**The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same**

The Dust Bowl was one of the worst man-made ecological disasters in American history when a grassland ecology that took thousands of years to develop was overturned in less than fifty. The result was a devastation of the land and economic ruin for thousands of farmers. But the Great Plains recovered, thanks mostly to better farming methods, advancing technology, and a new source of water, the Ogallala Aquifer. But now, it seems, the same mistakes are being made and this once seemingly inexhaustible source for water is rapidly being depleted. In addition, studies show that it is being polluted by water runoff carrying pesticides, fertilizers, and herbicides. The Keystone Pipeline also poses a potential threat of leaking oil seeping into the aquifer the same way surface water replenishes it.

Have students view the last segment in THE DUST BOWL entitled "The Western Gate" Ask them to identify parallels they see between the development of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s and the potential for a similar occurrence if the Ogallala Aquifer were to run dry or be rendered useless.

Divide students into small groups to do further research on the Ogallala Aquifer. Information can be found at High Plains Underground water Conservation District ([www.hpwd.com/aquifers/ogallala-aquifer](http://www.hpwd.com/aquifers/ogallala-aquifer)), North Plains Water District ([www.npwd.org/new\_page\_2.htm](http://www.npwd.org/new_page_2.htm)) and this article from Scientific American magazine ([lanbob.com/lanbob/H-Future/Ogallala.htm](http://lanbob.com/lanbob/H-Future/Ogallala.htm)).

Have students formulate a policy for managing the Ogallala Aquifer. In their report they should provide a geographic profile of the Great Plains (climate, growing seasons, elevation, precipitation, vegetation, etc.); a brief history of farming methods before and during the Dust Bowl – problems and solutions; description of the current conditions and concerns surrounding the Ogallala Aquifer and any parallels they see with farming methods during the 1930s; and recommendations for changes in agricultural practices that would reduce the risk of or prevent potential problems like another Dust Bowl.