

**Summer 2009 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly
Learning Activity – Elementary Level**

Voices from the Dust Bowl: Connecting the Past to the Present Activity



Lange, Dorothea. "Oklahoma dust bowl refugees. San Fernando, California." June 1935. From Library of Congress, America from the Great Depression to World War II: Photographs from FSA-OWI, 1935-1945.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b27316>

OVERVIEW

Overview

In this activity, students personally connect to the Dust Bowl Migration through song lyrics of the time. Intended for use as an activity within a larger unit of study about the Great Depression, students analyze the lyrics of migrant worker songs to learn more about this period. Using these primary sources, students identify various aspects of migratory life as starting points for research. Lastly, students creatively express their discoveries about the lives of Dust Bowl migrants by writing poems, song lyrics or stories.

Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- Describe one or more aspects of the lives of individuals forced to migrate from the Dust Bowl
- Analyze song lyrics written by Dust Bowl migrants for information about their lives
- Research a topic relating to the Dust Bowl Migration, referenced in song lyrics
- Write a poem, song lyrics or story to creatively express new understandings about the Dust Bowl Migration from a first-person perspective, drawing from primary and secondary sources

Time Required

Two class periods

Recommended Grade Range

5-6

Topic/s

Culture, Folklife

Subject

Social Studies, Language Arts (Writing and Reading)

Standards

McREL 4th Edition Standards & Benchmarks

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

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OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

United States History

Standard 23. Understands the causes of the Great Depression and how it affected American Society

Language Arts: Writing

Standard 1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Language Arts: Reading

Standard 5. Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process

Credits

Activity adapted from “The Great Depression,” a unit plan created by Gared Chrismer and Amy Thornton, Waynesburg University School of Education students, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania

PREPARATION

Materials

Have these materials ready before the activity.

Bryant, Jack. "Arizona." 1940.

- Prepare to play the sound recording of this song for the class

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/toddbib:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(4148a1\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/toddbib:@field(DOCID+@lit(4148a1)))

- One copy of the song lyrics for each student

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/dust-bowl-migration/pdf/arizona.pdf>

Primary Source Analysis Tool and Teacher’s Guide: Analyzing Sound Recordings

- Primary Source Analysis Tool: Prepare to display and distribute one copy per student

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf

- Teacher’s Guide: Analyzing Sound Recordings: One copy for use in guiding discussion of the sound recording, “Arizona”

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Sound_Recordings.pdf

Hunter, Lester. “I’d Rather Not be on Relief.” 1938.

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/toddbib:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(st045\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/toddbib:@field(DOCID+@lit(st045)))

- One copy of the song lyrics for each student, using the pdf version below:

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/dust-bowl-migration/pdf/relief.pdf>

(Optional) Internet-ready computer for each student or pair of students

- Set up access to do online research. Bookmark links to resources appropriate for student use, which may include some of those listed in the “Resources” section that follows.

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PREPARATION (CONT'D)

Resources

Before guiding students through the activity, teachers can familiarize themselves with the background of the Dust Bowl Migration and the Great Depression by reviewing the following Library of Congress Web site resources:

Dust Bowl Migration Primary Source Set: Teacher's Guide

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/dust-bowl-migration/>

Teachers Page: Themed Resources: The Great Depression

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/dust-bowl-migration/pdf/overview.pdf>

Voices from the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afctshhtml/tshome.html>

Additional external resources relating to the Dust Bowl Migration include:

The American Experience: Surviving the Dust Bowl. PBS Online by WGBH, 1998.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dustbowl>

Dust Bowl Migration Digital Archives. California State University Bakersfield Library, 2008.

<http://www.csub.edu/library/special/dustbowl/dustbowl.shtml>

PROCEDURE

1. Play the sound recording, "**Arizona**," instructing students to listen carefully.
[*Note: You may want to ask students to close their eyes while listening.*]
 - Display the **Primary Source Analysis Tool** and complete it together as a class.
 - Use the **Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Sound Recordings** to facilitate discussion about the meaning and context of the song.
2. Pass out copies of the song lyrics to "**Arizona**." Instruct students to follow along with the written lyrics and underline any unfamiliar words or phrases as they listen to the recording again. Replay the recording as needed.
 - Return to the **Primary Source Analysis Tool** and record any new observations, reflections or questions that have emerged. Leave the completed form on display.
3. Encourage students to share what they know about the Dust Bowl Migration, as well as any hypotheses or preconceptions they may have about the lives of Dust Bowl migrants. Continue to add to the displayed **Primary Source Analysis Tool**. Possible discussion questions include:
 - What was the Dust Bowl? What human actions and environmental factors created it?
 - Where did these dust storms occur?
 - How do you think this disaster affected the people who lived in those areas?
 - What help did the government offer?
 - What difficult choices did many of these people have to make?

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PROCEDURE (CONT'D)

- Where did many Dust Bowl migrants head when they left their homes? Why?
 - What do you think these migrants experienced as they traveled? Upon arrival?
4. Explain that students will work in pairs to analyze the lyrics to another song written by a different Dust Bowl migrant. Each pair will analyze one stanza using the **Primary Source Analysis Tool**, and then share their findings with the class. [*Note: Students with higher-level reading skills may be assigned multiple sections or the entire song; the same section may be assigned to multiple pairs of students.*]
 5. Assign students to work in pairs and pass out copies of the song lyrics to, **“I’d Rather Not be on Relief,”** along with copies of the **Primary Source Analysis Tool**. Ask for volunteers to read aloud the song lyrics to the class as everyone follows along with the text. Assist students as needed during the analysis process.
 6. When all students are ready, discuss their analysis findings together as a class. As pairs report out, complete a master **Primary Source Analysis Tool** for the **“I’d Rather Not be on Relief”** song lyrics. Compare this completed form to the other one the class completed for **“Arizona.”**
 - What do these song lyrics tell us about the lives of Dust Bowl migrants?
 - What questions do we need to investigate further to better understand their perspective?
 7. Together as a class, identify topics, themes or questions about the lives of migrants and others during the Great Depression that emerged from analyzing the lyrics of the two songs. Ask students to individually (or in pairs) choose one area of research they find most interesting. For example, possible research topics inspired by song lyrics may include:
 - living conditions of the migrants (“lean-tos”), Works Progress Administration (“the W.P.A.”), labor organizations (“C.I.O.”), unemployment benefits (“rolls of relief”), farming during the Great Depression (“if the farmer could raise the pay”)
 8. Help students access primary and secondary sources from the Library of Congress Web site and other online resources. Instruct them to take notes as they research their selected topics. [*Note: This research process may be informal or structured, depending on time and students’ ability levels. Research may also be conducted offline with select printed materials.*]
 9. Assign students to write (possibly as homework) an original poem, song lyrics or story about their chosen topic. All students must follow these guidelines:
 - Write from the perspective of a Dust Bowl migrant or another person who lived during the Great Depression about the topic you selected.
 - Incorporate factual information from your research into this writing project to help your peers (who will listen to or read your finished work) learn about this time period.

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ACTIVITY EXTENSIONS

--Students could perform their creative writing works for the class and/or display these works in an exhibit for others to read.

--Students could write a one-to-two page reflection on their learning process, including personal responses to specific questions. Possible questions include:

- Why did you choose your topic?
- What did you hope to communicate about this topic to peers through your writing?
- Where did you find the primary and secondary sources you incorporated into your work?
- What surprised you the most about the lives of Dust Bowl migrants or other Americans who lived during the Great Depression?

EVALUATION

- Active, thoughtful participation in class discussions
- Thorough completion of **Primary Source Analysis Tool**
- Active engagement in researching a chosen topic, evidenced by research notes
- Satisfactory completion of the writing assignment, assessed on their use of primary and secondary source information, creativity and grammar/spelling