What problems did the Homesteaders face?

Building materials

* For the vast majority, the only material available for house-building was earth. Blocks of earth (sods) were cut out by hand or with a special plough. These were used as building bricks to construct the house walls.
* Windows and doors were fitted. The house was roofed with boards, grass and more sods.

Dirt and disease

* Sod houses with earth floors, walls and roofs were very difficult to clean.
* They harboured all sorts of pests – bed bugs, fleas, mice and snakes. Diseases and illnesses were common, especially amongst the children.

Extremes of weather

* The weather was extreme – hot in the summer, cold in the winter, which made life uncomfortable. The Indians had moved with the seasons, but the homesteaders remained rooted on one spot.
* For farming, the drought in the summer and cold winter could damage or destroy crops.

Water shortages

* In many places on the Great Plains water was scarce.
* In such places it was difficult for people to keep themselves or their clothing clean.
* For farming, the shortage of water was a major problem as it could lead to the total failure of crops, which could lead to bankruptcy or starvation.

Ploughing

* The Great Plains had never been farmed before, so the first task was to plough the land – the grasses had dense, tangled roots.
* Ploughing was a long and back-breaking task.

Fuel

There was no wood to burn for heating and cooking on the Plains. Instead, homesteaders had to rely on buffalo dung.



Natural hazards

* In the summer, the grass was so dry that it was possible for fires to start.
* If they were too big for the people to fight then their crops would be destroyed.

Protecting and growing crops

* There was nothing to protect crops from buffalo or straying cattle.
* The homesteaders planted crops they had always grown, which were not suited to the weather conditions on the Plains.