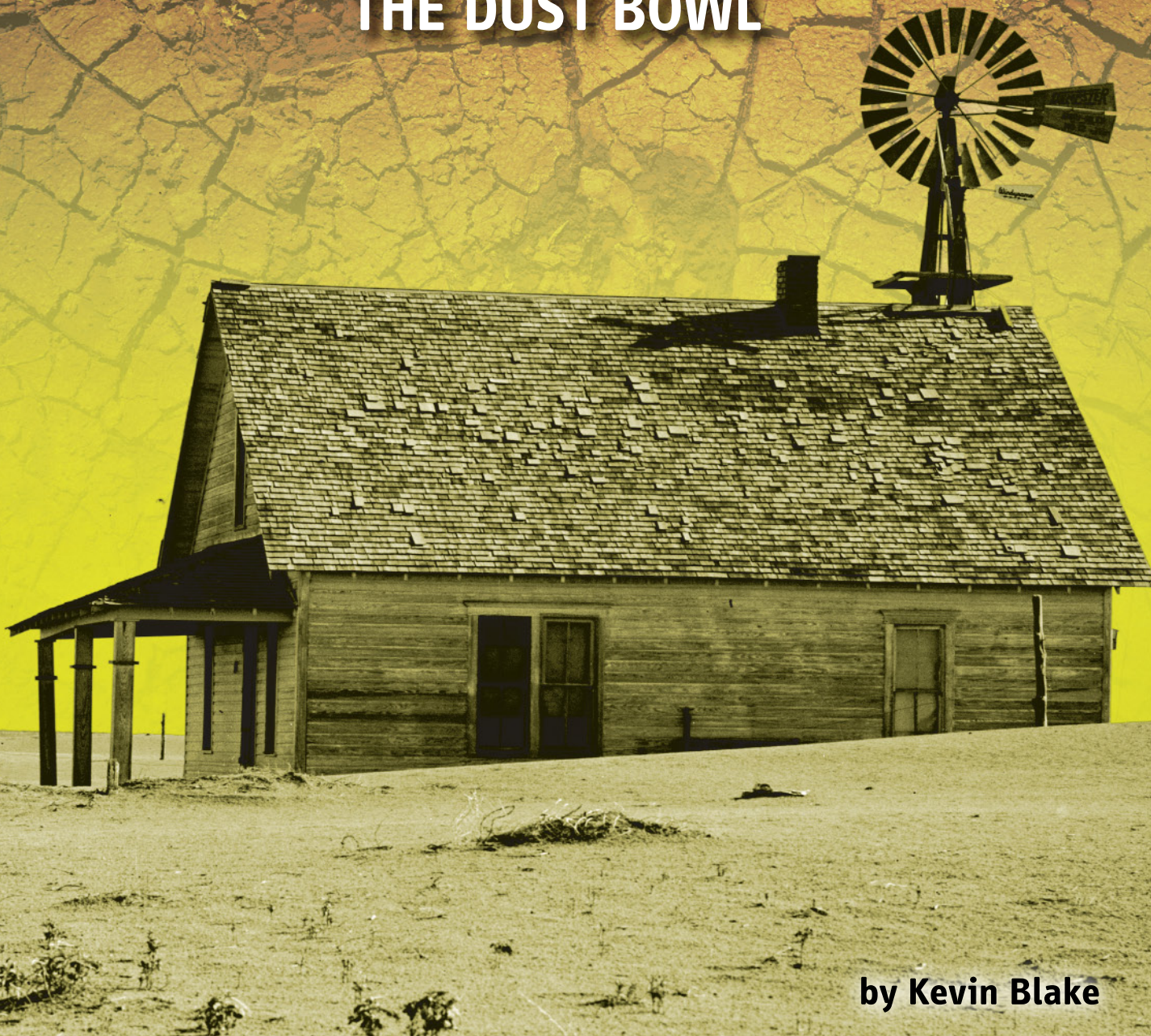




ECO-DISASTERS

SICK SOIL

THE DUST BOWL



by Kevin Blake

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by Kevin Blake

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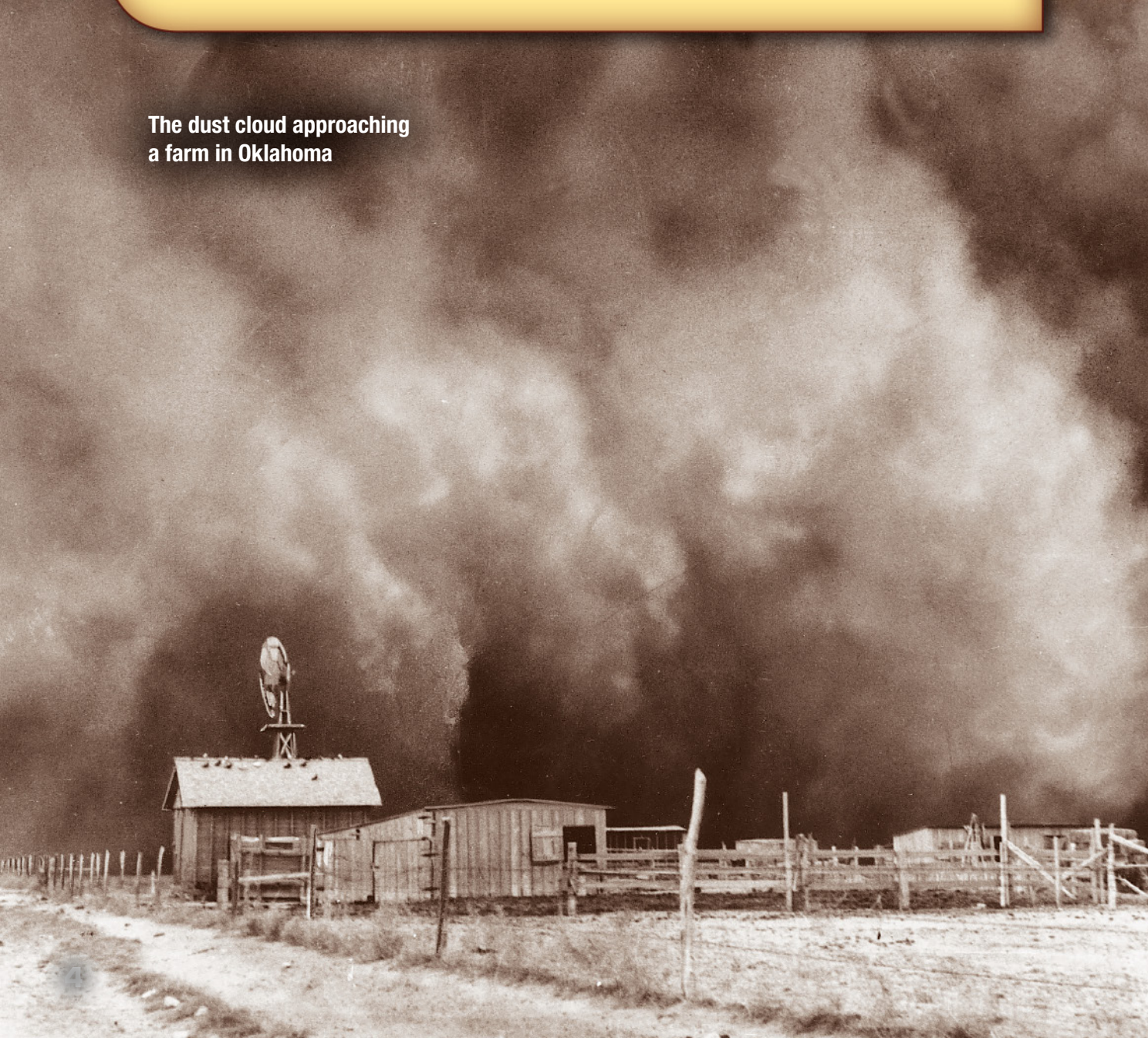
Contents

Complete Darkness.....	4
The Great Plains.....	6
Wheat Boom.....	8
Depression and Drought.....	10
Black Blizzards.....	12
Living in the Dust.....	14
Ailing Animals.....	16
Leaving Home.....	18
California.....	20
Rainmakers.....	22
The New Deal.....	24
A Changed Land.....	26
Fixing the Future.....	28
Glossary.....	30
Bibliography.....	31
Read More.....	31
Learn More Online.....	31
Index.....	32
About the Author.....	32

Complete Darkness

It seemed like a normal day in Boise City, Oklahoma, on April 14, 1935. Then, in an instant, everything changed. The sky turned a deep purple, and the temperature **plummeted**. Birds chirped nervously. Then a **massive** swirling cloud filled with 300,000 tons (272,155 metric tons) of black dust appeared in the distance.

The dust cloud approaching a farm in Oklahoma



When the huge dust cloud hit Boise City, it blocked out the sun. One farmer remembered, "It got so dark that you couldn't see your hand before your face." People ran for their lives. Blinded drivers drove their cars off the side of the road. Terrified cows spun in circles. This terrible day, known as Black Sunday, marked the worst **ecological** disaster the country had ever seen.

A family in Oklahoma runs to escape the blinding storm.



The dust cloud was hundreds of miles wide and thousands of feet high. It also hit Spearman, Texas, 90 miles (145 km) away from Boise City.



The Great Plains

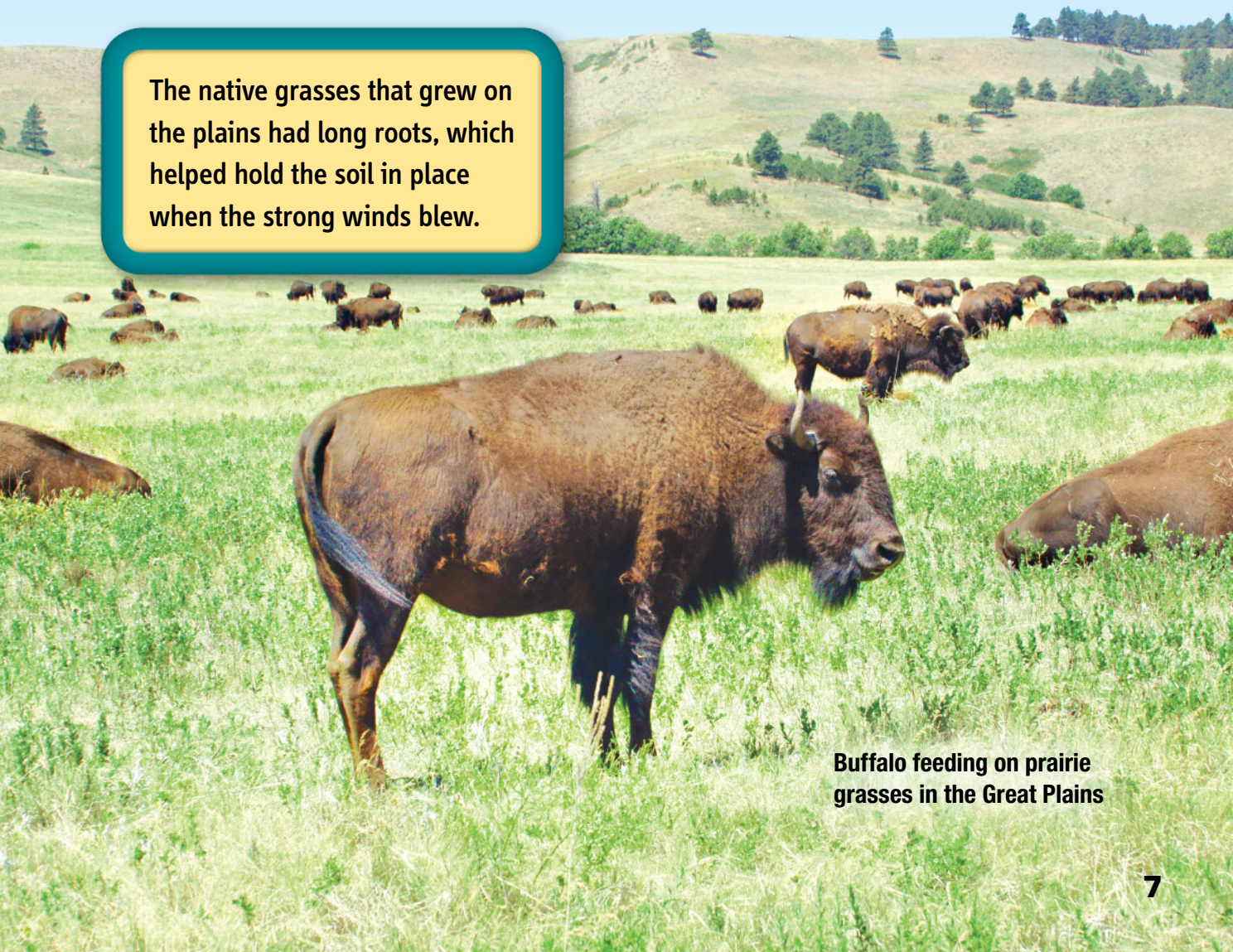
Where had the huge black dust cloud come from and what caused it? The story begins in a place called the Great Plains. In the United States, this vast area of flat, grassy **prairies** stretches all the way from North Dakota to Texas.



The Great Plains includes parts of Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, along with seven other U.S. states.

For thousands of years, the Great Plains was home to millions of buffalo that fed on the **native** grasses. These large animals could withstand the area's icy cold winters and dry, scorching summers. In addition to the extreme temperatures, the Great Plains is known for strong winds that sweep over the prairies. As a result of the harsh **climate**, the land was considered poor for farming, and few people lived there. However, that changed in the late 1800s and early 1900s when settlers started arriving . . . by the thousands.

The native grasses that grew on the plains had long roots, which helped hold the soil in place when the strong winds blew.



Buffalo feeding on prairie grasses in the Great Plains