



Curriculum Guide

"This Great Nation Will Endure": Photographs of the Great Depression

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum



Dorothea Lange, September 1939.

"This Great Nation Will Endure": Photographs of the Great Depression

Related Documents
Vocabulary



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"This Great Nation Will Endure": Photographs of the Great Depression Vocabulary

Arkies—Migrant workers from Arkansas displaced by crop failures and dust storms.

Black Tuesday—Tuesday, October 29, 1929. The New York Stock Market crashed. Generally referred to as the event which marked the beginning of the Great Depression, more accurately, it was only the first major visible sign of the Depression.

Ditchback Camps— Slang term for shanty-town buildings located in the fields near irrigation ditches. These small unsanitary shacks were generally located in the back of the camps.

Drought—A long period without precipitation.

Dust Bowl—Term used to describe much of the south western Great Plains in the 1930's, which experienced frequent dust storms and loss of agricultural income.

Dust Storm—Huge clouds of dirt caused by a combination of drought, high winds, and poor conservation practices. A dust storm could last up to three days, and cover large areas.

Evict—To remove people from someplace against their will; usually land or a building such as a home.

The Grapes of Wrath—The John Steinbeck novel about an Oklahoma farm family that moved west to California and became migrant workers.

Great Depression—(1929-1941) Period of economic downturn during which wages decreased dramatically and nearly 25% of the US labor force was unemployed; the Great Depression had worldwide effects.

Greenbelt Towns—An experimental federal housing program consisting of a planned town surrounded by agricultural land. There were Greenbelt towns constructed by the Resettlement Administration in Maryland, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

Jim Crow Laws—Laws passed in the South after the Civil War that segregated or separated people by race in public places.

Jobs Programs—Unemployed people are given work by the federal government building roads and bridges, planting trees and even painting murals and writing guide books.

Migrant Worker—A person, generally an agricultural laborer, who moves from place to place in search of work.



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My Day—The series of daily newspaper columns written by Eleanor Roosevelt beginning in 1936 and continuing until just before her death 1962. These articles chronicled her many interests and activities.

Okies—Migrant workers from Oklahoma displaced by crop failures and dust storms.

Propaganda—Information designed to promote or refute a particular cause or idea.

(Anna) Eleanor Roosevelt (1886-1962) —Wife of Franklin D. Roosevelt, she served as First Lady of the United States from 1933 to 1945 and was known as a reformer and humanitarian intent on advancing social justice, human rights, freedom and liberty. She was called “The First Lady of the World” by President Harry Truman and served on the first United States delegation to the United Nations, where she helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945) —As the Thirty-second President of the United States, Roosevelt was elected four times and led the country through the two major crises of the 20th century, the Great Depression and World War II. Roosevelt believed that the government should take an active role in ensuring the economic well-being of the average citizen and brought relief, recovery and reform through his many New Deal programs. During World War II Roosevelt along with the leaders of England and the Soviet Union, crushed Hitler and the Axis powers.

Rural—Having to do with farming, a way of life outside the city.

Urban—Having to do with life in an industrialized, city environment.

Sharecroppers— Farmers who work land owned by someone else in return for a portion (share) of the crops grown. This practice gained popularity in the South following the Civil War and was common during the Great Depression.

Socialistic—A system of government or community control of land, capital, and industry.

Tenant Farmer—A person who rents land from a landowner for the purposes of growing crops or raising livestock.

Tenement—A low rent apartment building that generally includes very few amenities and is usually characterized by overcrowded conditions.



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"This Great Nation Will Endure": Photographs of the Great Depression **Government Agencies, Organizations and/or Programs**

Farm Security Administration (FSA) — Tasked with improving conditions for the rural poor. This goal was advanced by photographing the severe conditions faced by American farmers during the Great Depression, and the government's efforts to bring relief.

Federal Arts Project (FAP) — The FAP was a part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which provided work for unemployed artists, actors, musicians and writers.

Library of Congress—This is the oldest federal cultural institution in America and the largest library in the world. It serves as the research arm of the Congress and has countless collections housed on more than 530 miles of bookshelves. The FSA photos are kept in the Library of Congress.

New Deal—The term given to the collection of more than forty federal government programs created by Franklin D. Roosevelt to help America out of the Great Depression and through World War II. Examples include the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), Social Security, and the Farm Security Administration (FSA).

Office of War Information (OWI) — This agency was set up to educate people on the major issues of World War II and the importance of American involvement in postwar issues.

Resettlement Administration (RA) —This agency was formed to improve land-use practices and help those affected by land misuse such as exploitative farming, lumbering, mining, and oil drilling. It also constructed camps for migrant workers and resettled farmers to more productive land.

Geographic Regions

Northeast—A region of the United States generally considered to include New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine.

South—A region of the United States generally considered to include Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas.

Midwest—A region of the United States generally considered to include Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota.



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Great Plains—A region of the United States generally considered to include North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma.

Southwest—A region of the United States generally considered to include Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada.

Rockies—A region of the United States generally considered to include Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah.

Pacific (Northwest)—A region of the United States generally considered to include Oregon, Washington.

California—The western most state in the continental United States. It comprises nearly two-thirds of the west coast.



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Teaching Activities and Assignments

The following activities have been developed for teachers to use in the classroom or as homework assignments. They are grouped under the following topics: history; civics, citizenship, and government; writing; geography; fine arts; and hands-on-learning. Each assignment has been designed in a way that allows students to utilize a variety of skills including: reading for understanding; interpreting audiovisual materials; analyzing photographs, letters, reports, correspondence, and speeches; writing with clarity; role-playing; and researching historic evidence. Each of the activities can be adapted to suit your students' needs and your own teaching style.

The educational impact of these activities will be greatly enhanced by a class visit to the Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum to view the FSA exhibit in person. We encourage you to contact our education department at 1 800 FDR-VISIT (prompt 4 for Education Department) to discuss fieldtrip arrangements.

History

- 1) **Photographs used as historical evidence:** Use the photographs provided as the basis for a discussion on the use of photography as historical evidence. When doing so have your students consider the following questions:
 - a. What is happening in the photograph?
 - b. What are the specific details that provide clues to what is happening?
 - c. Are there any details that suggest a date or a time of the event?
 - d. Are there any details that suggest the event is happening in a particular place?
 - e. What is your general impression of the photograph?
 - f. What general conclusions can be drawn from the photograph?
 - g. What do you think prompted the photographer to take this particular picture?
 - h. What might an appropriate caption be for this photograph?
 - i. What biases or assumptions surround the photograph?

- 2) **The importance of keeping and maintaining historic records:** Describe the importance of keeping and maintaining historic records. Remind students that historical evidence can come in the form of photographic images, written and printed documents, three dimensional objects and artifacts, sound recordings, and oral histories. Have students read letters and diaries, examine period objects and artifacts from the Great Depression, and discuss how they contribute to our understanding of the era.



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Fine Arts

- 3) **Photographs used for observation:** Use the photographs provided to engage students in photographic observation. Encourage them to discover and observe such elements as: composition, balance, rhythm, focal point, perspective, cropping, lighting, modes of transportation, style and condition of clothing, architectural styles and features, geographic and topographic features, fixtures and furnishings, and technology. Ask students to consider the possible points of view and motivations of the photographer. Ask students to compare each of these elements to conditions today.
- 4) **Art imitates life.** Have students read John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, or arrange for them to view the classic film version of the book. How do the images conjured up in their minds, or presented on the screen, compare to those taken by the photographers of the FSA? What are the sub-themes that run throughout the book, film, and FSA images?

Civics, Citizenship, and Government

- 5) **Documenting government efforts:** Explain that the photography project was begun by the Farm Security Administration to document rural poverty and the government efforts to alleviate it. Lead a discussion of the use and effectiveness of images in conveying a story and influencing public perception. Share and discuss how more modern examples, such as President Bush flying on to an aircraft carrier anchored just off the coast of California or the 1988 image of Michael Dukakis driving around in a tank have influenced public opinion.
- 6) **Photographs then and now:** Ask students to select one of the photographs provided in this packet and find a contemporary photograph from a current newspaper or magazine that shows a similar situation or a totally contrary situation. Then have them explain the similarities or differences. Ask them to research if there is a government agency or program designed to address the situation and have them assess the success or failure of the program.
- 7) **A President speaks to the nation:** Have students listen to a copy of President Roosevelt's March 4, 1933 Inaugural Address in which he proclaims, "This great nation will endure." Ask the students to juxtapose the upbeat, confident and, enthusiastic tones and phrases of the President's speech with the conditions facing the subjects featured in the FSA photographs.



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Writing and Journalism

- 8) **In their own words:** Ask students to select a photograph and complete one of the following writing assignments:
 - a. A diary entry that describes in detail a typical day in their life of one of the people shown.
 - b. A diary entry that describes in detail the hopes and fears of one of the people shown.
 - c. A letter to a friend written from the perspective of one of the people shown in the picture, which describes in detail his or her feelings about the FSA photography project.

- 9) **A picture is worth a thousand words:** Ask students to select the ten most moving or meaningful photos in the exhibit or the packet provided. Have them write a brief statement about each photograph that explains why they think it important and meaningful. Ask them to write a caption that captures the essence of the image as they see it.

- 10) **FSA cub reporter:** Assign students one of the photographs included in this packet. Have them imagine that they are newspaper or magazine writers, and ask them to write an article that would accompany the photograph if it were to appear in print. Remind them that they must completely and carefully answer the who, what, when, where, and how questions that are the basis of good journalism. Have them prepare a catchy headline for the article and an appropriate caption for the photograph.

Geography

- 11) **From sea to shining sea:** Copy the map provided in this packet and ask students to outline the following geographic areas: the Northeast, the South, the South West, the Great Plains, Midwest and California. Have them identify where the "Oakies" and "Arkies" originated and where they were going. Ask them to circle the area considered to be the Dust Bowl.



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Hands-on Learning

- 12) **Jr. FSA agent:** Provide your students with inexpensive disposable cameras and a 'shoot script' similar to the one provided to the Farm Security Administration photographers. Allow them time to photograph people and places in their communities and then collect the pictures and organize them into a photo exhibit that mirrors the *'This Great Nation Will Endure'* exhibit at the Roosevelt

Presidential Library and Museum. Display the exhibit in your classroom or a public space in your community.

- 13) **Living history:** Have students review the brief biographies of the FSA photographers and select one that they will role-play in a presentation before the rest of the class. Ask each student to select one representative photograph from among those taken by his or her preferred photographer to present and interpret for the class. Encourage the other students to study the photographs and to ask questions that probe the photographer's background and possible biases.

- 14) **Can we talk?** Provide students with the following copy of Carl Mydan's 1964 quote:

"[I] don't think that the quality of the Farm Security Administration's pictures was notably great. I think what they portrayed was notably great. . . They were great pictures then and they are now, many of them because they told the universal story of people . . . of all qualities that we find in ourselves and in each other."

Then have the students prepare a list of interview questions they can use to prepare their own 'oral histories' of individuals in their community who experienced the Great Depression firsthand.