



One day in January 1888, a blizzard raged across the Midwest. The blizzard struck states from North Dakota to Texas. That morning, the weather had been sunny and mild. Suddenly, heavy snow and strong winds developed. They continued all day and night. In just 24 hours, the temperature in some places dropped more than 100 degrees. The snow and wind made it impossible to see more than a few meters. The storm became known as the Schoolhouse Blizzard because of all the children who were trapped in schools when the storm struck.

A blizzard is a severe winter storm with heavy snow and strong winds. A blizzard forms when a cold air mass moves into an area. An air mass is a large area of air that has the same **temperature** and humidity.

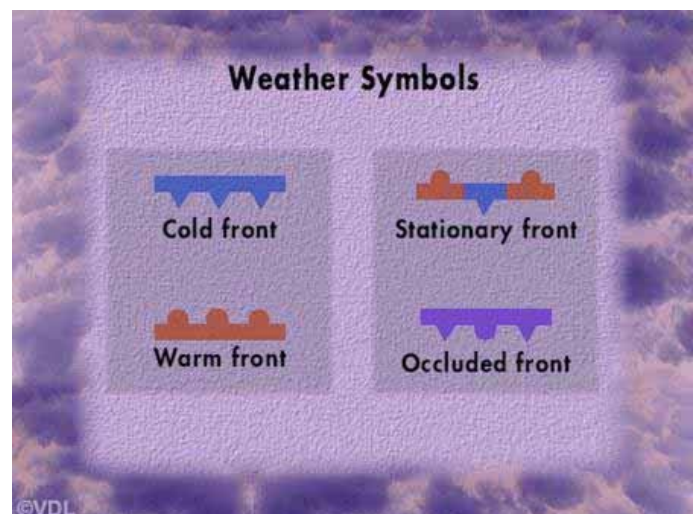
Most of the cold **weather** in the United States is caused by cold air masses. These cold air masses form over northern Canada and the northern areas of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Most of the warm weather in the United States is caused by warm air masses. These warm air masses form over Mexico and the southern areas of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Cold air masses and warm air masses do not mix when they meet. Rather, they form a **front**. A front is the boundary between a cold air mass and a warm air mass. There are four types of fronts.

A *warm front* forms when a warm air mass moves over a cold air mass. The warm air gradually replaces the cold air. Warm fronts usually bring light rains followed by warmer, more humid weather.

A *cold front* forms when a cold air mass moves under a warm air mass. The cold air gradually replaces the warm air. Cold fronts can bring heavy rain or snow followed by clear, cool air.

A *stationary front* forms when a cold air mass and a warm air mass meet. However, neither air mass has enough force to move the other air mass. As a result, neither front moves. They remain stationary. A stationary front usually brings several days of cloudy, wet weather.



These symbols are used to show the different types of air fronts on a weather map.

An *occluded front* forms when a warm air mass is caught between two cold air masses. The two cold air masses slowly push up the warm air mass. An occluded front usually brings large amounts of rain and snow.

The Schoolhouse Blizzard was caused by a cold front that quickly moved down the middle of the country from Canada. This cold front quickly pushed up the warm air mass that had covered the area. This warm air mass had come up from the Gulf of Mexico and contained a large amount of moisture. That day, the weather conditions were perfect for a blizzard.