



# The Dust Bowl Through the Lens: How Photography Revealed and Helped Remedy a National Disaster

*Martin W. Sandler*

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## **The Dust Bowl Through the Lens: How Photography Revealed and Helped Remedy a National Disaster** Martin W. Sandler

The Dust Bowl was a time of hardship and environmental and economic disaster. More than 100 million acres of land had turned to dust, causing hundreds of thousands of people to seek new homes and opportunities thousands of miles away, while millions more chose to stay and battle nature to save their land.

FDR's army of photographers took to the roads to document this national crisis. Their pictures spoke a thousand words, and a new form of storytelling- photojournalism-was born. With the help of iconic photographs from Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Arthur Rothstein, and many more, Martin Sandler tells the story of a nation as it endured its darkest days and the extraordinary courage and spirit of those who survived.

## **The Dust Bowl Through the Lens: How Photography Revealed and Helped Remedy a National Disaster Details**

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Author : Martin W. Sandler

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## **From Reader Review The Dust Bowl Through the Lens: How Photography Revealed and Helped Remedy a National Disaster for online ebook**

### **Adrienne says**

Martin Sandler provides a photoessay about the Dust Bowl and how the dust storms of the 1930s impacted the farmers who relied on the land for their livelihood. This is an informative book, and the photographs are incredible. However, in one regard the book is disappointing: the subtitle of this book is "How Photography Revealed and Helped Remedy a National Disaster," which would lead readers to believe that there would be a heavy emphasis on photography; however, the book is much less about photography than it is about the Dust Bowl. The information about photographers is sparse, compared with the rest of the text, and almost seems forced in places. Sandler would have done better to write a book about the Dust Bowl and include a page or two about photography. So, while the impact of photography of the Dust Bowl isn't explained as well as it could be, this book is worth reading for the interesting information and stunning photographs.

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### **Rachel Grover says**

An awesome addition to any library's collection of dust bowl resources. I also really appreciated the focus on the impact photographers and photography had on raising awareness of the dire situation and its impact on the people. Highly recommended. Already in MS library.

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### **Stacy says**

Great for high-school background knowledge

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### **Christine Turner says**

The Dust Bowl was a time of hardship and disaster. The worst ecological disaster in our nation's history turned more than 100 million acres of fertile land almost completely to dust. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced to seek new homes and opportunities thousands of miles away, while millions more chose to stay and battle nature to save their land. These terrible repercussions from the Dust Bowl contributed to the Great Depression, which impacted the entire country.

FDR's New Deal army of photographers took to the roads during this national crisis to document the human struggle of the proud people of the plains. Their pictures spoke a thousand words, and a new form a storytelling--photojournalism--was born. These talented cameramen and women used photographs to inform the rest of the nation and bring about much-needed change. With the help of iconic images from Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Arthur Rothstein, and many more, Martin W. Sandler tells the story of this man-made natural disaster and these troubling economic times, ultimately showing how a nation can endure its darkest days through extraordinary courage and human spirit.

Subject: Dust Bowl Era, 1931-1939 -- Juvenile literature.

Farmers -- Great Plains -- History -- 20th century -- Juvenile literature.

Dust Bowl Era, 1931-1939 -- Pictorial works -- Juvenile literature.

Farmers -- Great Plains -- History -- 20th century -- Pictorial works -- Juvenile literature.

Documentary photography -- United States -- History -- 20th century -- Juvenile literature.

Geographic Term:

Great Plains -- History -- 20th century -- Juvenile literature.

Great Plains -- History -- 20th century -- Pictorial works -- Juvenile literature.

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### **Elizabeth says**

Earlier this year I read and reviewed Albert Marrin's Years of Dust, which rekindled an interest in the Dust Bowl that I hadn't felt since I read Out of the Dust as a child. Years of Dust brought the photography of the Dust Bowl to my attention, and captured my interest quite firmly. Goodreads recommended Dust Bowl Through The Lens to me after I read Years of Dust, and I glad I heeded that recommendation.

Part photographic history of the Dust Bowl, part history of photography, Dust Bowl Through The Lens offers up a vast number of photographs, and accompanying information and explanations. This book is appropriate for anyone middle grade and up, regardless of their knowledge of the Dust Bowl. It's appropriate for those with next to no information, as it does a good job of explaining the events, but it also works well as a companion read with other books about the Dust Bowl. Some of the photographs used are truly stunning, and it's not hard to see why they had such an effect on the people of the time.

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### **Jennifer says**

I enjoyed learning more about the Dust Bowl. This book is very informative.

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### **Alicia says**

Beautifully published images, some famous others that should be are explained through the years of the dust bowl and the lens of the photographers. Wonderful facts about a trying time in American history. Well worth recommending!

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### **Vanessa says**

An excellent photo essay about the Dust Bowl from American history professor Martin Sandler. This makes a really good companion piece for readers of The Grapes of Wrath or The Worst Hard Time. It includes a concise, well-written history of agricultural life in the Midwest from the Homestead Act of 1862 through the Dust Bowl through the work of the father of soil conservation, Hugh Hammond Bennett. And each page has unforgettable pictures taken by FSA photographers like Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, John Vachon and Arthur Rothstein. I cannot get the image of the sleepy little girl with the giant pea picking sack out of my

head. This is a short but worthwhile read.

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### **Leah says**

This book is fantastic! A non-fiction account both of the Dust Bowl era and the ways in which photojournalism shaped the nation's response, this book is a rich, multifaceted portrait. I especially liked the multiple versions of Dorothea Lange's famous "Migrant Mother" photograph. The structure of the books lends itself well to hopping around, although it could be read cover-to-cover as well. The full-page photo spreads offer an excellent opportunity for close inspection in order to gain a nuanced understanding of the era. This book made me desperately wish for a class of fourth-graders and some time to teach social studies. It would be well-accompanied by Karen Hesse's "Out of the Dust".

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### **Kaitlynn Meurrens says**

This is a non-fiction book about the dust bowl, a time of disaster in America's history. We are shown actual photographs taken by FDR's New Deal Army of photographers during the crisis. Intern a new form of storytelling was created, photojournalism. The author tells us the story of this disaster and shows the courage and determination of those who lived through it. It shows readers how even through the roughest of times those who find the courage can make it through.

This book appeals to non-fiction readers and those interested in American history. It is intended for ages 9 and older. I would implement this in my upper elementary classroom by making a photography lesson out of it and instructing the children to take a meaningful picture such as the books were meaningful and share it with the class.

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### **Kristina Befort says**

Personal Reaction: I thought this was a very interesting take on an informational book, as it uses photographs to tell the story. A lot of people, even adults, struggle with history because it is difficult to picture. Since the Dust Bowl was pretty recent, there are plenty of photographs of the event. The photos in the book help the reader visualize the event.

#### **Use in the Classroom:**

Curricular Connection: I would definitely connect this book to a social studies lesson. In many schools, but particularly in Kansas, there is a unit over the Dust Bowl since it had such a large impact on the economy. This would be a great book to show to the class to help them visualize the event. It would also provide great supplemental information on the topic.

Independent Reading: This would be a great independent reading book for a fourth, fifth, or sixth grader, as the vocabulary in it is easy enough for them to read on their own, but it still provides a lot of great information. The photographs would also make the book a little more interesting to look at, and would give the students a better idea of the impact of the Dust Bowl.

Nonfiction Conventions: This book discusses a new topic on each page, and has a photograph to go along

with the topic. There is also a caption at the bottom of each page to tell the reader a little more about the photos on the page. There is a famous quote at the top of each page to discuss the importance of photographs in history. Finally, there are sources for photographs, quotes, and information at the back of the book, as well as an index and books and websites in case the reader wants to learn more about this topic. This book would be an excellent example of how to put resources such as these to good use when doing a report or project on a topic such as this one.

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### **Mary Lee says**

I'm probably not a completely unbiased reviewer of this book -- my dad was born in a sod house in Eastern Colorado in the late 1920's. I heard stories of the Depression and the Dust Bowl all my growing up life on the flat, arid, treeless, barren landscape of the photos in this book. (So you can decide how much you want to trust my assessment of this book.)

This book is fabulous on many levels. First of all, it is inviting and accessible. Every double page spread has a short essay with a telling title and quote that functions as a subheading on the left, and a period photo that illustrates the essay on the right. The photos are so compelling that one way to read the book is simply to look at the photos and read the captions.

As much as it is a book about the Dust Bowl, this is a book about the history of the development of photography as an art form...which just happened to take place during the years of and largely because of the Dust Bowl photographers.

This is a book about how art (photography) can be used to document and remedy social inequities.

It is a book not merely about what the Dust Bowl did to the people but also about what it did to the land -- it's a book about the importance of soil conservation and smart farming practices.

This book is a testimony to the strength of the human spirit and the will to survive. And we mustn't forget that the Dust Bowl also gave us The Grapes of Wrath, Woody Guthrie, The Wizard of Oz, and Will Rogers.

History was changed because of the Dust Bowl and because of the Depression, because of the Okies and because of Roosevelt's response to the economic tragedies of the nation at that time, because of photographers like Dorothea Lange and because of the photographs themselves. At the same time, photography evolved from a portrait-making tool, to a tool for social change. A new form of storytelling, photojournalism, was born of the Dust Bowl and the Depression, as were photographic essays. The way we get information and understand the world around us was radically changed during those years.

Like I said, this book is fabulous on many levels. Pick it up and take a look. I'm pretty sure you'll have a hard time putting it down without reading the whole thing.

(cross-posted at A Year of Reading)

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## **Valencia says**

Good book and very informative. Awesome pictures!

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## **Mary says**

I recently watched a five-part documentary, *The 1930s*, from American Experience, and it reignited my interest in The Great Depression, and especially The Dust Bowl. (What little I knew I learned from reading *The Grapes of Wrath* back in high school.) When I checked out *The Dust Bowl Through The Lens*, I didn't realize it was geared towards middle readers, but nonetheless, it was a fascinating little book that provided a cohesive and interesting overview of The Dust Bowl. Each page featured a simple essay and a related photo(s) taken by one of the photographers hired by FDR's New Deal program. The photographs were instrumental in communicating the economic and environmental devastation of The Dust Bowl to the rest of the nation, and eventually helped to promote government aid. I recognized some of these photos, but many more were new to me, and all were powerful images that gave me a better sense of what The Dust Bowl experience really meant. A quick and worthwhile read for anyone wishing to understand the basics of one of America's first disasters.

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## **Claudia says**

Amazing...Amazing that there just so happened to be professional photographers who were willing to go into the Dust Bowl, along HW66, into the migrant camps, and just document. Witness with their cameras. The FSA, Farm Security Administration, hired photographers who wandered the land, took photos, and had to mail their film back without even seeing the images. Dorothea Lange, of course, but others too, including Gordon Parks.

This book compiles the photos, and gives them context. The story of the wheat boom and bust...the drought, the dust storms. But the people are the stars. Mothers, children. Fathers.

Roy Stryker, head of FSA, said, "Dignity versus despair...I believe that dignity wins out." That is exactly what I love about these photos. There is a heroism, a dignity, that cannot be stripped from the people. They find a way to survive...they do what needs to be done.

Photojournalism, through LIFE and LOOK magazine, began in the Dust Bowl. Americans saw images they could not deny. These artists' eye for story helped make these people and their suffering real to others, and made it hard for us to deny.

I loved what Ansel Adams told Stryker: "What you've got are not photographers. They're a bunch of sociologists with cameras. Indeed. And that's what we needed.

This would be an important companion piece to any social studies or English class studying this time...or the literature of this time.

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