

from Survival in the Storm: The Dust Bowl Diary of Grace Edwards

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BACKGROUND

In the 1930s, severe dust storms blew over drought-stricken areas of the Great Plains region of the United States. A dust storm is a mass of dust and debris that is carried by the strong winds produced by a thunderstorm. Dust storms can develop suddenly and threaten both people and animals. The reduced visibility caused by a dust storm can cause accidents, and inhaled dust can damage health, particularly the health of people who have asthma.

Thursday, March 7, 1935

- 1 A duster hit today.
- 2 The afternoon had been beautifully warm, and Mama had even opened several windows in the house to let in the fresh air. Several ladies from church were over to discuss what could be done to help the community's less fortunate. After arriving home from school, I sat and listened to the conversation; Mama and the ladies seem to know every single family's needs.
- 3 Mrs. Mayfield's daughter Hannah came along with her to the meeting. She is Ruth's age, and they are two peas in a pod. The girls spent the whole afternoon out on the porch with their dolls.

READ TO UNLOCK MEANING

1. First read the text for comprehension and enjoyment. Use the **Reading Strategy** and **Comprehension Check** questions to support your first read.
2. Go back and respond to the Close-Read note.
3. Identify other details in the text you find interesting. Ask your own questions and draw your own conclusions.

stammering (STA muhr rihng) v. speaking hesitantly with starts and stops

shuddered (SHUH duhrd) v. trembled or quivered

frantically (FRAN tihk lee) adv. in a hurried, wild, or desperate way

USE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

What previous experience do you have with events that sent chills down your back or created a deafening roar? How does this background knowledge help you understand what's happening in paragraph 7?

From time to time their laughter floated through the windows, and several ladies commented how nice it is to see carefree little girls like Hannah and Ruth.

- 4 Mama had just risen from her seat to make more coffee for the ladies when Ruth and Hannah burst in the front door, **stammering** about a big dark cloud coming fast. Looks of alarm traveled quickly around the room as the buzzing women grabbed their pocketbooks and rushed out to the porch.
- 5 Sure enough, an enormous cloud of yellowish-brown sand was sweeping toward the hill just beyond our farm. I gasped as the women ran to their automobiles and hurriedly drove away. Mama cried, "Dear Lord, help them make it home before it hits!" I **shuddered**, taking one last look at the cloud of sand—it was barreling ahead like a train, never slowing down.
- 6 Somehow, Ruth was once again absorbed with her doll, and I **frantically** grabbed her and stumbled into the house, shutting the door tightly. I had to urge her to help Mama and me soak sheets in water to hang over the windows and doors. We stuffed towels and rags along the windowsills to catch and filter out as much dirt as possible; without them, it's nearly impossible to breathe.
- 7 While Ruth placed sheets over our beds and pillows, I pushed a towel tightly under the last window, which was facing the wall of the coming storm. It sent chills down my back as I witnessed the mass of churning dust-fog hit the window right before my eyes with a deafening roar.
- 8 Ruth and I ran to the kitchen to join Mama, my hands trembling as the winds whipped against the walls, howling and whistling. There was no telling how long it would last, and as I sat down across the table from Mama, the room grew darker and darker, until finally I had to help Mama light the lamps.
- 9 Even though we had stuffed as many rags and towels against the panes as was possible, the windows still rattled noisily, and I feared any moment they would burst, letting in clouds of choking dust. As it was, there was dirt already seeping in through the cracks, and the room began to fill with foggy darkness. The glow of the lamp grew steadily dimmer, and Mama instructed Ruth and me to cover our noses. I was having trouble breathing even after I placed a damp handkerchief over my nose and mouth. One of these days, I fear our house will outright blow away with the rest of the swirling sand.
- 10 The door suddenly banged open in the wind, and I heard Daddy stumble in. I was so relieved he was safe; even though I knew he was just putting up the livestock, I'd worried he'd lost his way trying to make it to the house. He sat at the table with us to wait out the storm.

- 11 We sat in silence as the gusts of wind pounded our little house. It then became so dark, I couldn't see my hand as I stretched it out in front of my face. I kept drawing it nearer and nearer, but I couldn't see my fingers until they were only inches from my face. I knew that if I tried to talk no one would hear me over the deafening roar of the wind. I shut my stinging, burning eyes and buried my head in my arms—I could barely breathe, my eyes were on fire, and everything tasted and smelled like dust. I felt as if I were all alone.
- 12 I guess I fell asleep, because the next thing I knew, Mama was gently shaking me. I knew right away by the silence that the storm was over. Relief washed over me, like **exhaustion** after running a long, long race. Mama told me it was past 10:00 P.M. She gave me a piece of cornbread that she had wrapped up when the storm first hit, and told me we'll begin cleanup first thing in the morning. Tomorrow will be a day of hard work.

Friday, March 8, 1935

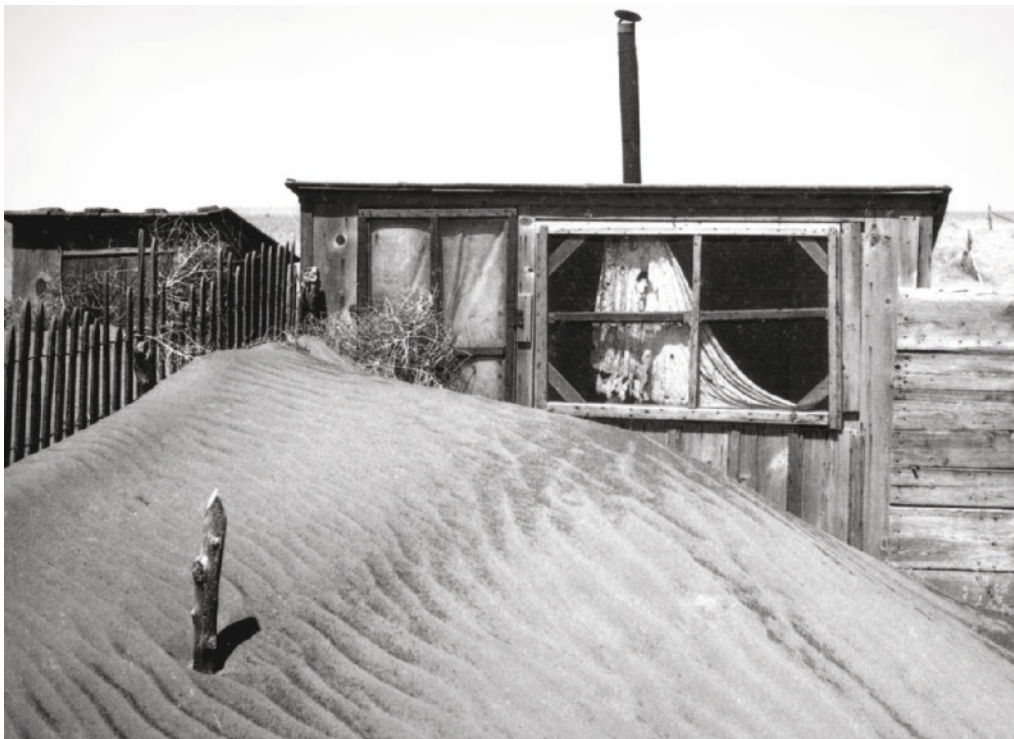
- 13 I ache all over so much; I don't even know exactly what it is that's aching. Mama called us early. I immediately got out of bed and was dressed soon after, but Ruth didn't even want to wake up. I dreaded having to spend a whole day away from school cleaning with Ruth and Mama.
- 14 First we strained the water. So much dirt and grit gets mixed in during a duster; it's impossible to get it all out. We had to pour it through a dishcloth several times to filter out the larger grains of

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE Mark sensory language, or words and phrases related to the five senses, that the author uses in paragraph 11.

QUESTION How does this language contribute to your understanding of the dust storm?

exhaustion (egh ZAWS chuhn) *n.* extreme tiredness or fatigue



COMPREHENSION CHECK

What do the various members of the family do to prepare for the dust storm to hit?

- sand. We then set it aside, allowing most of the remaining dirt to settle to the bottom. By suppertime, it was fit for use. It was still a little cloudy, but at least it tasted more like water than dust.
- 15 Dust covered the floor, and I spent nearly two hours sweeping every last corner, and whisking it out the door. Then Ruth and I proceeded to the front steps, which were completely covered in a huge sand dune. We scooped away, filling our buckets slowly. It didn't really matter where we dumped them, because most of the yard was covered with ripply waves of sand, anyway.
- 16 It seemed as if no matter how hard I worked, it was never satisfactory for Mama. I shoveled and swept the dirt off the porch, using lots of elbow grease. When Mama came to inspect, she said I needed to sweep the porch all over again, to rid it of the still-lingering grime. Sometimes I don't know which is worse: The dust storms or the cleaning.
- 17 Daddy spent a good deal of time unblocking the barn doors—the wind had blown a great mound of dirt right up to the door handles. He reported that his wheat had somehow stayed put in the ground, but he didn't know how. Meanwhile, Mama said the cupboards needed to be scrubbed, the sheets aired, and on and on her list continued. By nightfall, we had just completed the last chore, and we were more than ready for bed. At least with Ruth already asleep beside me, I can write in my diary undisturbed.
- 18 Daddy said if the sandstorms keep coming this bad, we'll have to start going down to the cellar. I think these dusters wear down the people just as much as they wear down the land. 🌪

MEDIA CONNECTION



"The Dust Bowl"

DISCUSS How does the video help you understand the period of American history known as the Dust Bowl in a way that is different from "Black Sunday" and the excerpt from *Survival in the Storm*?

Write your response before sharing your ideas.