicting solutions to the immigration problem? What is the stand of each of the presidential candidates? If you were a presidential candidate, what would your position be?

8. “All of the countries in the world, we Americans have been the greatest destroyers of land of any race of people barbaric or civilized,” Bennett said in a speech at the start of the dust storms. What was happening, he said was ‘sinister,’ a symptom of ‘our stupendous ignorance.’” (125) “In the last years of the wheat boom, Bennett had become increasingly frustrated at how the government seemed to be encouraging an exploitive farming binge. He went directly after his old employer, the Department of Agriculture, for misleading people. Farmers on the Great Plains were working against nature, he thundered in speeches across the country; they were asking for trouble. Even in the late 1920s, before anyone else sounded an alarm, Bennett said people had sown the seeds of an epic disaster. The government continued to insist, through official bulletins, that soil was the one ‘resource that cannot be exhausted.’ To Bennett, it was arrogance on a grand scale.” (126) “Americans had become a force of awful geology, changing the face of the earth more than ‘the combined activities of volcanoes, earthquakes, tidal waves, tornadoes, and all the excavations of mankind since the beginning of history.’ ” (127) was Bennett right? Follow his career from this point on. Was he a visionary?

## **Chapter 9 New Leaders, New Deal**

1. “When you’re hungry, you listen when a politician talks about food, and in the election of 1932, growling stomachs drove many people to develop a sudden interest in democracy. Alfalfa Bill Murray said if he were president, nobody would go without bread, butter, bacon, or beans. The man from Toad suck said the problem was that America had gone soft. Look at those college people at Oklahoma A&M, asking for public money to build a swimming pool.” (129) The more things change, the more they stay the same! In July John McCain’s presidential campaign co-chair and his most senior economic advisor resigned after his comment irritated people. He said, “We have sort of become a nation of whiners. You just hear this constant whining, complaining about a loss of competitiveness. America is in decline.” Why did Phil Gramm resign? Why were Americans so upset? In 1976 when he ran his first U. S. Senate campaign, Gramm said, “Has anyone ever noticed that we live in the only country in the world where all of the poor people are fat?” Start a blog to discuss Gramm’s comments.

2. Taxes: “Hoover was sinking fast. Most Americans paid no federal income tax in 1932. But Hoover wanted to tax the untaxed to pay for a sizeable deficit. He scoffed at the pictures of fruit vendors on city streets; they were selling apples at five cents apiece, he said, because it was more profitable than working a regular job. The Republicans had been routed in the 1930 mid-term elections, losing seventeen seats in the Senate and control of the House. The presidential election year of 1932 looked to be even worse for Hoover’s party. In the capital, a whiff of genuine class warfare was in the air. Congress voted to raise taxes across the board on the wealthy to cries of ‘Soak the rich!’ Others pushed for an estate tax, taking nearly half the worth of anything over ten million dollars.” (129) “Hoover was an engineer and entrepreneur who was worth four million by the start of the First World War. As president,

his past statements haunted him like a bill collector. It was not just his inaugural prediction that the United States was close to eliminating poverty forever, nor his prosperity-around-the-corner forecasts. One statement, defining character by how much money somebody had, followed Hoover everywhere. 'If a man has not made a million dollars by the time he is forty, he is not worth much.' (129) What happens when the president of the United States cannot identify with the problems of the majority of the Americans? Look up Hoover's speeches to track a pattern of his thinking on the state of the economy. Do the speeches of current presidential candidates' reflect a similar or a different attitude? Research income, estate, inheritance, and sales taxes. Do you think they are fair? What are the current presidential candidates' positions on taxes? Some people advocate disbanding the I. R. S. and replacing it with a flat tax. What is a flat tax? What are the pros and the cons of a flat tax? What is your opinion about taxes?

3. "The national unemployment rate remained at 25 percent. It seemed as if the country had been sick forever. The economist John Maynard Keynes was asked if there was ever a worse time. 'It was called the Dark Ages,' Keynes said. 'And it lasted four hundred years.' (130) Was there ever a worse time? What do you think Keynes meant by his remark? Was he indicating that is how long it takes to solve a problem?

4. ". . . FDR won the nomination on the third ballot. Alfalfa Bill accused FDR of being a Jew." (131) Has a candidate since then had to face challenges about his religion? (John F. Kennedy being Catholic, Mitt Romney being Mormon) Find other examples of religious discrimination in presidential campaigns. (See the cover of the July 21, 2008, issue of the *New Yorker* magazine.)

"Alfalfa Bill was crushed; he finished with twenty-three delegates, a curious presence, the Four B's clubs gone, unbending even as 'Happy Days Are Here Again' started to play and people sang:

'Your cares and troubles are gone  
There'll be no more from now on.'" (131)

Write or find songs to play in November for the new president. Why are popular songs part of political campaigns? ("Don't Stop Believing" – Bill Clinton, "We the People" – George W. Bush) Look up presidential songs on the internet.

4. The election: "In November, Roosevelt carried Oklahoma and every other state but six, mostly in New England. Hoover said the Democrats under Roosevelt had become 'the party of the mob.' The mob voted. FDR's take in Oklahoma was 73 percent; in Texas it was 88 percent. . . Hoover, his tank of ideas empty, handed Roosevelt a shell of a country, its confidence shot." (132) Predict the winner of the 2008 presidential campaign. On what did you base your prediction? Many people today believe that the United States is "a shell of a country" and that Americans' "confidence is shot." What will it take to turn the country around today? "Hoover believed the cure for the Depression was to prime the pump at the producer end, helping factories and business owners get up and running again. Goods would roll off the lines, prosperity would follow. Roosevelt said it made no sense to gin up the machines of production if people could not afford to buy what came out the factory door." (130, 131) Look at the attitudes of today's opposing presidential candidates and compare their stands to Hoover and FDR.

5. Banking: "Roosevelt did not waste an hour. The gates of possibility sprang open, and Roosevelt went on a hundred-day dash. For American capitalism, it had been a truly

frightening time, full of 'dark realities,' as Roosevelt said. Money was not circulating, even in the capital. James A. Farley, the postmaster general, said he could not cash a check in Washington. The postmaster general blamed 'unscrupulous money lenders' and 'a generation of self-seekers.' Roosevelt immediately called a bank holiday, four days to stabilize a system in which nine thousand banks had failed in three years. And then he took to the airwaves. 'I want to talk for a few minutes about banking.' It was his first radio chat with the country, just days after his inauguration. Roosevelt tried to reassure people that when the banks reopened, the system would stay afloat. . .He called Congress into session and signed the Emergency Banking Bill into law – eight hours after it had been introduced. It worked. By the end of Roosevelt's first week in office, deposits exceeded withdrawals. A few months later, more provisions were added to the new law, insuring individual deposits up to ten thousand dollars. He told people they could take their savings out of mattresses and from beneath the floor. The government would back their dollars." (132) Research FDR's programs, (The Emergency Banking Bill, the Civilian Conservation Corps) acts, bills, and organizations to try to turn the country around "for the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid." (131) Listen to FDR's fireside chats at the Pikes Peak Library District. Why were those chats so popular? Radio and newspapers were primary means for politicians to reach the people. How have presidential campaigns changed? Does television coverage inform the citizens as well as the print media? Investigate the visual power of negative campaigning. Are you influenced by negative approaches? With addressing small gatherings, John McCain seems to be imitating FDR's fireside chats. Is McCain's approach effective? Pose as a campaign manager for a presidential campaign. Develop an internet ad for your candidate. Address all of the major issues (immigration, unemployment, the mortgage crisis, health care, etc.)

6. CCC: "Next up: try to save the farms. Free-market agricultural economics was over, for good. . .Roosevelt had the government buy surplus corn, beans, and flour, and distribute it to the needy. . .Under Roosevelt, the government *was* the market. The Agricultural Adjustment Act created the framework, and the Civilian Conservation Corps drummed up the foot soldiers. They would try to stitch the land back together. Build dams, bridges. Restore forests. Keep water from running away. Build trails in the mountains, roads on the prairie, lakes and ponds. In May, Roosevelt signed a bill giving two hundred million dollars to help farmers facing foreclosure. Now, before some nester's land could be taken to satisfy a bank loan, there was a place of last resort." (133) Is the government still the market? Are you familiar with federal food and/or agricultural programs? Which ones?

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) also worked in Colorado Springs. Research a CCC project that was built in Colorado Springs. Does one still exist today? If so, plan a field trip. According to reports the infrastructure in the country is crumbling. This fact was brought to our attention by the collapse of the bridge in Minneapolis and by the levees breaking in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. Stitch together a plan to rebuild America.

7. "Hoover had been leery of meddling with the mechanics of the free market. Under Roosevelt, the government *was* the market." (138) Many people believe that we are under too much governmental control. Fully research the issue and report to your class.

8. "The Volstead Act was amended to permit the sale of 3.2 percent beer, and by December, the rest of the federal prohibition was gone. Signs went up in Boise City: 'BEER IS HERE!' (133) What are blue laws? When were they first initiated and why? How did blue laws get named?

9. John Muir: “Basic soil science was one thing but talking about the fragile web of life and slapping the face of nature – this kind of early ecology had yet to find a wide audience. Sure, Teddy Roosevelt and John Muir had made conservation an American value at the dawn of the new century, but it was usually applied to brawny, scenic wonders: mountains, rivers, megafloa. . . And in 1933, a game biologist in Wisconsin, Aldo Leopold, had published an essay that said man was part of the big organic whole and should treat his place with special care.” (134) Research John Muir or Aldo Leopold. What did they advocate? Do you agree or disagree? Write a letter of support. Look up the John Muir Society on the internet. What do you think of the organization?

10. Ecology: “And in 1933, a game biologist in Wisconsin, Aldo Leopold, had published an essay that said man was part of the big organic whole and should treat his place with special care. But that essay, ‘The Conservation Ethic,’ had yet to influence public policy.” (134) We’ve come so far in regards to ecology and conservation – or have we? What should Americans do to protect the environment for future generations? Divide your class into groups to research how to deal with issues such as disposal of plastic products, the air pollution, ocean pollution, conservation of natural resources, and using wiser energy sources. Present your plan to Dream City/Vision 2020.

## Chapter 10 Big Blows

1. Weather forecasting: “At the Panhandle A&M weather station, they recorded seventy days of severe dust storms in 1933. Weather forecasting was still a rough skill in that year, a hit and miss game. The basic instruments for measuring air movement, temperature, and all that fell from the sky were little changed over the previous 350 years. The government predicted the weather by rounding up readings from more than two hundred reporting stations across the country and from air balloons, planes, and kite stations. The information was sent by Teletype to Washington twice a day. There, a map was drawn up and a forecast went out from the weather bureau for different regions of the nation. It was based on the movement and struggle between high and low barometric pressures – an ancient way of predicting weather. The forecast always originated in the capital, which is one reason why older, more skeptical nesters still referred to weather prediction by its nineteenth-century term – the ‘probability.’ A hardy homily such as ‘Clear moon, frost soon’ or ‘Red sky at night, sheep herder’s delight, red sky in the morning, sheep herder take warning’ was more trusted and not just by those who worked the land.” (137) Compare and contrast weather forecasting then and now. Today we rely on meteorologists; but during the Dust Bowl, they relied on *The Old Farmers’ Almanac*, which has been in publication for 216 years. Farmers swore by it. They had sayings, such as “A cow’s tail to the west is weather coming at its best; a cow’s tail to the east is weather coming at its least.” ([dcrafts.com/weathersayings.htm](http://dcrafts.com/weathersayings.htm)) Create a saying of your own. Are there weather expressions to explain Colorado’s weather? Invite a meteorologist to speak to your class.

2. “At the end of April, with no green on the land and no rain from overhead, came a duster that lasted twenty hours. For most of the storm, the winds blew at better than forty miles an hour. The dust was strong and abrasive enough to scrape the paint off the Folkers’ house, to get into the digestive system of cattle.” (138) Think about it. The timing of the dusters was unpredictable. During the Dust Bowl, people huddled in their homes for twenty hours. They could do nothing but survive. Record all of your activities for a twenty-hour timeframe each

day for a week. How would your week have been impacted if you had lived during the Dust Bowl era? What is the longest a blizzard or a tornado has lasted in Colorado?

3. “ ‘Twister!’ People raced for shelter, praying for deliverance. The tornado touched down in Liberal, Kansas, near the Oklahoma border, in the heart of tornado alley. It lifted roofs from barns, knocked down warehouse walls, pushed houses from their foundations. An old broom-corn factory was completely destroyed. Stores were pulverized into piles of sticks. Windows shattered. Downtown was reduced to a heap of timber and bricks. Four people were killed; nearly eight hundred were left without homes.” (139) Research tornadoes. Where is tornado alley located? Which tornado in U. S. history was the most destructive? When was the last time that a tornado touched down and caused damage within the city limits of Colorado Springs? What is your family’s survival plan in case of a tornado?

4. “People from four states gathered in Guymon, Oklahoma, east of Boise City, to share stories and plead for help. The Red Cross was overwhelmed, with far more people begging for assistance than the agency could respond to. Some relief was on the way from one of the new agencies of the federal government: it would provide enough money to pay men to shovel dust from the streets of Guymon, Liberal, Texhoma, Shattuck, Dalhart, and Boise City.” (141) The American Red Cross is important to people who have experienced a disaster. Design a plan for your school to raise funds for the local Red Cross chapter.

### **III BLOWUP 1934 – 1939**

#### **Chapter 11 Triage**

1. “The job of the government men was to set things right by drying up the market of surplus beef, hogs, and grain. . . The government men had set a goal of killing eight million cattle over the next year to bring prices up enough for farmers to get a fair return on their labor.” (146) Did the government men set things right? What is the government doing today to set things right in the United States? For example, the high price of gas is reflected in the July 26 article in *The Rocky Mountain News* stating that Conoco/Phillips earned \$5.44 billion dollars in three months. Use the oil crisis as one example where American consumers can make an impact. How can they go about it?

2. “The XIT was so exhausted that barely a blade of grass was seen in the summer of 1934; a ranch that had been bigger than some Eastern states was a drifting wasteland, and probably all the better that most days the wind blew dust so hard a man could not see far enough to get a sense of how awful it was. That prairie writer, the Kansas newspaperman William Allen White, said he knew what was to blame, and it was time for people in the Great Plains to look inside themselves and acknowledge what they had done. He blamed the wheat farmer who broke ground at a gluttonous pace. . . The irony was that ‘Fifty years earlier the government had cleared this land of the finest grass-eating creature on four legs, had cleared away every bison to make room for cattle.’” (148, 149) From Sections I and II, review who was to blame for the dusters. Cite specific examples from the book. Recall all of the previous warnings, such as from cowboys. To get some idea of the size of the areas, look at the XIT Ranch. How many small Eastern states would fit into its perimeter?

3. “For people who did not like baseball, whores, or cold beer for their diversions, the Reverend Joe Hankins held a revival on the Fourth of July, at the First Baptist Church, titled, ‘What’s Wrong with Card-Playing and Dancing.’ He swept the dust off the pews and welcomed a hundred young people. Following the sermon, the kids crowded to the front of the church and pledged never to dance and never to play cards.” (150) Are there any religions today who ban card playing or dancing? Which churches take a totally different approach and emphasize music and drama to encourage young people to be involved?

4. “On May 9, 1934, a flock of whirlwinds started up in the northern prairie, in the Dakotas and eastern Montana, where people had fled the homesteads two decades earlier. . .The next day, a mass of dust-filled clouds marched east, picking up strength as they found the jet stream winds, moving toward the population centers. By the time this black front hit Illinois and Ohio, the formations had merged into what looked to pilots like a solid block of airborne dirt. . .Carrying three tons of dust for every American alive, the formation moved over the Midwest. It covered Chicago at night, dumping an estimated six thousand tons, the dust slinking down walls as if every home and every office had sprung a leak. By morning, the dust fell like snow over Boston and Scranton, and then New York slipped under partial darkness. Now the storm was measured at 1,800 miles wide, a great rectangle of dust from the Great Plains to the Atlantic, weighing 350 million tons. . .From the observatory at the top of the Empire State Building, people looked into a soup unlike anything ever seen in midtown.” (150, 151) Map the dust storm’s path. Have we had any comparable weather events in your life time?

5. “New York was a dirty city in 1934, the air clogged with auto exhaust and the effluents of thousands of small shops, factories, bakeries, and apartments. The air could be so hazardous that people with respiratory problems were advised to move out to the Western desert for life. On a typical day, the dust measured 227 particles per square millimeter – not a good reading for someone with health problems. But on May 11, the dust measured 619 particles per square millimeter. It got inside as well. In the NBC radio studios, air filters were changed hourly. . .all of New York City was under the weight of 1,320 tons.” (151, 152) Compare New York in 1934 with New York today. Compare Colorado Springs in 1934 with today. In 1960, Denver was named a clean air city. Years later, the brown cloud descended over the city. Yet, in 2002, Denver became the first metropolitan area in the nation to receive a clean bill of health from the Environmental Protection Agency. Who were the visionaries in Colorado who predicted the brown cloud? When did air quality become a national concern? When did the environmental and ecological movements start? Who is Rachel Carson? What do we each need to do to improve air quality?

6. “The storm moved out to sea, covering ships that were more than two hundred miles from shore. Its rear guard also spread south, leaving a taste of prairie soil in the mouths of members of Congress. Dust fell on the National Mall and seeped into the White House, where President Roosevelt was discussing plans for drought relief. Dust in Chicago, Boston, Manhattan, Philadelphia, and Washington gave the great cities of America a dose of what the people in the little communities of the High Plains had been living with for nearly two years.” (152) The people in the east did not understand the problems caused by the dust storms until they experienced it (albeit briefly). There is an adage “Before you judge a man, walk a mile in his shoes.” Once the storm fell on the national mall and seeped into the White House, serious discussions about the issue started.

Often we aren't concerned about a problem until we are affected personally. Discuss another problem that started somewhere other than Colorado but eventually became a local issue, as well. (gangs, smog, rapid expansion) Have you ever had a personal experience that led you to reconsider your initial opinion? Share the incident with the class.

7. Language: "A snowstorm in March dumped twenty-one inches in No Man's Land, but it fell as dark flakes. They called it a 'snuster,' snow mixed with dust." (153) "Snuster" is an example of a blend word. List twenty-one other blend words. (smog, doddle, chortle, blurt, snazzy, Muppet, motel, for example)

8. "Even with Vaseline in their noses and respiratory masks over their faces, people could not keep from inhaling grit. Dust particles are extremely fine, sixty-three microns or smaller. By contrast, a period at the end of a typewritten sentence is three hundred microns." (153) Comparing a punctuation period to a dust particle is an effective comparison. What else can be measured to show how tiny a dust particle is? What size are some of the bugs we can't even see? (dust mites) Browse through the *Grossology* book or visit [www.grossology.com](http://www.grossology.com) for a virtual tour. What did you learn?

9. "Men avoided shaking hands with each other because the static electricity was so great it could knock a person down. They also put cloth on their doorknobs and metal oven handles to inhibit the electric jolt. Car owners used chains, dragging them along the street as a ground for the electricity in the air." (153) We've all experienced static electricity in Colorado, but a bigger problem is lightning. What are the safeguards against static electricity in the air? against lightning? What precautions should people take when they are caught outside during lightning? What precautions should be taken inside the house?

10. " 'Rarely a day appears when at some time the dust clouds do not roll over,' wrote Caroline Henderson, a Mount Holyoke College graduate and a farmer's wife who lived in No Man's Land just north of Boise City. . . The wheat shined in the good years, and Caroline had a telephone installed and a got a daily newspaper delivered, bringing the world to their homestead. The bust left the Hendersons living a subsistence life . . . They lost the phone, the newspaper, the garden, the farm animals, and all their crops. . . She clung to small things – a houseplant in the windowsill, pictures of the farm when it was full of grain, a belief in tomorrow." (153, 154) Read Caroline Henderson's writings. See the bibliography. The Hendersons lost everything they had worked for and lived at a subsistent level. What do you consider the basic necessities in your life? If you had to start cutting back, which items would you give up? Make a list, e. g., pedicures, manicures, cutting own hair, downloading music, cable TV or DIRECTV, magazine and newspaper subscriptions, Starbucks, eating out, etc.

Libraries usually see an increase in patrons during tough economic times. Go to the library and interview a librarian to see if this is true for the Pikes Peak Library District and/or your school library.

## **Chapter 12 *The Long Darkness***

1. "Later that year, the government men offered contracts to wheat farmers if they agreed not to plant next year. This idea seemed immoral and not the least bit odd to people when they first heard about it. Like the cattle slaughters, it was a part of a Roosevelt initiative to bring farm prices up by reducing supply – forced scarcity. In the end, many farmers were not going to plant anyway – what was the use, with no water? – so the idea that they could get money

by agreeing to grow nothing was not a hard sell. More than twelve hundred wheat farmers in No Man's Land signed up for contracts and in turn got a total of \$642,637 – an average of \$498 a farmer. Thus was born a subsidy system that grew into one of the untouchable pillars of the federal budget.” (158) Research the subsidy system today. Do you agree with the principle? Has the subsidy system outlived its purpose? What else does the federal government control in regards to supply and demand (oil, for example)? How does that affect the consumer?

2. Language: “Bennett put one of Roosevelt's alphabet agencies, the Civilian Conservation Corps, to work on some of his early demonstration projects, and tried to inspire them with a sense of urgency about their mission.” (159) What “alphabet agencies” exist today? (FBI, CIA, IRS) List the agencies and their full names. Which ones are acronyms?

3. “ ‘We are not merely crusaders,’ he said at a rally of CCC workers, ‘but soldiers on the firing line of defending the vital substance of our homeland.’ ” (159) During this presidential election, notice how war terms are used to rally people. Listen to the buzz words in the political speeches and campaign. Keep a notebook of these phrases.

4. “. . .FDR was the face of salvation. Nearly one in five people were still unemployed, but government jobs had given four million people a paycheck. . .Fueled by his customary two pots of black coffee a day, the titan from Toadsuck railed against Roosevelt and his public works projects, calling him a communist.” (159, 160) Are words used to stereotype people so that groups will pick sides? Does this prevent people from seeking the truth? Find current examples from the Internet, the media, or the campaigns, which use inflammatory words to prejudice the public.

5. “He (Oklahoma governor Alfalfa Bill Murray) quit the Democratic Party in protest of the New Deal.” (160) Why would people quit the Democratic, the Republican, or the Libertarian party today? Be specific with examples. (When Hillary Rodham Clinton did not become the Democratic presidential candidate, some people threatened to vote for the other party.)

6. “Murray became increasingly irritable. In one speech late in the year, while puffing on a cigar, Murray lit into the president as usual. Just then, a schoolboy raised his voice. Murray exploded, snapping at the child. ‘You little screw worm!’ the governor shouted at the boy. ‘Get out of here!’ Alfalfa Bill's political career never recovered.” (160) Give examples today of politicians' careers which were ruined due to missteps. With the internet, YouTube, cell phone cameras and videos, etc., anything that occurs in public is open for inspection. For example, Jesse Jackson had to apologize after whispering derogatory comment about Barack Obama to an interviewer. How careful are you with your words? Have you ever been overheard when you didn't intend for your message to be overheard? What were the consequences? Would you want to run for public office and be open to such scrutiny?

7. “The president had his doubts about reverse homesteading. He did not want an uninhabited expanse of shifting sand in the middle of the country. Why not try to change the land itself. Roosevelt, like his fifth cousin, Teddy, was an authentic conservationist from the start. . .When Roosevelt suggested planting a great wall of trees from the Canadian border to Texas, people derided the plan as a Soviet-style joke. If God wanted trees to grow on the Great Plains, he would have put them there himself. The wind blew too hard for saplings to take root; there was too little rain. But Roosevelt persisted: why not plant rows, and in between would be farmland protected from the wind, a ‘shelterbelt’? The president asked the

Forest Service to draw up a plan, to span the globe and see if there were tree species that could survive the hot breath of the plains in summer and the deep freezes of winter.” (161) Draw up the shelter belt plan for the president. What is the advantage of having leaders who are visionary and open to new ideas?

8. “Now some of his (Folkers) neighbors wondered: why couldn’t people eat tumbleweeds as well? Ezra and Goldie Lowery, homesteaders in No Man’s Land since 1906, came up with an idea to can thistles in brine. Friends asked them how they could eat such a thing, the nuisance weed of the prairie. It was as dry as cotton, as flavorless as cardboard, as prickly as cactus. Well, sure. Indeed they tasted like twigs, no debate there. But the Lowerys said these rolling thistles that the Germans had brought to the High Plains from the Russian steppe were good for you. High in iron and chlorophyll. Cimarron County declared a Russian Thistle Week, with county officials urging people who were on relief to get out to fields and help folks harvest tumbleweeds.” (162) Determine the nutritional value and caloric count of tumbleweeds. Look at the food pyramid and determine what was missing from these Dust Bowl diets. Compare their diet to yours.

9. “For people in No Man’s Land without a cow or a hog of their own, there were ways to get food. They could wait on the soup line that had opened a few blocks from the courthouse in Boise City. They could wait on another sort of food line, this one courtesy of Sheriff Hi Barrick. If it wasn’t sugar from the bootleggers, which the sheriff gave out free, it was road kill, which he had his deputies bring in for distribution. There were always takers for the critters smashed by a car or a train on a dust-clogged highway or track. Their third option: they could steal food.” (165) During the Dust Bowl people had to resort to eating road kill. What are the options for hungry people today? Why isn’t road kill one of the usual choices? Would you eat road kill?

10. “The handsome mugs of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, in their mid-twenties, were posted in (Sheriff Hi) Barrick’s office. Joyriding, robbing banks, and killing their way through Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Missouri, the Barrow gang was declared Public Enemy Number One by a law enforcement posse headed by a former Texas Ranger. Bonnie and Clyde made fools of cops in dozens of counties, once kidnapping a lawman and having him steal a car battery to replace one in their stolen roadster. . .It contributed to their heroic stature among some people in No Man’s Land. They robbed banks, just as the banks had robbed people.” (166) Research more about Bonnie and Clyde. Who since then has been on the FBI’s Most Wanted List? Think of some people who have broken the laws or stirred up ethical controversy, yet, evoked peoples’ sympathy because they agreed with their cause. (possibly Dr. Kevorkian) What are the ethical and the moral dilemmas of these situations?

11. “Some teachers had gone nearly two years without pay, living on the room and board of a student’s parents and nothing else. Hazel Shaw thought she could use her ‘salary,’ the scrip, to buy groceries. But the bank stopped honoring the school scrip when it became clear the system was bankrupt. The county’s coffers were empty. By 1934, more than 60 percent of property owners were delinquent in their taxes in Cimarron County. They stopped paying because they had nothing. For the schools, heated by stoves burning cow chips, with dust drifts covering windows, it meant they could no longer afford books. The children would have to continue with broken-spined, ragged old texts perforated by the abrasive air of No Man’s Land. Cimarron County High School fell into further disrepair; it was one of the most forlorn sites in a town of dirty-faced buildings, just two clapboard shacks attached at the

shoulder. Before the dust, parents had been able to clean the windows and keep the roof in shape. Now the exterior was worn, as if it had been chipped by vandals, the gutters had fallen away, and the windows were covered with torn sheets splashed with three years' worth of uplifted soil." (167) What is scrip? Is it still used today? Tennessee Ernie Ford wrote a classic song, "Sixteen Tons." The last line is "I owe my soul to the company store." (www.cowboylyrics.com) He is referring to miners' scrips being accepted only at company stores. Write song lyrics to reflect scrips being accepted at only company stores. Many schools in Colorado, particularly in rural areas, are in disrepair. Research the condition of these schools and how the state government is planning to repair these schools. Smaller schools across the country frequently are unable to replace textbooks regularly and have minimal school libraries. What do more affluent schools do with their used textbooks? Hold a book drive to donate gently used books to other schools. Consider adopting a rural school in Colorado. Compare your school to schools in the Dust Bowl era. What do you have in your school that they didn't?

12. "One morning while Hazel rocked her baby, she saw in the pale light a small coffee box on the steps of the church across the street. . . That night . . . Hazel noticed the coffee box and the coat still on the church steps; they had been there all day. The next morning, with the temperature well below freezing and several inches of brown snow on the ground from the snuster, Hazel looked outside; the coat and box had not been moved. She walked across the street to the steps, brushed back the snow, stripped away the coat. There was a baby inside, blue-faced, barely moving, perhaps no more than four pounds, no bigger than a garden squash. . . People were abandoning their children – not in great numbers, mind you, but enough to make the sheriff feel a sense of shame for his fellow Oklahomans." (168, 169) A law in Colorado went into effect in 2006. Parents can leave their baby at a fire station or a police station. Research this law further. Why was it enacted? How many babies have been left at designated locations?

### **Chapter 13 *The Struggle for Air***

1. "Going to the outhouse was an ordeal, a wade through shoulder-high drifts, forced to dig to make forward progress." (171) Compare their "bathroom" with the restrooms in your school and in your home. Several townships, cities, et al, have outlawed outhouses due to sewage and illegal disposal of the contents. Research more about this issue. Should the government stay out of it? Is it irresponsible environmentally for people to have outhouses today?

2. "Ike considered dropping out. . . But Ike's mother said it would break her heart if he left before making it out of high school . . . He signed up to help with the senior play, *Mail Order Bride*, staying after school in the tiny gym to work as a stagehand." (172) Get a copy of the play. Why would that play be pertinent to the time? Which school plays have been performed at your school? Since many schools have experienced a waning interest in school plays, the schools have looked to more current plays. Research school plays performed in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the U. S. last year. What play was the most popular? Does the idea of a mail-order (or internet) bride still exist today? If so, which countries?

3. "One dirt-filled day blended into another. Starting on the first day of March, there was a duster every day for thirty straight days. . . In Dodge City, Kansas, the Health Board counted only thirteen dust-free days in the first four months of 1935. People were stuffed with prairie topsoil. . . Prairie dust has a high silica content. As it builds up in the lungs, it tears at the

honeycombed web of air sacs and weakens the body's resistance. After prolonged exposure, it has the same effect on people as coal dust has on a miner. Silicosis has long been a plague of people who work underground and is the oldest occupational respiratory disease." (173) Research respiratory diseases, including sinusitis, laryngitis, bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma. Have you ever had an upper respiratory diseases? How was it treated?

### **Chapter 14 *Showdown in Dalhart***

1. "The sign at the edge of Dalhart- 'BLACK MAN DON'T LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON YOU HERE'-was strictly enforced. In February, a norther came through the High Plains, sending the mercury plummeting to seven degrees. . .When two black men got off the train in Dalhart, hungry and nearly hypothermic, they looked around for something to eat and a place to get warm. They found a door open in a shed at the train depot. Inside was some food and shelter from a cold so painful it burned their hands and feet like a blowtorch. . .They were cuffed, locked up in the county jail, and after a week brought out for arraignment before a justice of the peace, Hugh Edwards. The judge ordered the men to dance. The men hesitated; this was supposed to be a bond hearing. The railroad agent said these men were good for nothing but Negro toe-tapping. The judge smiled; he wanted to see it. 'Tap dance,' Edwards told the men. . . The men started to dance, forced silly grins on their faces, reluctant. After the tap dance, the judge banged his gavel and ordered the men back to jail for another two months." (177) "In early April the two black men who had been sitting in the Dallam County jail for three months were brought back to the courthouse for trial. . . The judge found the pair guilty of criminal trespass and sentenced them to 120 days in jail. But again he wanted one more thing. 'Dance,' the judge said." (183) Was the judge out of line for ordering the men to tap dance? How much time did the men serve all together? Were they better off in jail because they had a warm place (shelter) and food? Today how would the same scenario play out? Is criminal trespass and/or stealing food a misdemeanor or a felony? What would the punishment be? What would happen to a judge who was so blatantly racist? Find examples of recent judges' unusual orders. Are there people who return to jail because they are unable to adapt to society?

2. Not only was respiratory disease a problem but also a mental illness. ". . .the courts had to contend with a new type of mental illness – the person driven mad by dust. . . He (Wilson Cowen) had been a judge less than a year when he was assigned the case of a mother of young children, the thirty-five-year-old widow found on the streets. . .One day the woman simply snapped." (177, 178) What resources were available to the young mother? What resources are available today to treat mental illness? What is post-partum depression? During the Dust Bowl, what was the attitude towards mental illness?

3. "The judge told her about the relief house, just opened in town, Doc Dawson's operation. The Doc was broke. All the money he made at the sanitarium had been put into the land, and the land gave back nothing. What was left for him was service, the impulse that had driven the Doc all his life. With a donation from Uncle Dick, he opened a soup kitchen known as the Dalhart Haven." (178) Research people who have devoted their lives to service. (Bob Telamosse who started a Colorado Springs holiday give away, Nicholas Venetucci with his pumpkin farm, Greg Mortenson who builds schools in the Middle East) Collect non-perishable food for the Marian House Soup Kitchen. Volunteer to work at the Soup Kitchen. Who funds agencies like the Marian House Soup Kitchen, Ecumenical Social Ministries, and

West Side Cares? Devote at least one week of your time to a philanthropic cause. Encourage your friends and family to join you.

4. “. . .the judge told friends some hope existed if only the government could find a way to tame the dunes and if the skies could spare some rain. Cowen was encouraged by talk among some of the government men about trying to control the prairie with contour plowing. *Conservation* – that was the new word coming from Big Hugh Bennett.” (179) What conservation efforts were put into place? Why are “green,” “greening,” “going green” the new terms? What do they mean? The Democratic National Convention touted itself as being “green.” What did that mean? Was it effective? Coin other terms that can be used by environmentalists.

5. “This tomorrow land was running out of tomorrow people.” (178) What do you think the phrase “tomorrow people” means? Decisions we make today affect the people of tomorrow. Are we doing a good enough job for future generations?

6. “The way the cowboys kept their tomorrow days alive now was to rope off a section of Denrock Street on a Saturday night and hold a square dance.” (180) Hold a square dance! Consider charging a small fee and donating the money to a worthy organization.

7. ‘A TRIBUTE TO OUR SAND STORMS’: McCarty declared it was time to stop treating the dusters like a Biblical plague, time to give them praise. The newsreel people and the traveling reporters from the big city dailies and the magazines – they had it all wrong. The dust storms were majestic, in their way, even beautiful, he wrote.” (185) Finish the article he wrote which is started on page 185. McCarty put a spin on the dusters. What were his motives? Are spins put on our news today? Do national figures spin mistruths that affect the nation? If so, give examples.

8. “He (McCarty) was on to something. He had tapped into the resilience of people who wanted to do something other than club rabbits, pray for rain, and wait for the gates of hell to open for them. . .From the worst conditions came the strongest men, he concluded.” (186) Using examples from history, prove McCarty right or wrong about his premise that the worst conditions create the strongest men.

9. “From praise of the dust storms, McCarty moved on to praise of the people who endured the storms. Yes, Americans were soft, as he said last Fourth of July, except for these High Plains nesters. There were no wristwatch cavemen.”(186) What do you think the term “wristwatch cavemen” meant? Write his article. Are Americans today soft? Write what James McCarty would say about Americans today.

10. “The Red Cross organized a shoe drive. They asked people to go through their closets, find shoes that were too small, too tattered – it did not matter. They collected several hundred pairs in a hotel room at the DeSoto donated by Uncle Dick. A Mennonite cobbler was enlisted. Old belting material was picked up at the railroad depot, and tire casings were collected. Over several weeks, the shoes were torn apart and put back together, with fresh soles.” (190) In your class, add up the number of shoes you and your classmates own. Are you surprised at the total? Several years ago, drives were held to recycle tennis shoes. Crocs currently holds a drive for recycling their product. Research more about those shoe drives

and recycling efforts. After determining which agencies want your shoes, hold a shoe drive. What other types of recyclables could your school collect? (suitcases for foster children, plastic tablecloths for rain capes for the homeless, pop tabs for Ronald McDonald House, socks for the homeless, washcloths and towels for the Red Cross Shelter, small toiletries for the Red Cross Shelter ) Americans today live in a “throw-away” society. Brainstorm how many items we throw away that others could use. Could this become an Eagle Scout project? a school project that will benefit poor people who live in Colorado Springs?

11. Rain: “Town leaders solicited ideas on how to force moisture from the sky.” Hanging a dead snake belly-side up on a fence and aerial bombing were two methods. “In the late 1890s . . . Congress had appropriated money to test the concussion theory in Texas. Tests were done by a man named Dyrenforth. He tried mightily, with government auditors looking over his shoulder, but Dyrenforth could not force a drop from the hot skies of Texas.” (190, 191) Why did Napoleon and C. W. Post believe in the concussion theory? Do we use methods to induce rain today? If so, are they effective?

### **Chapter 15 *Duster’s Eve***

1. “. . . 1935 had been one duster after the other and April showed no sign of letup, no rain in the forecast, four years into the drought. At the end of March, black blizzards had fallen for twelve straight days. During one of these storms, the wind was clocked at forty miles an hour or better – for a hundred hours. The *Boise City News* said it was the worst storm in the history of the county.” (194) None of us can imagine a storm lasting for one hundred hours. What was the worst storm in Colorado’s history? What is the worst storm you ever experienced? Compare the forty-mile-per-hour wind with windstorms today. Then, compare the winds’ velocity with the speed of a professional baseball player’s pitch. What does such comparison tell you about the dusters’ velocity and unrelenting pounding?

2. “The volume of dirt that had been thrown to the skies was extraordinary. A professor at Kansas State College estimated that if a line of trucks ninety-six miles long hauled ten full loads a day, it would take a year to transport the dirt that had blown from one side of Kansas to the other – a total of forty-six million truckloads.” (196, 197) This is another staggering statistic. Plan a class project where each student collects ninety-six pennies (or pop tabs) over a thirty day period. Then, do the math. How many days would it take to reach forty-six million? If you chose, extend the project so that you can collect a sizable donation to contribute to Pennies for Peace or give the pop tabs to the Ronald McDonald House.

### **Chapter 16 *Black Sunday***

1. Art: “. . . the second Sunday in April was an answered prayer. Sunrise was pink with streaks of turquoise, a theatrical start. The sky was clear. The horizon stretched to infinity once again, the sky scrubbed. There was no wind. The sun infused every gray corner with a spring glow.” (198) Draw the scene. Print pictures of Black Sunday from the internet and post them make a comparison with the scene you’ve drawn. Then compare it with the scene when the mega-duster blew in.

2. “His brother hauled water inside for baths. With the windows open on a windless day of perfect clarity, everyone in the dugout could get a good soak without worrying about the water going brown. After it cooled, the bathwater was not wasted. It was used to nurture an

elm tree, just about the only thing still alive on the Osteen homestead.” (200, 201) During the Dust Bowl era everyone shared the same bath water, and the water was recycled to nurture trees. Sharing bath water is almost unheard of today. Would you be willing to share bath water if that was all that was available? Water usage and availability are hot topics in Colorado. Look at the Colorado Springs Utilities Department website and/or flyers to see ways to save natural resources.

Access the *The Denver Post*'s archives for the article, “Not a drop to spare.” It reads in part: “Today, this water-management system is under stress from growth in demand, drought, and the specter of climate change. The system is bumping against its limits and needs to adapt. What do we do?” (Grigg, Neil S.) Answer the question! If your family doesn't already have a water saving plan in place, draw up such a plan with input from the entire family. (For example, take shorter showers; turn off the water when brushing your teeth – it doesn't have to be sharing bath water!)

The Stormwater Enterprise collects revenue to fund stormwater drainage improvement projects. Why is this enterprise so controversial? Look up the 1935 flood in Colorado Springs to see what happens when drought-hardened ground can't absorb rain.

3. “After he had cleared a path from the dugout to the outhouse, Ike turned his attention to the Model-A, which he called Old Henry.” (201) Take a survey to find out how many of your friends' families name their cars. List the names. Which ones are clever? Do people name any thing besides their cars? boats? motorcycles? lawn mowers? Name a school bus.

4. Weather: “About eight hundred miles to the north, people in Bismarck, North Dakota, started calling the weather bureau. A high-pressure system had been sitting over the Dakotas, and it was tussling with a cold front that had barreled down from the Yukon. With the clash of warm and cold currents, the air turned violent. Winds screamed over the grasslands, carrying dust so heavy that visibility was less than a hundred yards. The Dakotas had been pummeled by numerous dusters during the Dirty Thirties, but this one was bigger and stronger, packing a tremendous load of sand. In two hours' time, temperatures plunged more than thirty degrees, heralding the cold front's advance. By mid-morning, the windblown soil slid down over South Dakota and was advancing on Nebraska. The weather bureau was flooded with questions: What happened to the sunlight? Why is it so dark? Was this a twister? a series of twisters? something new and horrible? Where did it come from? What was the forecast? Where was it going? How long would it last? Will we get enough air? What should we do? flee? hide?” (202) Pretend that you are the weatherman fielding the calls during Black Sunday. Answer people's questions, after you have mapped the storm's path. What were the dangers for people, particularly for children? What kind of equipment would have been available for emergencies? The American Red Cross sells emergency winter storm kits. What items are in the kits? What kind of emergency equipment do people keep on hand during serious winter storms in their cars and homes?

5. “The weathermen were as confused as the callers. The storm that had moved out of the Dakotas a year earlier and blanketed New York, Washington, and ships at sea gained strength because it rode the jet stream and its high-level winds to the east. This duster was moving south with the cold front, but it was darker by far than anything ever seen before on the prairie.” (203) Prepare the Black Sunday weather report for the radio station. Using

advanced tracking systems available today, prepare the same report. Give the two different presentations for then and now.

6. “An Associated Press reporter from Denver, Robert Geiger, was traveling toward No Man’s Land with photographer Harry Eisenhard on that Sunday morning. The route took them from Denver to the southeast, away from the mountains, over the high, browned prairie, through (Colorado counties) Arapahoe, Elbert, Lincoln, Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Prowers Counties to Baca. . .The newsmen were simply looking for more anecdotes about the storms that were killing the southern plains. With black blizzards blowing through almost daily, Geiger’s stories were good play across the nation. The pictures sent out by the wire service during that winter and early spring told as much, if not more, than Geiger’s prose: people with masks and flashlights, navigating the perils of small-town main streets, card dodging the drifts and haze of a country road, storefronts boarded up, schools closed, cattle lying dead in the dust.” (203) Using a map of Colorado, trace the storm’s path. Research pictures from that time, including ones by Dorothea Lange, one of the most famous photographers of the era. Which ones told the stories most graphically and proved again that “a picture is worth a thousand words”? Read more anecdotes about peoples’ experiences during Black Sunday. Study Lange’s pictures to create additional stories. Today we have storm chasers with sophisticated technology. Read about their adventures.

7. “When the big roller crossed into Kansas, it was reported to be two hundred miles wide, with high winds like a tornado turned on its side. In Denver, temperatures dropped twenty-five degrees in an hour, and the city fell into a haze. The sun was blocked. That was just the western edge of the storm. The front end charged into Kansas carrying soil from four states. A telegraph inquiry around 2:30 p. m. came by Morse code from northern Kansas to the railroad depot in Dodge City, Kansas, about 140 miles northeast of Baca County. . . ‘My God! Here it comes!’ Dodge City went black. The front edge of the duster looked two thousand feet high. Winds were clocked at sixty-five miles an hour. A few minutes earlier there had been bright sunshine and a temperature of eighty-one degrees, without a wisp of wind.” (204) Track the storm as it moves into No Man’s Land. Use the Denver Public Library, the Library of Congress, and the American Memories Project to locate pictures of Black Sunday and the Dust Bowl. Create a gallery of photographs from the dust storms.

8. Art: “Just below Elkhart, in the northern fringe of No Man’s Land, several hundred people were massed in a field for the rabbit drive. . .Ike Osteen was five miles away from his homestead, with Tex and Pearl, when he noticed rabbits and birds fleeing south. This he had never seen: a desperate migration, the birds screeching by his car, the rabbits in a spring, all headed in the same direction.” (205) Draw the scene and explain the forewarning the animals were giving to humans.

9. “It was curious because there still was no wind, and the early afternoon was as luminous as the morning had been. He looked north and east, scanning the horizon of the broken land of Baca County on a rare day when a person could see into forever. Then he saw it, a few minutes past 4 p. m. . .The three teenagers made a dash for the (nearby) farm. . . Every spike on a barbed-wire fence was glowing with electricity, channeling the energy of the storm. Ike and his friends were a few yards out when the dirt got them. It came quicker than most dusters and was deceptive because no wind was ahead of it. Not a sound, not a breeze, and then it was on top of them. They were slammed to the ground and engulfed by a wall, straight up and down, the dust abrasive and strong, boiling up, twisting. The noise was ferocious, a

clanking, scraping sound. They could not tell up from down, one side from the other. Without their dust masks or goggles, Ike and his two schoolmates were blinded, and they struggled to breathe. They crawled forward, clawing at the air, and found the farmhouse door. The Coulters let them in and slammed the door. It was black inside. . . They sat on the floor with towels over their heads and mouths. Tex was on one side of Ike and Pearl was on the other. He could hear their voices and feel their hands, but he could not see them. He could not see his own hand in front of his face.” (206) Search for stories of good Samaritans helping others during natural disasters.

10. “The funeral procession, after fifty people in all, was six miles out of Boise City, still a ways from the Lucas family plot in Texhoma. They had spread out some to let the dust from the chains dragging behind car axles settle. About 5:15 p. m., they saw the heap of half-mile-high dirt casting a shadow before it was on them, and it was so big, so dark as to scare some in the procession into thinking there must have been an explosion somewhere, that a mountain range had blown its top. . . From this perspective, the mourners got a broad, expansive view of the Black Sunday duster. The wall looked like it ran for several hundred miles, east to west. The top was mostly flat, only slightly jagged at one end. The front was advanced by columns, which billowed ahead of the main storm, as if clearing the ground.” (211) Photograph a stormy day in Colorado and submit a picture to your local television station.

11. Art: “They poured water into scarves, shirts, and handkerchiefs, and tied them on. The children were told to crawl under the cars and keep the damp clothes on their faces. Everyone fell to the ground or got inside a car. As the big duster had bullied its way south, it had picked up more power and more density. There was probably no better source of pulverized sand than the arid, wasted wreckage of the High Plains on this afternoon in April. The earth went black. People saw flashes of electricity around their cars, the only light in the void. When it hit, the duster covered the hearse roof and the tops of vehicles, and blew granular bits against the windows and scoured the road beneath the cars where people were hiding. It was dark for more than an hour. Around 6:30, the winds diminished enough so a person could stand without getting knocked down.” (211, 212) Draw the scene or write a news article to appear in the local newspaper the next day. Use your five senses to capture the intensity of your first-hand experience.

12. Art: “The AP team traveled over the state line into Oklahoma, just ahead of the wall of dirt, but it was closing on them. Though wind speeds were estimated at one hundred miles an hour at the roof of the roller and sixty miles at the ground, the duster itself seemed to have slowed a bit, based on government notations of when the storm hit a certain place. By early evening, the formation was moving about forty miles an hour. The newsmen crossed the bridge over the anemic Cimarron River and aimed for Boise City. Just north of town, near the farm of Herman Schneider, they stopped their care. Eisenhower took a picture of the duster as it rose up behind the Schneider farm. ‘What a swell picture,’ he said. The shot ran in newspapers all over the world, one of the few news service photographs taken of Black Sunday as it unfolded. Geiger estimated the cloud’s height at several thousand feet. And while he initially thought it was black, he wrote in his notes that it appeared to be blue gray as it rolled over Cimarron County.” (214) Find this picture as well as other pictures of Black Sunday. Make a poster of pictures of natural disasters.

13. Laura Ingalls/aviation: “Another pilot, the aviator Laura Ingalls, had managed to get aloft before the storm. She was flying over the Texas Panhandle in a Lockheed monoplane, attempting to set a new nonstop flying record for crossing the continent. The plane was sleek with low wings, very fast. Ingalls was approaching the Oklahoma border when she spotted the moving mountain of dirt. It stretched so far she could not see the rear of it, and it looked several hundred miles wide. Even at its top, where the wind should not be to hold so many coarse dirt particles aloft, the formation was dark, a deep purple, she thought. Ingalls gunned the engine, ascending for cleaner air. She climbed to 23,000 feet. By then it was obvious: no way could she expect to leapfrog over this duster. She turned the plane around and scouted for a place to land, the record on hold. ‘It was the most appalling thing I ever saw in all my years of flying,’ she said later.” (217) Locate the actual report from Ingalls’ flight. Did she achieve her goal of crossing the continent?

14. Weather: “Most dusters blew sideways, the dirt seeping through the walls in horizontal gusts. This one showered from above, the black flour slithering down the walls.”(219) Why was this duster different from the other ones? Be a news reporter. Interview Joe Garza (208-211) and write the story about his experience. As a reporter, interview people who were in the Lucas funeral procession. (211) Write their story using quotes from the various people in the funeral procession.

15. Journalism: “McCarty was reading a book when the page went black. He felt his way outside, glanced back at his house, three feet away. It was gone. Using a heavy flashlight, he found his way to the newspaper office. A Teletype was sending a story from Kansas about a duster people were calling ‘The great grand daddy of all dust storms.’ . . .He prepared a page one headline for tomorrow’s paper: ‘SUMMER DAY TURNED INTO NIGHTMARE.’” (220) Find out whether that newspaper is still available. Produce a daily newspaper the week of Black Sunday with students assuming different roles: weatherman, a writer complaining about the government, a citizen writing a letter to the editor, a feature writer on the family at the funeral, a political cartoonist, a regular cartoonist, and a visitor there by accident.

16. Music: “Inside a blackened room in Pampa, Texas, 110 miles southeast of Dalhart, a twenty-two-year-old itinerate folksinger thought up the first line of a song about the world coming to an end. Woody Guthrie was with several people clustered around a single light bulb; the glow was so weak it looked like the end of a cigarette. . . .While working at a root beer stand that sold corn whiskey under the counter, he’d picked up the guitar during idle times and learned how to strum a few chords. As he watched the Black Sunday duster approach, he thought of the Red Sea closing in on the Israelites. . . .Guthrie started humming. He had the first line of a song, ‘So Long, It’s Been Good to Know Ya.’” (220, 221) Listen to the song. Then, find someone with a guitar, organize a group of singers, and record your version of “So Long, It’s Been Good to Know Ya.”

17. “It took an hour for the Black Sunday duster to travel from the border towns to Amarillo. At 7:20 a. m., the biggest city in the Texas Panhandle went dark, and its 42,000 residents choked on the same thick mass that had begun its roll in the Dakotas, clawing the barren plains, charring the sky in five states, producing enough static electricity to power New York, a fury that had never been duplicated.” (221) Egan wrote *The Worst Hard Time* in 2005. Has a storm since then duplicated or surpassed the storm of Black Sunday? If so, which one? Prove it! Which storms may have come close? To answer this question, you need to review all of the statistics of the storm on Black Sunday. Also see paragraph three on page 222.

18. Throughout the chapter, different activities mention collecting photographs of natural disasters, including the Dust Bowl. Become an expert on different natural disasters, such as tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, fires, etc. Was man responsible? How was man impacted?

**Chapter 17 A Call to Arms**

1. Dust Bowl: “Bob Geiger’s dispatchers and Harry Eisenhard’s images ran in newspapers everywhere, providing words and pictures for a story that many urban dwellers still could not believe . . . And for the first time, a term entered the nation’s lexicon. It came from another of Bob Geiger’s dispatches, a throwaway phrase that was part of a larger point he wanted to make. . . The headline writers, politicians, and newsreels referred to the airborne part of the southern plains by its new name: the Dust Bowl.” (222) According to Diane Yancey, “The name ‘dust bowl’ was casually coined by Associated Press reporter Robert e. Geiger, who was familiar with the Rose Bowl and Orange Bowl football championships.” (12) Sometimes a throwaway word becomes highly significant. When we hear them, we immediately think of the speaker or a particular event. For example, 9-11, “I Have a Dream,” “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” Find other historic throwaway words or phrases. Think of a family event that you want to remember. Create a throwaway word to trigger that memory. What computer terms have become part of our every-day language? Make two columns to compare the old meaning and the computer meaning of words:

Standard Meaning	Computer term and definition
mouse - rodent	mouse – an attachment to the computer to facilitate use of data on the screen
application – a written request for employment	application – use of computer programs

2. “In the first days that followed Black Sunday, people tried to explain it. The weather pattern that produced the storm was not out of character, especially for early spring. A mass of polar air had moved south from Canada, colliding with the dome of high pressure over the plains. As the heavier colder air pushed down a prairie lane, it drove the winds and caused the extreme, sudden drops in temperature. The winds were part of the landscape – always had been. Ever since the first Anglos dug a blade into the grass, they made jokes about the lashing currents. Newcomers wondered if it blew all the time. The standard answer was that the wind would shriek for ten days and then blow like hell for another five. The drought was in its fourth year, and it was the worst in at least a generation’s time. But long dry periods were as much a part of the Great Plains as the grass itself. What was different in 1935 was that the land was naked. . . The soil had been so pulverized by the dusters of 1933, 1934, and early 1935 that it was easy to lift. And fresh-formed dunes added reinforcement for Black Sunday’s clouds. With every new reach for the ground, the storm became heavier, thicker, darker.” (222, 223) Describe the weather where you live. Research the drought in Colorado Springs during the past summer and its impact. What is the source of our water? Study the struggle between Pueblo and Colorado Springs over water rights.

3. “For days, Congress had been sitting on Hugh Bennett’s plan to save the Great Plains from itself . . . He wanted something *permanent* to ensure against wipeouts and to try and restore the grass. . . Bennett had been trying to draw a big picture, to impart some sense of the magnitude of the collapse of the plains. It was not just black blizzards, starving cattle, and an exodus of hollow-eyed people. The human stories, each sad in their own way, were part of a larger tragedy: the collapse of a big part of mid-America.” (222) Read more about Hugh Bennett. What are his major contributions to America? Who do you think is the Hugh Bennett of today? Explain your reasons.

4. “One hundred million acres had lost most of its topsoil and nearly half had been ‘essentially destroyed’ and could not be farmed again, Bennett said. Think about the size, Bennett said: an area stretching five hundred miles north to south and three hundred miles east to west was drifting and dusted; two thirds of the total area of the Great Plains had been damaged by severe wind erosion – an environmental disaster bigger than anything in American history. . . The debate was whether to start from scratch, with radical new methods of farming, or to give up on the southern plains altogether.” (224) Locally, Coloradoans have experienced a similar problem with loss of topsoil and severe wind erosion: the Hayman fire. Why are areas like this so vulnerable to severe storms? Why is it important to restore the land as quickly as possible?

5. “Ickes continued to make the case against offering people more incentive to keep farming the Dust Bowl. At times, Ickes was an idealist, the designated dreamer of the New Deal. ‘Utopian goals? Utopian indeed,’ he said in response to a reporter’s question two years into the administration. ‘We are a spiritual people, and life for us would not be worth living if we did not have this urge to reach for what will always seem beyond our reach.’” (224) Does Interior Secretary Ickes’ comment also describe America today? Look for positive things about America. Write them. Look for courageous people, perhaps even people you know. Write about something they have done that is significant. Create a newscast to present to the class to inspire them.

6. Role play a key figure such as Bennett, Ickes, or FDR. Recreate a discussion between them whether to start from scratch or to give up on the southern plains altogether. What is this area like today? What would the land have been today if they hadn’t destroyed it? Is that area richer today?

7. “ ‘The trouble with Senator (Huey) Long (Louisiana) is he is suffering from halitosis of the intellect,’ he (Ickes) said. ‘That’s presuming Emperor Long has an intellect.’ ” (225) Political barbs are nothing new – and are still with us today. Record several political barbs. For example, “Bless his heart, President of the United States – a total failure, losing all credibility with the American people on the economy, on the war, on energy – you name the subject,” spoken by Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House, mocking George W. Bush after he scolded Congress for legislative inaction. (*Time*, August 4, 2008)

8. “Hugh Bennett took a different tack, using country charm and playing off the sheet music of history. . . He had backed off trying to shame people into action and no longer singled out the United States as the biggest abuser of the land the world had ever known. . . At first the government looked at the wreckage of the plains in the same way it viewed the great Mississippi River flood of 1927, or a tornado or hurricane for that matter – a natural disaster requiring relief. . . But as the dusts picked up in ferocity, Bennett was one of the first in

Washington to try and convince people it was not just another natural disaster or an epic drought. It seemed like something caused by man, a byproduct of hubris and ignorance on a grand scale. Maybe some of it could be reversed. But to do so, people would have to think anew about how they used the land. . . Bennett conceded that FDR had no plans to take on the work of God. His idea was much simpler: change human behavior, not the weather.” (225, 226) Sadly, we are in the same situation today. Americans have to think anew about how they have used the land. How can Americans change their behavior? Design a plan to reclaim our natural resources. If your plan fits with Dream City/Vision 20/20’s goals, give that group a copy of your plan – or become involved in Dream City’s discussions and planning. What is the difference between plans that are reactionary and plans that are visionary?

9. “Still, many politicians thought other parts of the country needed more help. More than two million people had found government public works jobs, which paid a minimum of twelve dollars a week, putting bandages on the wounds of American life. But nearly twenty-five million were still without regular income, relying on part-time jobs, private charities, or black-market income. For African Americans, the unemployment rate was 50 percent. Throughout the South and in some places in the North, notes were posted on job sites that read, ‘No jobs for niggers until every white man has a job.’ It took an executive order from Roosevelt in May 1935 to open up the public works ranks to all races. Nationwide, per capita income had fallen from \$681 in 1929 to \$495 in 1934. The ranks of landless farmers had swollen to an unmoored army. Between 1930 and 1935, there were 750,000 bankruptcies or foreclosures on farms.” (226, 227) What is the unemployment figure and percentage today? How many people have lost their jobs in the U. S. in the last year? What companies have laid off large numbers of employees? Why was it necessary to lay off employees? What is the per capita income today compared to 2003? Many people today believe that illegal immigrants are taking jobs that belong to Americans. Research the issue fully.

10. “Others thought the nesters of the southern plains were too dumb, too inbred, too thick to deserve more help. ‘They are simply, by God’s inscrutable will, inferior men,’ wrote H. L. Mencken, one of the most influential columnists in the land. The best thing to be done would be to sterilize them, he said.” (227) The idea of some people being inferior sounds like Hitler. But, we don’t have to look at Hitler to find a parallel. In the fall of 1994, the newsletter of the Los Angeles chapter of Mensa, an organization for people with extremely high IQs, published an article calling for the sterilization of individuals with low IQs. Why were people upset about this article? Read the short story “Examination Day” by Henry Slesar, which advocates the extermination of highly intelligent people. What would be the outcome if that happened? Research eugenics, a social philosophy which advocates the improvement of human hereditary traits through various forms of intervention, and debate the concept.

11. VISUAL: Big Hugh Bennett wasn’t convincing Congress to act. So, he stalled. “He wanted them to get another taste. On Friday, April 19, five days after Black Sunday, Bennett walked into Room 333 of the Senate Office Building. He began with the charts, the maps, the stories of what soil conservation could do, and a report on Black Sunday. The senators listened, expressions of boredom on the faces of some. . . A senator who had been gazing out the window interrupted Bennett. ‘It’s getting dark outside.’ The senators went to the window. . . For the second time in two years, soil from the southern plains fell on the capital. . . The weather bureau said it had originated in No Man’s Land. . . ‘This, gentlemen, is what I’m talking about,’ said Bennett. ‘There goes Oklahoma. . .’ Within a day, Bennett had his money and a permanent agency to restore and sustain the health of the soil. When Congress passed

the Soil Conservation Act, it marked the first time any nation had created such a unit.” (227, 228) Consider speeches by men and women who have captured the nation’s attention due to the dramatic timing. (For example, Abraham Lincoln, Chief Seattle, Chief Joseph, Osceola, Black Elk, César Chávez, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama.) Study their speeches and look for memorable phrases. Why were they successful in making their point? Pick an issue that is important to you and write a speech that will influence your classmates.

The Soil Conservation Act, which Bennett influenced Congress to pass, was critical at the time. What is the purpose of the Soil Conservation Act? What does it accomplish today? Since the Dust Bowl era, have other nations created similar legislation? If so, which nations? Has Congress in recent years responded to people’s needs this quickly? (the stimulus package?)

12. “But the administration was of two minds about what to do, for Roosevelt also created, at the same time, the Resettlement Administration. The purpose was to give loans, averaging about seven hundred dollars a family, for people to start anew or to buy land for the same purpose.” (228, 229) Compare the Resettlement Administration with the recent congressional acts to provide tax incentives, to bail out large companies in trouble, to seize control of banks in trouble, and to rescue Americans who were facing foreclosures.

13. “In Dalhart, John McCarty took a fresh vow in public. . . McCarty announced formation of the Last Man Club, himself as president, open to anybody who agreed to stay put. . . A person signed their name at the bottom, next to McCarty’s signature, and was given a number. Last Man Number One was Ealy Moore . . . Uncle Dick Coon, now said to be the only wealthy man left in town, was Last Man Number Two. . . A week after Black Sunday, banners went up around town. . . McCarty’s speeches were filmed by newsreels and sent to theaters across the country. . . Behind him was a larger banner of the Last Man Club.” (230) Design the banner. Write McCarty’s speeches. Petitioners are often positioned outside of stores requesting signatures to place an idea on the ballot. Would you agree to be the first signer? Would you read the petition first? Think about the signers of *The Declaration of Independence*. What courage did it take for those men to be the “first signers”?

14. “Some of Hazel’s friends who had joined the exodus, filing west with migrants from tenant farms in Arkansas and eastern Texas and Oklahoma, reported back in letters that California was no better than Cimarron County. No matter where they had come from, or if they had some schooling or owned land, they were called the same thing: *Okie*. It meant being no better than a throwaway rag. . . Signs in the Central Valley of California made clear how people felt about the new arrivals. One sign read. ‘OKIES AND DOGS NOT ALLOWED INSIDE.’ Over the next two years, 221,000 people would move to California, most of them from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. But only 16,000 came from the actual Dust Bowl.” (224, 225) Read *The Grapes of Wrath* about the “exodusters.”

## Chapter 18 Goings

1. Weather: “The Osteen dugout broiled in the heat. In May, the temperature rose to 105 degrees, the highest the mercury had ever been that early in the year in Baca County. . . “Summer temperatures were brutal. For two days in July and two days in August, the mercury reached 118 degrees, the highest ever recorded at that time in No Man’s Land. August went down as the hottest of the century in Oklahoma. It was 117 degrees in Dalhart,

120 in Shattuck. . .Ike's mother was thinking about moving the girls to town, to some little place, doing odd jobs. She had fed her family in part by canning meat from the government cattle kills. You could can anything, she always said." (236) Research the highest recorded temperature in Colorado and then in Colorado Springs. In what month did it occur? Does that year still hold the record for the highest temperature? Each student in the class should take a past year to look up the temperature and rainfall amounts for that year and then compare the years to 2008. Look at Colorado's weather this past summer. For example, Denver broke the record for the most consecutive days over ninety degrees. How did Denver's records compare with other places in the state, such as Springfield and Pueblo?

Mrs. Osteen had to can food in spite of the hot weather. Canning food is regaining popularity. Explain the reasons for its resurgence. (price of food, concerns of chemicals in and on the foods, recent foot scares) Does your family have a garden? Do you can any food? Have you considered canning some of your own food? How long does canned food last?

2. "Baca, so heavily plowed in the 1930s, was one of the most blown-away counties in the heart of the Dust Bowl; more than 1.1 million acres were so eroded they probably would never support a crop again, in the view of the government men. Not long after Black Sunday, a wire service reporter toured a Baca County mail route with a postal carrier. . .At one location, a lone woman was shoveling dirt from a front walk; she was shoeless and hollow-eyed. When the mailman approached, she dropped the shovel and clutched his arm. She said she had marooned for days. 'What's happened?' the woman asked. 'What's going on in the outside world?' " (237) Answer the woman's question. What was happening in the world around the time (May 1930)? Answer the same question for someone who would ask today. What is happening in the world?

3. "In the summer of 1935, FDR launched the Second Hundred Days, one of the great thrusts of domestic change ever seen – zero to sixty in an eyeblink, by government time. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act to ensure that the pensionless elderly would not starve, started the Works Progress Administration to keep the government payroll rolling, and backed the National Labor Relations Act, which enshrined union rights in the workplace." (237) Research those agencies, including their impact and activity now. Should we rewrite the Social Security Act to guarantee that it will be available for future generations? Write a plan that would benefit your generation. Submit it to your congressman.

4. "The farm economy was improving; income higher by 50 percent, crop prices up by 66 percent since Hoover had been turned out of office. Roosevelt took credit, saying the government cattle and hog kills and the plowing-under of surplus land had moved the market by creating a forced scarcity. The Supreme Court disagreed, at least on agricultural reach; they declared FDR's control of farm economy unconstitutional. " (238) Who served on the Supreme Court then? How did the various justices vote? What were the ramifications of the Supreme Court's decision?

### **Chapter 19 Witnesses**

1. "He started his diary on New Year's Day, 1936. If Don Hartwell was going to be buried under this sea of dust, he wanted to leave something behind. . .His story is of a farmer's life on the Kansas-Nebraska border during a decade when homesteads became graveyards. And he kept his diary secret, never showing it to anybody, not even his wife. . .The problem with

history was that it was written by the survivors, and they usually wrote in the sunshine, on harvest days, from victory stands. So Hartwell started his diary at the darkest hour.” (242) According to Egan’s notes, Hartwell’s writings are from his unpublished diary, which is on file at the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln, Nebraska. Find out whether the diary and the notes are available online. Since Hartwell did not show his diary to anyone, was it ethical to publish it? Have you ever kept a diary? How would you feel if it became public? As you read entries his diary in *The Worst Hard Time*, track his emotions.

2. “Feb. 14 I have often thought of sending valentines (as who hasn’t) but I never have.” (244) When did sending valentines become popular? Why is the market value of valentines today? Research organizations that take recycled greeting cards – and hold a greeting cards drive for them.

3. “July 30 Charlotte Lambrecht was in this afternoon. Charlotte is quite the stickler for morals and temperance, nearly all of us go through that stage at some time in our life. Too many times life slips apart and we find that is all we have left to us.” (247) Do you agree or disagree that “morals and temperance” is a stage we all experience? Fully explain your answer. What do you think Hartwell meant by finding out that is all we have left? “At age forty-seven, Hartwell was not going down without a fight, but if the elements finally beat him, he wanted a record of his struggle; maybe it would serve as a warning to some future nester.” (242) Which entries seem to indicate that Don is in despair? Talk about despair with your parents and with your classmates. What types of assistance are available for people today that were not available to Don? How does keeping a journal or recording one’s thoughts help?

4. “Sept 10 I took down 3 pigs to the sale in the afternoon they sold for \$12.05 or about \$4 each. These sales are remarkable. An old can and kittens sold for .05. Ducks sold for .30 each. One horse sold for \$11 another for \$7.” (247) Compare these prices with the prices today. Due to the slowing economy, second-hand stores, such as Goodwill, and stores that advertise consistently lower prices, such as Wal-Mart, Big Lots, and dollar stores, are seeing increased business. Determine whether that is true for these types of stores in Colorado Springs. What was the value of a dollar then? Compare prices then with today based on the dollar’s value.

5. “Oct. 2 I listened to the ‘World Series’ baseball game over the radio. The N. Y. ‘Yankees’ beat the N. Y. ‘Giants’ 18 to 4. One can hear the ball game in N. Y. City from the radio (wireless transmission) in his own home. You can hear the crack of the bat and the ball hit the catcher’s glove. Who would have thought it possible 25 years ago!” (248) What advances in communications have occurred since then? Will television stations changing to high definition affect you and your family? Will it affect lower-income families? those with several TVs? How many converter box coupons have been issued? How many converter boxes have been sold? Why are the television stations making this transition?

Will more families listen to the radio instead of converting to HD? Use a tape recorder to create a radio show with interviews, weather reports, skits, commercials, recipes of the day, household hints, latest weather horror story, and mystery theatre. Build a wireless radio.

6. “While Don Hartwell was scribbling descriptions of daily life on a dusted-over piece of ground, others were trying to record similar details with cameras. . .Roy Emerson Stryker came up with the idea of creating a record of American decay for the files of the Farm Security Administration. . .the government photo unit proved to be one of the lasting and most popular contributions of the New Deal. . .Stryker sent his photographers out to the heart of the Dust Bowl to get the faces of the desperate. He told his shooters that they should do more than drive by and hustle back to the city. . .Arthur Rothstein (was) twenty-one years old when Stryker sent him to Kansas, Texas, and Oklahoma in the spring of 1936. It was like sending George Catlin on one of the first explorations of the West, for Rothstein returned with images that most of America had never seen.” (248, 249) Find the pictures shot by Stryker, Rothstein, and others. Critique the photos and award the winner. What did you learn from studying the visual record of the period? Be specific in your answers. Today the media captures the history of the era. Which newspaper(s) and news magazine(s) do you read regularly? Which TV station do you watch regularly for the news broadcast? Why did you select these over others? Your school newspaper and yearbook record your school’s history in print and/or electronically. Get involved. Does your school have archives? If so, what can you learn about the past from reviewing those records?

7. “Roaming through No Man’s Land, Rothstein stopped his car outside the shack of Arthur Coble’s family. Coble was digging out fence posts and hauling water to a couple of starving cattle. When a sudden wind carried a wave of soil up from the south, Coble and his sons fled for shelter . . .Rothstein’s picture caught father and son, face into the wind, running for cover to a ramshackle, half-buried outbuilding; it looks as if the very earth is swallowing them. Just the tops of fence posts are visible in the foreground, and the background is shapeless beige. It became one of the most significant images of the time.” (250) Find the picture and compare it with others from the era. Why did it become one of the most significant images of the Dust Bowl era? Stryker and Rothstein are just two renowned photographers. Who are well-known photographers today? Sometimes photographers become controversial. Give examples of recent photographs that have caused a stir. (e. g., the cover of *Vogue* with LeBron James and Giselle Bündchen; Miley Cyrus covered only in a sheet both by Annie Leibovitz? Hold a photography contest at your school. Would you establish guidelines? Should a photographer have the right to photograph any thing s/he wants? Look for one powerful photograph (e. g., hunger, war, fireman rescuing a baby from the Oklahoma bombing, Iwo Jima, World Trade Center) and talk about why the photograph moved you. Why are we so impacted by visuals? How can one picture sway public opinion?

8. “Another documentarian, Pare Lorentz, wanted to tell a larger story, not just take snapshots of those trapped by the dead land. His idea was to film a narrative: how and why the Great Plains had been settled and the brought to ruination. . .Lorentz said he wanted only to tell a story that needed to be told: as one arm of the government tried to save the plains, another arm would try to show how people had created the problem. After much debate, the film was given the green light. It would be one of the most influential documentaries ever made, the only peacetime production by the American government of a film intended for broad commercial release.” (251, 252) Why did Hollywood studio heads object to the U. S. government financing this film? Do you think the government-produced documentary surprised Hollywood because it was a moneymaker? Research Hollywood documentaries to see when the industry began making documentaries. What were the first documentaries produced by Hollywood. Is the U. S. Government still in the film business? (Consider recruitment ads for the military.) Can documentaries become the impetus for other films? (e.

*March of the Penguins*) What is the difference between documentaries and docudramas? Name current documentaries that you liked. (for example, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Sicko*, *Inconvenient Truth*) Hold a class discussion on documentaries. What purpose do they serve? What responsibility do the filmmakers have to be truthful?

9. “. . . as he (Lorentz) filmed around Dalhart, a central image began to take shape: that of the iconic plainsman who first tore at the prairie earth. . .(Bam) White was everything Lorentz was looking for. . .Bam White, silhouetted against blowing soil, became the lasting image of the film that Lorentz made, *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. . .The film moved Bam to tears. He always thought there was a reason why his horse had died in Dalhart, marooning the family on this wedge of desolate ground. Now he saw the answer, there for all the world.” (252, 253) Review the film (U. S. Government short film, produced by Pare Lorentz, 1936).

## Chapter 20 *The Saddest Land*

1. “The government men held a summit in Pueblo, Colorado, moving the debate from the marbled comfort of Washington, D. C., to the war zone itself. They heard grim numbers about the enormity of the disaster. More than 850 million tons of topsoil had blown off the southern plains in the last year, nearly 8 tons of dirt for every resident of the United States. In the Dust Bowl, farmers lost 480 tons per acre. . .what did it mean to lose 850 million tons of dirt in a single year? It meant 5 million acres in a coma, with little chance of being cultivated. It meant 100 million acres might never be productive farmland . . .What could be done?” (254, 255) Answer the question! (before you read further) After reading the government’s plan, compare it with yours. When did Pueblo begin to house the Public Documents Distribution Center?

2. “The debate at the dust summit was the same one that had raged in Washington, with fresh urgency: whether to encourage people to cling to the land, hoping for recovery, or to let the plains empty out, a retreat of defeated Americans. If they did nothing, it looked like the trends that had accelerated in 1935 would continue. Across the entire Great Plains, nearly a million people had left their farms from 1930 to 1935.” (255) Where did the people go? (not all moved to California) What impact did this migration have on other parts of the country and on the Great Plains?

3. In one of his famous fireside chats, Roosevelt said, “You and I know that many farmers in many states are trying to make both ends meet on land not fit for agriculture. But if they want to do that, I take it, it’s their funeral.” (255) Research Roosevelt’s fireside chats. What topics did he cover first? Which ones do you think were the most popular? most unpopular? What topics did he cover? Roosevelt grappled with the issues, and people thought that he was listening to their ideas. Do current politicians research all sides and listen to the people? Give examples to prove your point. (off-shore drilling, nuclear power)

4. “The administration agreed to buy an initial 2.25 acres of used-up and dusted-over farmland. Despite the complaints of groups like McCarty’s Last Man Club, the government men believed it was cheaper to buy people off the farm than to pay them relief to hold on to marginal land. One new idea was to give some of these lands back to the Indians.” (256) The concept of “throwaway” land and “throwaway” people is emphasized in Egan’s writing. Consider the two solutions to the problem of the Dust Bow: to buy off the people or to pay them relief (welfare). In solving problems, the government often chooses the more economically feasible solution rather than considering the needs of the people. In many

situations, there are at least two sides. Research current examples of this happening. For example, Fort Carson's expansion and other examples of imminent domain.

5. "For Hazel Shaw, the only plan she had for the next year was to bring a new life into the world . . . In Elkhart, the baby was born without trouble, a black-eyed boy." (258) Compare baby Charles' birth with the birth of Rose of Sharon's baby in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

6. " 'It is purely a propaganda film,' McCarty said. It is bound to do more damage to our credit and our agriculture than it can possibly do good.' " (261) "Eugene Worley, a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1936, demanded that the government withdraw the film from theaters. 'It's a libel on the great Texas panhandle,' said Worley." (262) When is something libel and when is it pursuing the truth? We still have buzz words and sound bites today. How are loaded words still used today? How do political ads and brochures and internet postings use them? (get attention, being visual, for brevity) Are visual messages more powerful to you than verbal ones? Consider YouTube and My Space as you discuss the issue.

7. "At the same time, Bennett, as part of the team appointed by Roosevelt, was working on the investigation into the cause of the Dust Bowl." (263) Write Bennett's report.

8. "The plan was to slow the drifts by contour plowing, which created furrows and made it less likely for the earth to lift off in great sheets, and then plant it over with grass seed from Africa." (263) How is that concept reversed today to help the African people survive?

9. "Bennett was also struggling to put the fledging conservation district together. The nesters had usually worked alone, one man against the land, and sometimes one man against another, each with his section. Bennett was trying to create what amounted to neighborhood civil defense committees of the soil. But people had to take the initiative. A soil conservation district would fail if only a few people went along with it. It was all theory, of course. But neighbors bitched about other neighbors not wanting to do their share, or shucking duties, or being sloppy or lazy or drunk or too religious or just plain onerous." (263) One of the traits of Americans moving West was the hankering for their land and individual rights. Individualism and fierce independence worked against them. Bennett could see the need to unite people and to encourage them to work as teams. Bennett was indefatigable in his efforts. During the Dust Bowl era, the country learned that people have to pull together. How do people work today? When in recent history have Americans had to pull together to overcome a major challenge? Provide examples. Take on a challenge and organize a group to accomplish a goal through teamwork over a year. (For example, tutor for the Children's Literacy Center, adopt senior citizens in your neighborhood or contact Silver Key for suggestions on how to help the elderly, donate babysitting services. On a regular basis, serve food at the Marian House Soup Kitchen.)

## **Chapter 21 Verdict**

1. ". . . Bennett believed that the Great Plains could be saved; it did not have to blow away and lose its people. But all the marvels of concrete and rebar used elsewhere could not put back what the winds and a swarm of one-way plows had done on the prairie. There would be no magical engineered solution. Some believed so, of course . . . Others thought the solution was to go deep, dig far below the surface, and mine the great underground reservoir of ancient water, the Ogallala Aquifer. Deep wells, drilled for oil or gas, had found a ready

source of water five hundred feet or below. Bring it up, many county leaders told Bennett during his tour of the Dust Bowl. If rain would not come from the sky, it could come from the ground. The Ogallala was there for the taking, just like the grassland itself thirty years earlier. Bring it up.” (265) Explain why bringing up water from the Ogallala Aquifer was a bad idea then – as it is now. (See p. 311.)

2. “Roosevelt asked for an honest verdict: why had the Great Plains blown away? The crisis of the transient prairie had already cost Depression-strapped taxpayers an enormous sum – five hundred million dollars since 1933 – on remedial land projects, grants, loans, and relief. Before spending any more money, the president wanted to know if the plains could be saved, and if so, how.” (266) Convert the \$500 million to today’s amount. President Roosevelt’s request seemed reasonable. Congress today continued to approve expenditures without considering that taxpayers are already strapped in a declining economy. As a result, Congress and the President have the lowest approval ratings ever recorded. How can the taxpayer make Congress aware of the individual needs of the average American and more fiscally responsible in their decisions? Have a discussion with your family. Ask your parents to help you draft a letter to your congressman explaining your views on the major problems affecting the American family and offering suggestions on how to meet these needs. See if your congressman will read your letter on the House or Senate floor so that it will become part of the Congressional Record.

3. “The report of the Great Plains Drought Area Committee was delivered to the president on August 27, 1936.” (266) The full report is available at [www.newdeal.fei.org](http://www.newdeal.fei.org). (The following answers are provided for the teacher.) List the highlights:

- ✓ The climate had not changed. (266)
- ✓ The nation’s midsection west of the ninety-eighth meridian, from the Canadian border to Mexico, received only twenty inches of yearly rainfall or less. This was simply not enough rain to raise crops. (266)
- ✓ Mistaken public policies have been largely responsible for the situation. Specifically, ‘a mistaken homesteading policy, the stimulation of war time demands which led to over cropping and over grazing, and encouragement of a system of agriculture which could not be both permanent and prosperous.’ (267)
- ✓ People, not weather or bad luck, had caused the problem. (267)
- ✓ The problem could not be fixed by man. (267)
- ✓ How the disaster had unfolded:
  - 1) In 1879, ten million acres were plowed. Fifty years later, the total was one hundred million acres. Grass was needed to hold the soil in place; it was nature’s way of adapting to the basic conditions of the plains, the high wind and low rainfall. . . The turf was intact for thousands of years, and then in two manic periods of exploitation –

the cattle boom, followed by the wheat bubble – it was ripped apart. (267, 268)

- 2) The settlers lacked both the knowledge and incentive necessary to avoid these mistakes. (268)
- 3) The Federal homestead policy, which kept land allotments low and required that a portion of each should be plowed, is now seen to have caused immeasurable harm. (268)
- 4) Wartime demand drove up prices, stimulating record production. (268)

4. “And why should a city person care about this wreckage of lives and land? ‘The situation is so serious that the Nation, for its own sake, cannot afford to allow the farmer to fail,’ the report concluded. ‘We endanger our democracy if we allow the Great Plains, or any other section of the country, to become an economic desert.’ ” (269) Similarly, why should we care about the farming crisis today? about the price increases in food? about corn being used for fuel instead of for food? Why do people demand incentives to care or to get involved? (e. g., for food drives, drop off canned items at a fast food restaurant and receive a discount or a free item) What is the impact of citizens not having knowledge and requiring some kind of incentive to care? How did we become a what-is-in-it-for-me society? What would happen to organizations like Care and Share if all area schools discontinued their food drives? What is the importance of an informed citizenry?

5. “It (concern over the Great Plains) was enough to keep Roosevelt up nights.” (269) If you were president, what situations would keep you up at night? Fully explain your answers. How do you get people to care about an issue that doesn’t directly affect them? Pick an issue that is important to you and convince your classmates to get on board to make a difference. Possibilities include the housing for the poor, animal issues, skateboard parks.

6. “It was an election year, and Roosevelt was extremely popular. Europe was tense, with Hitler consolidating power and fortifying his military in Germany, and the Spanish Civil War a staging ground for the larger battle to come. Consumed by its domestic crisis, the United States declared neutrality in the affairs of Europe. The Republicans ran a Kansan, Governor Alf Landon, the only GOP governor west of the Mississippi. Landon said Roosevelt had no idea how to fix the Great Plains and was taking the country in a radical direction. Most Americans felt otherwise; the election was a rout. Roosevelt carried every state but Maine and Vermont, winning the Electoral College by the largest margin ever, 523 to 8, and the popular vote by more than ten million, with 60 percent of the electorate.” (269) This is an election year. Predict whether you think the Electoral College will figure into the outcome of the election. Debate whether the United States should adopt a system in which the votes are split among the candidates, reflecting the percentage of votes each candidate received instead of a winner-takes-all approach. During the Dust Bowl era people were consumed with the domestic crisis. Similarly, the American public is consumed with our troubled economy, and yet we are now part of a global community. How do you think American citizens are going to vote? Will they be more concerned about the economy than global issues? Can we afford to ignore our role in the world’s economy?

7. “People wrote to him (Roosevelt) as if he were an uncle, the one who always had an answer.” (270) Is the president today isolated from or in touch with the average citizen? How does the president keep in touch with the needs of the citizenry? Who opens and answers the president’s mail today? If you send an email to the president, who reads it? Send the president an email on key issue.

8. The second part of the plan was to replant. “They planted a mixture: weeds to hold the ground down, grass from Africa, blue grama, bluestem, buffalo grass, and other flora. It would take time: ten, twenty, maybe fifty years before a big new swath of turf was in place again.” (270) Compare this reclamation project with the one to repair the scar on the mountain in Colorado Springs. Who paid to have the area replanted? What is being done to reclaim the Hayman Fire areas?

9. “Roosevelt still wanted something dramatic, something quicker – a Grand Coulee Dam for the soil. His ‘Big Idea’ of planting trees down the middle of America had taken on a life of its own after the Forest Service came back with a positive report. The president had been mocked since he first talked up his vision, a belt of trees a hundred miles wide, stretching from the North Dakota border with Canada to just south of Amarillo, Texas. Trees could not stop the dust. But they could provide shelter from black blizzards, enough so people could get a crop in. He hoped the project would accomplish three things: break up the winds, check erosion, and employ thousands of people. . . The tree planters were CCC crews, young men hungry for work; an eleven-man team could plant six thousand trees a day. . . Trees would bring people together, make it easier to live, some of the experts said – social change through hardwood. . . Nobody plants a tree on the prairie facing north and south. After a time, the crews shifted and planted rows running east and west, a more effective wind barrier.” (271) Do you agree with Roosevelt’s plan? Why or why not? What is the importance of learning from others before undertaking such plans? How expensive is it to launch major programs without carefully researching all of the ramifications first? What did it cost to plant the trees under Roosevelt’s program? Did the trees survive? What does the expression, “Haste makes waste,” mean? How about in your own family? Talk to your parents. Have they ever made a decision and regretted it later because they felt they didn’t have time to research it carefully enough? Have you ever done this?

10. “Into the ground went cottonwoods, honey locusts, hackberries, ash, walnuts, ponderosa pines, and Chinese elms. The trees held through that first winter, and by late spring of 1937, as the dusts started up the ferocious seasonal winds, Roosevelt sent the crews out again. The president ignored the warnings of Hugh Bennett and others who said man could not alter the basic nature of the Great Plains. . . Roosevelt bulled ahead with the idea that had most captivated him from the start. He dispatched his army to half a dozen states, to the most broken counties, the most barren farms, the driest land, with a simple command: plant trees, two hundred million of them, from the top of the plains to the bottom.” (272) How much did it cost to plant two hundred million trees? Are the trees alive today?

About thirty years ago, Colorado Springs was named a Tree City USA. Tree City USA is a designation that cities can earn for having Urban and Community Forestry programs. Look at pictures of Colorado College to determine the difference between the way it looked when it was first established and the campus now. Which other U. S. cities have been named Tree Cities? Which trees are best suited for Colorado’s climate? What kinds of

trees do you have in your yard? Consider a tree-planting project for your school, your neighborhood, or your park.

### **Chapter 22 *Cornhusker II***

1. “On New Year’s Day, he (Don Hartwell) recorded in his diary the simple facts of life on the farm: the wind at twenty-two miles an hour, gas selling for twenty cents a gallon, which meant it took a full day’s work at one of the government road jobs to fill up your tank.” (273) Write a journal entry about life in Colorado Springs. Organize it as a project so that each student selects a different time of the year. Share your entries. Do your impressions of the city differ?

2. “Feb 25 In Chicago a man offered to give away his baby so he could keep his car and, of course, there is much righteous indignation. But at least he dares to be honest. I’ll bet anything that thousands of others would do the same thing, if they dared to and could.” (274) Do these acts of desperation happen today? Collect news articles that reflect the challenges that people face. How do they vary according to socio-economic groups? Do you notice any patterns?

### **Chapter 23 *The Last Men***

1. CCC: “Bennett’s project, Operation Dust Bowl, was in full swing. An army of CCC workers, aided by unemployed farm hands, was called to duty each morning . . . in a war against dirt. . .Dallam County was the lab. Bennett started out working with 16,000 acres, but the project expanded quickly to 47,000 acres, with a goal of ten times that size. After so many years of destruction, of hearing how they had killed the land, people wanted to be a part of restoration. It felt good to be trying to heal something.” (280) In July 28, 2008, the *Denver Post* ran an article under the column “Colorado Voices.” The title was “What this world needs now,” and featured Leroy Lewis, 96, of Grand Junction who was a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Read the article to learn from a first-hand account about the CCC. According to the article, “FDR created the program to give the ailing economy a boost and to restore Americans’ confidence in themselves and their country. From all accounts, it proved a remarkable success during its 10 years of operation. . .The CCC worked magic. ‘It was all about patriotism,’ he said. ‘They should bring it back. It would keep our young kids out of mischief.’ ” See if you can find a former CCC employee to interview. Do you agree or disagree that the federal government should reinstate the CCC? Fully explain your answers.

If you think that it is a good idea (including giving jobs to more people), develop a plan for the CCC to be implemented. What local projects would you have a group undertake? Could your program be organized at a local or state level rather than federal level? How would you fund it? Would you use prisoners in your work force? Similar programs do exist. Research prison work forces.

2. “Even Dalhart’s lone banker, Lon C. McCrory, had joined in the plea for outside relief, saying, ‘We need somebody to save us from ourselves.’ ” (281) We are always looking for someone to solve our problems. Have we lost that pioneer spirit? How do we encourage people to take the initiative?

Take a poll in your school. What percentage of students are involved in after-school activities? Which ones? How many students are involved in community service? What percentage appear to be uninvolved in any activity? Get your student body excited about a project that unites the school.

3. Art: “The remedial efforts did not keep cattle from dying or black blizzards from rolling over other parts of the Dust Bowl. In 1937, there were more dusters on the High Plains than in any other year – 134. . . A minister’s son, Alexandre Hogue, had grown up on a relative’s ranch not far from Dalhart, left for the city, then returned with a plan to paint what he saw. Hogue was a careful student of the land, studying the way a grove of trees he remembered from his youth looked like standing skeletons . . . Hogue painted starving animals, drifts that covered tractors and homes, a surfeit of predatory snakes and bugs, a landscape of rotting hell. *Life* magazine ran his paintings in 1937, calling him ‘the artist of the Dust Bowl.’ The painting that drew the most attention was an oil-on-canvas piece named *Drouth Survivors*, a portrait of an agrarian nightmare, with surreal touches. It showed two dead cows face-planted into a drift, the top of a leafless tree buried by dust, a tractor half-smothered by sand, a fence drifted. . . The painting was later purchased by the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, a museum in Paris, and burned in a fire.” (282) Redraw the famous painting. Draw other scenes from this era and display them.

4. “Melt White was outside in early evening, temperature still above a hundred, when he heard a buzz like the electricity of a snapped power line . . . That aint’ no duster. It’s hoppers. . . Grasshoppers are eating machines, each bug consuming up to half its body weight in a single day. . . The insect clouds moved from county to county, looking for any living thing, leaving not a flower or a leaf or a sprig of grass standing. . . The county ag man, Bill Baker, said he had never seen a bigger surge of insects in his lifetime. He estimated there were 23,000 grasshoppers per acre, fourteen million per square mile. A farmer with two sections faced twenty-eight million of the voracious creatures.” (284, 285) How do we control grasshoppers and the insect population today? What insects are we most concerned about? (beetles destroying pine trees, mosquitoes carrying West Nile virus). Interview several lawn and tree service companies. What pesticides do they use? Are the companies environmentally concerned? Are their services necessary?

5. “Nature was out of whack. In place of buffalo grass, prairie chickens, and mourning doves were black blizzards, black widows, cutworms, rabbits, and now this - a frenzied sky of grasshoppers. They had come out of the dry Rocky Mountains, the government men said, locusts that laid eggs in the flatlands and multiplied during the dry years without predators. A wet year would usually produce a fungus that killed many of them. Birds that used to populate the High Plains year-round or descend on its stubble during the migrating season had disappeared. Same with rattlesnakes. A farmer used to fill a bucket in the spring with all the rattlers he shot on his half-section. But no more. For five years, people had rarely seen a rattler. Snakes and birds ate grasshoppers. When they were taken out of the prairie life cycle, the hoppers metastasized. That much, people could see; it was obvious. The early ecologists in Bennett’s soil service were only beginning to examine how much life had frayed below the surface, among the small world of insects and micro-organisms. (285) How did man affect the balance of nature during the Dust Bowl? Why did this lead to problems with grasshoppers birds, snakes, and other species? Are we creating similar environmental problems today? Study examples of man negatively affecting the balance of nature. Research the decline in the number of frogs. What species in Colorado have changed their migration patterns? their

length of hibernation? their foraging areas? Present your research. To inform the public, write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper to generate concern over these issues.

6. “The National Guard was called out and instructed to exterminate the grasshopper plague by any means necessary. . .A combination of arsenic and bran was settled on as the best method, and it was sprayed from the air and distributed by seeding machines.” (285 How many people in Colorado have been stricken with West Nile virus since it was first identified? this year? In the past, most towns sprayed for mosquitoes. What were the advantages/disadvantages of this approach? In Colorado Springs, which agency is responsible for dealing with mosquito control? What is your personal responsibility? Write a public service announcement to advise the public of the precautions they need to take.

7. “In Dalhart came a surprise announcement: John McCarty was leaving town. . .So Dalhart lost its biggest booster and the *Dalhart Texan* was without its unique voice. . .Uncle Dick was the only community pillar left in town. . .Dalhart had a resource after all: this history, the biggest ranch in the state, the spread that built the capitol, the largest grass under fence in the world, the boys of original Texas. ‘We oughta have ourselves a barbecue,’ said Uncle Dick. . .Bam White brought his fiddle, and he was joined by other cowboys.” (286, 287) Hold a neighborhood or school barbecue, but charge admission or have people bring a can of food. Donate the money/food to a local food bank.

8. Art: “A few days later, Uncle Dick was leaning against a rail in front of the DeSoto when he spotted a young cowboy and his family drifting through town. . .Dick rolled a cigarette from the plug of tobacco he kept in a vest pouch, staring all the while at one cowboy and his family. He overheard part of the conversation, the man telling his kids he knew they were hungry but would have to hold on a little longer, maybe at the next town they could get something to eat. . .Uncle Dick reached into his pocket and pulled out his hundred-dollar bill. He handed the money to the cowboy, told him to take it – it was his.” (287, 288) Uncle Dick gave his money to this particular man because he knew that he was worthy and was not asking for handouts. How do you determine the best way to help the needy? Is it better to give to an organization that helps people or to individuals? What are the issues regarding panhandling? What are some creative ways of helping the needy in your community? Acting on Mayor Hickenlooper’s idea, Denver turned old parking meters into collection sites to help the homeless. What are the issues regarding panhandling? See the recent article in *The Colorado Springs Independent* at [www.csindy.com](http://www.csindy.com) about turning old parking meters into donation sites to help the homeless. Do you think that this is a good idea? Then, create a colorful design for this parking meter. Convince the City Council to allow students to design the parking meters. Submit your designs.

9. “It wasn’t like that hypocrite John McCarty leaving to take a better job after getting everybody worked up into a froth and pledging to stick around. Dick had to leave in order to stay alive. Okay, then.” (289) Why did the citizens feel that John McCarty betrayed them? Find examples of people today who have sold out. (e. g., Scott McClelland, former press secretary to President Bush) CEOs of major companies have sold or moved stock based on insider trading deals. They knew stockholders would be hurt financially. How can the American people prevent these things from happening? How can we restore integrity in society? What is the value of being known for keeping your word?

## Chapter 24 *Cornhusker III*

1. “The communities around Hartwell’s farm were dying fast. A village four miles north of his home fell empty, the school abandoned, the houses and farm buildings deserted, tumbleweeds pressed against the sides. This could not possibly be the same land Lewis and Clark had seen in 1804, ‘well calculated for the sweetest and most nourishing hay,’ the bluestem twelve feet high. Clark had marveled at the grass as the Corps of Discovery moved up the Mississippi River, staring east at the plains of Nebraska. ‘So magnificent a scenery,’ he wrote, ‘one of the most pleasing prospects I ever beheld.’ ”(295) Have Lewis and Clark take their trip again and record their reaction of it during the Dust Bowl era.

2. Poetry: Read the poem on page 302. What do you think the poem meant? What do you think is the rest of Don Hartwell’s story? Write an ode for Don Hartwell in which he analyzes his life. Was Don an educated man? How would he know about this poem? Did it surprise you that a tough sodbuster would appreciate poetry? Is poetry important to people today? Aaron Anstett was recently named as Colorado Springs’ first poet laureate. He has selected “Poetry in Waiting” as one of his projects, meaning that he wants to incorporate poetry into waiting rooms. Identify places where you go where you have to wait. (physicians’ offices, dentists’ offices, mechanics’ waiting rooms, hospital waiting rooms). Write poems on those topics for those places. Then give them to your teacher for submission to Mr. Anstett in care of the Pikes Peak Library District.

## Chapter 25 *Rain*

1. “They worked through the hottest days of summer, stitching a flag forty-nine feet long by twenty-nine feet high, the biggest in the world. Every musician in the Texas Panhandle was summoned to fall in line, forming another superlative: the largest single marching band ever assembled on American soil – 2,500 instruments.” (303) Are these categories in *The Guinness Book of World Records*? If so, what is the current record for the biggest flag? for the largest marching band? How big is your school’s marching band?

2. “The rain started just after the president’s train pulled into Amarillo . . . At Ellwood park, there was no shelter for the honored guest. It had been dry for six years; no one expected a downpour in mid-July. . . Roosevelt had always believed in the power of restoration. He was also starting to believe that the Dust Bowl could have been prevented. He had taken to heart some of the conclusions of the Great Plains committee, and he saw a way out in Operation Dust Bowl and his own tree-planting design. What happened on this hard ground was not a weather disaster at all; it was a human failure. A year earlier, in a speech at the dedication of Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River, Roosevelt said if only Americans had known as much thirty years ago as they knew today about care of arid lands, ‘we could have prevented in great part the abandonment of thousands and thousands of farms in portions of ten states and thus prevented the migration of thousands of destitute families.’ ”(307) President Roosevelt acknowledged the government’s mistakes in judgment. Why is it important for the president to research decisions carefully and to listen to conflicting sides of an issue? List lessons about conservation and environment you have learned from reading *The Worst Hard Times*. Create a mural of President Roosevelt’s historic visit to the Dust Bowl as described in *The Worst Hard Times*. Post your list of lessons by the mural. Hold an evening program to present what you learned to your parents and to the public.

## Epilogue

1. “The High Plains never fully recovered from the Dust Bowl. The land came through the 1930s deeply scarred and forever changed, but in places it healed. . .But in the heart of the old Dust Bowl now are three national grasslands run by the Forest Service. . .Some things are missing or fast disappearing: the prairie chicken, a bird that kept many a sodbuster alive in the dark days, is in decline, its population down by 78 percent since 1966. The biggest of the restored areas is Comanche National Grassland, named for the Lords of the Plains, which covers more than 600,000 acres, much of it in Baca County. Plans are underway to reintroduce bison to the shortgrass prairie, as was done in tallgrass preserves in other parts of the Great Plains.” (309) Why is the prairie chicken population declining? Are prairie chickens on the endangered species list? What other animals are on this list? Which animals have been taken off this list and why? Have bison been reintroduced to the area? If so, when? If not, why not?

2. “The trees from Franklin Roosevelt’s big arbor dream have mostly disappeared. Nearly 220 million were planted, just as the president envisioned. But when regular rain returned in the 1940s and wheat prices shot up, farmers ripped out the shelterbelt trees to plant grain.” (310) Reread Santayana’s quote. Work on a project to inform the public about the importance of trees. Present your information to Dream City/Vision 2020. Work with Dream City to organize and to implement a large tree-planting project.

3. “The United States was founded as a nation of farmers but less than 1 percent of all jobs are in agriculture now. . .The subsidy system that was started in the New Deal to help people . . . The government props up the heartland, ensuring that the most politically connected farm will remain profitable . . .has become something entirely different: a payoff to corporate farms growing crops that are already in oversupply, pushing small operators out of business.” (310) Research the farming industry and the subsidy system. Design a plan to improve it. Why does business have such a strong influence on governmental decisions? How can the average citizen have an equal impact on government decisions?

4. “To keep agribusiness going, a vast infrastructure of pumps and pipes reaches deep into the Ogallala Aquifer, the nation’s biggest source of underground freshwater, drawing the water down eight times faster than nature can refill it. . .With this water, farmers in Texas were able to dramatically increase production of cotton, which no longer has an American market. So cotton growers, siphoning from the Ogallala, get three billion dollars a year in taxpayer money for fiber that is shipped to China, where it is used to make cheap clothing sold back to American chain retail stores like Wal-Mart. The aquifer is declining at a rate of 1.1 million acre-feet a day – that is, a million acres, filled to a depth of one foot with water. At present rates of use, it will dry up, perhaps within a hundred years. (310, 311) Should declining water resources be a major issue in the upcoming elections? What would it be like to be without water? What if all your water use was regulated? Read predictions about the future – a decreasing water supply versus an increasing population here on the Front Range. Americans know what it is like to be without easy access to oil. Why is the concern about oil taking precedence over water?

5. Can it happen again? “During a three-year drought in the 1950s, dusts returned. There were big storms covering roads and spinning over towns but nothing like Black Sunday. Droughts in 1974-1976 and 2000-2003 made the soil drift. But overall, the earth held much

better. Why no second Dust Bowl? In 2004, an extensive study of how farmers treated the land before and after the great dusters of the 1930s concluded that soil conservation districts kept the earth from blowing. . .What saved the land, this study found, was what Hugh Bennett had started: getting farmers to enter contracts with a soil conservation district and manage the land as a single ecological unit. . . His legacy, the soil conservation districts spread throughout America, is the only New Deal grassroots operation that survives to this day.” (311) Could the Dust Bowl happen again? Shouldn't we be forewarned? We continue to create ecological problems for ourselves. We waste our natural resources. We pollute our water supply, oceans, beaches, and rivers. Our infrastructure is deteriorating. And, yet, we don't want to spend the tax money to restore it. We are irresponsible in our use of non-biodegradable products, such as plastic. Rather than recycle we create mountains of garbage and we litter. If this were a description of another species behaving in this way, what would you think? Looking at the animal world, which species is the real problem? Write a speech to inform the public about these issues and to inspire them to care. Present your speech to Dream City/Vision 2020 groups and/or participate in ServiceNation.

As readers, we certainly learned by reading *The Worst Hard Time* that there is a lot to be done to make this world a better place. *Time* magazine is helping to lead a major push to make national service a priority in Washington. Here are excerpts from their announcement:

“It is a unique moment for the idea of national service. You have two presidential candidates who believe deeply in service and who have made it part of their core message to voters. You have millions of Americans who are yearning to be more involved in the world and in their communities. You have corporations and businesses that are making civic engagement a key part of their mission. . . This year . . .we are convening – along with the Carnegie Corporation of New York and with presenters AARP and Target – a national bipartisan summit in New York City that will bring together hundreds of leading Americans to plan and lay out a bold blueprint on citizen service. The event will start on Sept. 11 – that solemn anniversary seemed an appropriate time to launch this effort – and the meeting itself will occur the next day, Sept. 12. The summit will also be the first major public event for ServiceNation, a national campaign of more than 100 organizations – ranging from AARP to the National Council of La Raza and Habitat for Humanity. . .

All the partners are keen to make the summit a place for not only dialogue but also action. To that end, ServiceNation is working with Senators Ted Kennedy and Orrin Hatch on legislation designed to expand opportunities for volunteering and national service. ServiceNation will urge the next President and Congress to enact that legislation by Sept. 11, 2009. Two weeks after the summit, ServiceNation will engage tens of thousands of Americans in a national Day of Action to highlight the benefits and goals of citizen service.” (Stengel, Richard. *Time*. July 28, 2008)

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## For Further Information

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