**The Dust Bowl - Script**

Hi. Good morning everybody. How are you? Today I want to talk about the Dust Bowl, which happened in the 1930s, in the center of North America. I'm going to do it in ten minutes because it's too big a topic to cover in five minutes. Don't forget, if you click on the link down in the description you can find the script for this, you can find questions and answers. Please try the questions. You can practice your listening skills and your writing skills. Your English will improve if you try that.

OK. Here we go. Ten minutes on the Dust Bowl. Three, two, one, go. OK. I live in Japan, here, right now, and every year we have a problem with sand blowing across from China, from basically the Gobi Desert. Happens once or twice a year. The particles of sand blow across and our things get covered in sand. It only happens a couple of times a year. Why is that relevant? Well, you'll find out in a little bit.

OK. Let's talk about America. We're going to talk about the plains of America. The plains are the central part of Central North America. America is basically bowl shaped. You've got mountains over here, mountains over here, and it's flat in the middle. That flat bit is the plains. It spreads from Canada in the top, down as far as Mexico. Because the plains are in the center of the American continent, the North American continent, they suffer from continentality. What that means is that the center of continents don't have the warming and cooling influences of the sea, so they get much hotter. They have more extremes of temperature. They get very hot in the summer, very cold in the winter. And this area of course has very strong wind. And it's also very susceptible to droughts. Now, this is going to become important in a minute as well.

So, before Europeans went over there, on the plains you had buffalo, you had grass and the native Americans live there, of course. Buffalo are extremely hardy animals. They can survive very hot summer temperatures. They can survive very cold winter temperatures. They're very well adapted for that area. The grass of course, the grass can survive in the heat and the cold, but the grass can also survive through the droughts because their roots go down hundreds of meters into the water table far down below the ground. So, even if it doesn't rain for years at a time, the grass can survive. And, what grass does of course is it holds the land together.

The Native Americans who live there, they hunted the buffalo. They would kill one or two buffalo and they would use all of the buffalo: the bones, the meat, the fat, the hide, everything. They wouldn't waste a single thing. OK. After about 1850, the Europeans start … the Americans start to spread into Central North America. They've colonized California, they live in California and now they’re heading towards the center part. But, of course, the Native Americans live in that part, so they have to get them off the land. And, one way they do that is to hunt the buffalo. Now, the railroad has spread into this area by now, so it's very easy for people to get there, and to transport things. So, they go and they hunt the buffalo. When I say “hunt” I don't mean they killed one or two. In 1870 they kill five million buffalo. Five million! That's almost the entire population of buffalo. By the end of 1880 there are only about five hundred buffalo left. They've recovered a little bit by now, but, in 1880 there were only about five hundred buffalo. So, the Native Americans had nothing to hunt. So, the Native Americans had to move to different parts of the land.

Now, the American government wanted people to live in that part of the land because to control the land you have to have your people living there. So, they sold … well, they basically gave away Native American land. They gave it to these people. So, a lot of Americans uprooted their families and they moved into central North America. They were basically conned to go there. The government told them that they would be able to grow crops, that they would be able to farm and that it would be beautiful and rainy and green and wonderful. Which, of course, was a lie. But, anyway, hundreds of thousands of people move into that area and they start to make cities and communities and they start to farm.

Now, the best thing to farm in that area, they discovered, was wheat. There was a particular type of wheat came across from Russia, which was very hardy. It grew very well in those kinds of conditions. It wasn't hardy enough, as we'll find out soon, but that's what they started to plant. So, they plowed up the grass and they put down wheat. They use horse drawn plows and they plowed up the grass and they put down wheat. And they started to grow wheat. Now, at that time, in Europe, we have World War I happening. And the Russian revolution happens, of course. In 19 … oh, I forget … 16 … 17 … 1918, and what that does of course, once the revolution starts Russia stops producing its wheat. And because of World War I, Europe and Russia stop producing wheat. So, American wheat prices of course go up. Now, what happens when the prices of something go up? More people want to start selling it. You have a bubble develop. So, more people move into these areas, drawn by the rumors, by the reports of high prices of wheat. They go in and they plow more land and plant more wheat. Now, when you have a bubble, people without money they want to get in on the action. They have to borrow money, so banks start appearing to lend people money. People use that money to buy wheat and to buy machines. They start buying tractors and the tractors of course can do in a day what a horse would take weeks to do. So, they start to plow even more land. They rip up more grass. They plant more wheat.

Now, of course, supply and demand, you have a lot of wheat now, the prices are going to start coming down. And once World War I and the Russian Revolution are sorted out European … Russia starts producing wheat again, and American wheat prices go down. Now, if the price of something drops and your entire livelihood depends on that one crop, what can you do? Well, you can quit, which obviously you can't do because you owe money to the bank. Or you can grow more wheat. So, basically, people started doubling the amount of wheat they were growing. They started plowing up even more land to grow more wheat and of course more wheat on the market means the prices start to come down even more and it reaches the point where it costs more to grow the wheat than you can get from selling the wheat. You cannot make a profit and what do people do here? There is nothing they can do. They cannot grow wheat anymore. And the banks of course have lent people money. The banks want their money back, but the people cannot pay the money back because they don't … they're not selling any wheat. They're not making any money. So, the banks start to foreclose on houses. And then the banks themselves start to collapse. Of course, in this time, 1929, you have the Great Depression. The whole American economy starts to collapse. But, in the central part of North America, it's basically caused by the wheat prices. So, banks start to collapse.

At the same time you have a drought. Now, droughts have been happening in that area since time immemorial, but they don't last very long. But this drought starts in about 1929 and it ends up lasting nine or ten years. Nine or ten years with very little rain. So, once the wheat prices have collapsed and you cannot sell wheat you have two choices: you can leave the area (which about three hundred thousand people do, they travel into California, other areas of America, but of course there are no jobs there either), or you can stay, but of course you're staying in drought conditions. There is no food. You cannot grow anything. Anything you grow will die. There is no water, so basically you're living in a desert.

Now, when people leave, they leave their farms, they leave their plowed land. They don't plant wheat anymore. Does the grass grow back? Of course not. They've ripped up the soil to plow it. Does the wheat grow? No, it's too dry. So, what happens? Well, basically, it turns into a desert. You have all these plowed farms that are abandoned and it becomes a desert. As we know with deserts, especially in windy areas, the wind blows up the sand … blows up the top soil and they started to get dust clouds that would be three meters … sorry … three kilometers high. These dust clouds would blow up and because dust creates static electricity it would attract more dust and more dust would attract more dust, and you had these giant clouds of dust that would just fly across cities. They would cover cities in a fog of sand for days at a time. And, because of the static electricity, the whole area was charged. You couldn't shake people's hands because of the static electricity. You couldn't touch metal door knobs. It was a terrible situation.

Now, of course, because the dust is blowing … the sand is blowing … the soil is blowing it starts to drift, and whole farms get covered in sand, and buildings get covered in sand, and of course the sand goes inside houses. You cannot seal a house against dust. You cannot seal it. It goes through cracks in windows, through cracks in wood, and everything in your house gets covered in dust. Your food gets covered in dust, your clothes get covered in dust. If you leave out water it gets covered in dust. And, of course, people breathe it. Now, I talked about Japan where we have these dust clouds come from China once or twice a year. These dust clouds in America were happening every month, every week, sometimes for days at a time. And you breathe the dust. So, most people would have a cough all the time. People would crack ribs because they would cough so much. And young and old, particularly young, they would die of something called Dust Pneumonia. They would have so much dust in their lungs that they would die. And about seven thousand children died of this disease. And the dust was everywhere. Google it. Look at pictures. It's absolutely incomprehensible. And sometimes it would rain. But it would rain dust and water. Sometimes it would snow. But it would snow dust and snow. The dust was absolutely everywhere. It controlled people's lives.

Now, everyone else in America was concerned with the great depression, and things started to recover. They weren't really thinking about Central America … Central North America, but then the dust clouds started to spread. April the 14th 1935, a day known as Black Sunday, the dust cloud spread as far as New York and Chicago. About twelve million tons of dust were dropped on Chicago. Daytime in New York it was dark, and people started to sit up and realize what was happening. And FDR, Roosevelt he came up … well, he didn't come up with it himself … his advisors came up with some ideas to try and help the situation. He planted two million trees from Canada down to Texas as a windbreak because they needed to stop this wind. They sent in food aid. Lots and lots of food aid. They educated the farmers about crop rotation. They imported grasses from Africa. Hardy desert grasses. They imported those and started to plant them. … Ah. Time’s up. Sorry. Almost. Almost finished. I can’t stop my thingy. … They imported these African grasses which were hardy. They tried to plant the grasses to hold the soil together. They educated the farmers.

They tried as hard as they could to fix it. And, gradually, over time, they have slowly repaired the land. A lot of the areas of the Central Plains now are covered in grass. But, many areas are still not fixed. It's seventy, eighty years since then, and we still have dust storms coming around in that area. The dust is still picked up. 1939 the drought finished and people could finally start planting again. But, so many people died. So many people had to move. So many people starved. So many people died of dust pneumonia. All because, in a very short period of time, humans destroyed the ecosystem. Because of greed, because of ignorance, they destroyed the ecosystem. Now, it's very easy for me to say that looking back. Hindsight is twenty-twenty of course. But, we are doing exactly the same thing all over the world. We are destroying the ecosystem because of greed, because of ignorance. In the future is somebody going to be looking back at what we're doing to the world and talking in the same way? Are we going to experience something like the Dust Bowl on a global stage? What's going to happen in the future? There is no way of knowing. But, we have to learn from lessons like that and look at what we're doing to the world and try to repair things before they break. We have to try.

Anyway, thank you. That was very interesting. I hope you understood that. If you have any questions or any topics you'd like me to talk about please put them in the comments section below here. If you click on the link in the description you can find the script for this talk, you can find questions and answers. Have a look at the questions. Try them. You can improve your listening skills and your writing skills. Please try them. If you liked this click LIKE. Share it to your friends. If anybody you know wants to study English send it to them. If you want to subscribe click SUBSCRIBE. Thank you. I'll see you next week. Goodbye.

**The Dust Bowl – Questions**

1. What effect does continentality have on the center of continents?

A: They have especially cold summers.

B: They are warmed by warm winds from the sea.

C: They have very mild weather.

D: They have extremes of temperatures.

2. How can the grass that lived on the plains survive through a drought?

A: They don’t need much water.

B: They have very long roots.

C: There are never droughts.

D: They can catch and hold small amounts of rainfall.

3. Which of these words describes what the Americans did to the buffalo in the 1880s

A: decimated

B: decorate

C: decay

D: decline

4. Why did the Russian revolution affect US wheat prices?

A: Because the Americans had planted Russian wheat seeds.

B: Because Lenin was a big investor in wheat.

C: Because it caused the global supply to drop.

D: Because the quality declined.

5. Which of these is not a consequence of the American wheat price bubble.

A: More people move into the area to plant wheat.

B: Some people start to plant other crops.

C: Banks appear to lend money to famers.

D: Farmers buy machinery such as tractors.

6. How many people left the area when things became too bad?

A: 3,000

B: 30,000

C: 300,000

D: 3,000,000

7. What causes the dust clouds to grow in size?

A: High humidity

B: Magnetism

C: Static electricity

D: The drought

8. What was Dust Pneumonia?

A: Having your lungs full of dust.

B: Being too cold all of the time.

C: Breaking ribs from coughing too much.

D: A very strong virus.

9. What caused the rest of the country to sit up and take notice on April 14th, 1935?

A: The drought got so bad, New Yorkers didn’t have any water.

B: FDR told people to send aid to the middle of North America.

C: The Great Depression was solved, and people had more time.

D: A dust storm so big it reached Chicago and New York.

10. Which of these was not an attempted solution?

A: Educating farmers about crop rotation.

B: Planting trees.

C: They brought back the buffalo.

D: Bringing in African grass.

11. What is Steven’s final point?

A: That we have not learned our lesson from this disaster.

B: That we can solve any problem that confronts us.

C: That our planet will always survive.

D: That droughts always finish if you just wait long enough.

12. Give an example of how we still harm the environment.

13. What was the biggest difference between the way the Native Americans used the land and the New Americans used the land?

14. Two civilizations can not peacefully live side by side with each other. Discuss. Give reasons and examples in your answer.

15. Many environmental disasters are caused by human greed. Discuss. Give reasons and examples in your answer.

16. If you were in this situation, what would you do?

**The Dust Bowl – Answers**

1. D 2. B 3. A 4. C 5. B 6. C 7. C 8. A 9. D 10. C 11. A

12. Give an example of how we still harm the environment.

There are so many examples to chose from. We harm our environment and the planet we live on in increasingly imaginative ways, but I will try to explain the disaster that is the plastic waste floating in the oceans of the world. All countries on Earth, some far more than others, use and discard plastic. Plastic is an extremely useful product and we use it far more in our daily lives than we are probably aware of. Then, once we are finished with it, we toss it in the trash. Some of the plastic is recycled, the majority being sent to China where the recycling is carried out, the rest is either buried, burnt or dumped. If it is buried, it takes 500 to a thousand years for plastic to decompose. If it is burned, the energy released can be used, but there are many chemicals given off. If it is dumped, it usually makes its way to the sea in the end. According to Greenpeace, of the 260 million tons of plastic the world produces every year, 10% ends up the oceans. Ocean currents can cause this plastic to clump together, making a plastic island that is twice the size of Texas. However, the majority of the plastic breaks up into smaller pieces, where it is ingested by sea life. Unless we do something, our oceans will be destroyed in the same way over-plowing destroyed the American plains. Some people have solutions, but the countries of the world need to come together to fix this problem. A worldwide ban on plastic is probably the only way to go. Highly unlikely, though.

13. What was the biggest difference between the way the Native Americans used the land and the New Americans used the land?

The main difference is not limited to the American continent. It can be found when comparing pretty much any aboriginal civilization with modern civilization. The aboriginals only use what they need. And they are thankful for it. If you look at the religions of most aboriginal people, they stem from the worship of Earth and of nature. They pray and give thanks before they cut down a tree. They pray and give thanks before they harvest a crop. They pray and give thanks after the kill an animal. And then, as Steven says, they use all of that animal. Not a single piece is wasted because to waste it would be to disrespect their gods. They worship nature because nature supports us. We have lost that. We respect nature when she shows her strength with a volcano, a hurricane or an earthquake, but generally we just see nature as another resource. Something that puts the coffee in our hands and the ham in the middle of our sandwich.

14. Two civilizations cannot peacefully live side by side with each other. Discuss. Give reasons and examples in your answer.

I believe that two civilizations have the ability to peacefully live side by side with each other, but that was not always the case. Throughout history, stronger groups of people have conquered weaker groups of people. This began with one tribe conquering another tribe and continued until technology allowed some countries to conquer most of the world. We had become an intelligent species, but we were not far enough removed from the animals to learn that survival of the fittest isn’t the only way. As our civilizations have matured, and after two World Wars that decimated the world, we have learned that we can live peacefully with our neighbors. We can work together toward a common interest. There are some countries where this jump hasn’t happened yet, but it will. The trajectory of humankind is to gradually move toward total peace and the quest for knowledge and self-betterment. I truly believe that. It won’t come in my lifetime. It might not even come in my daughter’s lifetime. But it will come.

15. Many environmental disasters are caused by human greed. Discuss. Give reasons and examples in your answer.

I would have to agree, but I think I need to define “greed”. To me, “greed” means wanting more than you need. Humans need a certain amount of things. We need shelter, food, companionship, and so on. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs lists all of the things we need. If we want more than is enough for us to live a comfortable life, then that must be greed. If we look at food, for example, the majority of Americans are becoming supremely obese. The only way you can become obese is to eat more than your body needs. That is “greed”. So, how does that connect to an environmental disaster? The Amazon rainforests are being cut down to make way for cattle grazing land. These cattle end up as steaks or burgers on out plates. Do we need that second hamburger? How much of our beef ends up in the trash? Greed means that far more cattle are reared than are necessary, which means that far more rainforest is cut down than is necessary. And fewer trees means less CO2 is absorbed, along with a host of other problems. Obesity is wrecking the health budgets of developed countries, but it is contributing to climate change as well. Greed is destroying our planet.

16. If you were in this situation, what would you do?

Wow. That is a tough question. It is a lose lose prospect. If you up stakes and move to another state, there is a very small chance that you would be able to find work. You and your family would probably end up living out of a car, if you had one, and possibly even starving. If you stayed, you wouldn’t be able to grow anything, and your whole family would be breathing in the dust. They could starve or drown in dust. Lose lose.

I have a daughter and a wife. We live a comfortable life, so it is difficult to put myself in those poor people’s shoes, but, if I had to, I would probably stay. I tend to be a pretty optimistic person, and I would always think to myself that the end of the drought is just around the next corner. I would continue thinking like that until my wife took my daughter and left me. In fact, the decisions in my house are entirely made by my wife, so what I would do is irrelevant. I would do whatever she told me to do.