

TEACHER'S GUIDE  
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MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

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**A Child's View of the Drought**

*Ethel Oleta Wever Belezouli was born in Oklahoma and moved with her family to California when she was a teenager. In this oral history recorded in 1981, Belezouli describes the dust storms she and her family faced while still living in Oklahoma, the difficult growing seasons, and the resourcefulness of her local farming community.*

*Interviewer:* It sounds like your life on the farm was kind of an idyllic life. But what happened when the drought came?

*Ethel Oleta Wever Belezouli:* ...We moved to another place. The house wasn't nearly so nice but it wasn't that bad. . . . I remember the first sandstorm that I had anything to do with. We were walking home. Of course, we walked a lot then. There were cars and we had a car, but people thought nothing of walking. Everybody walked. So we were walking home probably three or four miles and this huge, huge black cloud came. We thought it was going to be a thunderstorm or a rainstorm but it was only dust. And it just blotted out the sun. It was just like night. People had to use their car lights. The town lights went on. It was very, very bad but then there would be a while without any storms. Then we'd have more sandstorms and more sandstorms. Afterwards sand piled up two feet high in front of your door. It went through your windows and everywhere. It just permeated everything. Those were bad.

*Interviewer:* Do you remember your father talking very much about how that affected the crops?

*Belezouli:* Oh yes. The big question was, "Will it rain?" We noticed every little cloud. But it didn't rain. There was quite a long period there that it didn't rain. The farmers would sow their crops. I shouldn't say there was no rain because I remember my dad did grow some broomcorn and cotton. I remember those two crops. It was very exciting for the young girls in the community when the broomcorn johnnies came... They'd go from town to town and farmer to farmer [harvesting broomcorn]. All the women would go and help whoever was having them that day cook the dinner. The young girls would serve and get to meet all the handsome men. That was interesting for me too. I liked that.

*Interviewer:* But as the storms grew worse and the drought grew worse what happened to your financial situation?



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*Belezzuoli*: I rather imagine it was pretty bad.

Source: "Interview with Ethel Oleta Wever Belezzouli," California State College, Bakersfield - *California Odyssey: The 1930s Migration to the South San Joaquin Valley*, pgs. 7-8  
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