

America's Economy: Sorrow and Hope

Grade Level: 6–8

Curriculum Focus: U.S. History

Lesson Duration: Two to three class periods

Objectives

- Review causes and consequences of the Great Depression.
- Discuss how FDR's New Deal and World War II affected the nation's economy.
- Write two fictional journal entries describing a time of sorrow and a time of hope at any point from the 1920s to 1940s.

Materials

- *America's Economy: Sorrow and Hope* program
- paper and pens or pencils

Procedures

1. After watching *America's Economy: Sorrow and Hope*, review some of the causes of the Great Depression. (Speculation and the stock market crash of 1929; banks closed and people lost their savings; overproduction caused prices and wages to drop; factories closed and people lost jobs.)
2. Discuss how the Great Depression affected the nation. Ask students: How did their lives of the people shown in the program change during the Depression? In what ways were people in urban and rural areas affected differently? As a discussion aid, you may want to name some of the people featured in the program or write their names on the chalkboard:
 - Jewell Blankenship, Oklahoma
 - Jim Wolford, Arkansas
 - Endicott "Chub" Peabody II, Massachusetts
 - Dave Moore, Michigan
 - Joe Mifsud, Michigan
 - Dick Manoff, New York
3. Review President Roosevelt's "New Deal." Ask students: What was it? What did it provide the nation? How did the program affect the nation's economy?
4. Tell students that another event that greatly affected the U.S. economy was World War II. (You may want to remind the class that the U.S. joined the war after Pearl Harbor was attacked in

December 1941.) Ask students to consider the people in the video. How did the war change the lives of those who served in the military? The lives of those who stayed at home?

5. Ask students to consider the program's title, *America's Economy: Sorrow and Hope*. What events caused sorrow for the people in the program? What events inspired hope?
6. Explain that students will write two fictional journal entries, taking the point of view of an American living during the period shown in the program, the 1920s to 1940s. One entry should describe a time of sorrow, the other a time of hope. Encourage students to consider the stories of the real people featured in the program, but remind them that they need to create a fictional person when writing their journal entries. Each entry should include the following:
 - Date and place
 - Identity of the person they are posing as (name, age, role – sharecropper, auto factory worker, immigrant child living in tenement)
 - A description of a sorrowful or hopeful situation or event (leaving farm for California, joining a union, standing in a bread line)
 - Personal thoughts or feelings about the time
7. Ask for volunteers to read their journal entries. After hearing several entries, read the following quote from the program to the class:

“Life is not a clean, upward thrust, and the American dream is not a straight ladder up. Kind of a corkscrew spiral and ups and downs. There’s no place in the world that has had such a profile to its history.” – Dick Manoff
8. Discuss how the lives of the Americans featured in the program reflect this quote. Ask students: What were some of the ups and downs they experienced? How did these events reflect life in our nation during this period?

Evaluation

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were active in class discussions; showed a strong understanding of the causes and consequences of the Great Depression and the effects of the New Deal and World War II on the nation's economy; developed thorough, engaging journal entries that reflected the hope and sorrow Americans felt during this period in history.
- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; showed a satisfactory understanding of the causes and consequences of the Great Depression and the effects of the New Deal and World War II on the nation's economy; developed clear, complete journal entries that reflected the hope and sorrow Americans felt during this period in history.
- 1 point: Students did not participate in class discussions; showed a weak understanding of the causes and consequences of the Great Depression and the effects of the New Deal and World War II on the nation's economy; developed vague or incomplete journal entries about the hope and sorrow Americans felt during this period in history.

Vocabulary

Dust Bowl

Definition: A large region covering the southern Great Plains of the United States that suffered drought, crop failures, and intense dust storms in the 1930s

Context: *The Grapes of Wrath* has become a classic account of the human toll of the Dust Bowl.

Great Depression

Definition: A period of worldwide economic downturn that began in 1929 and extended into the early 1940s, characterized by unemployment, poverty, hunger, and despair

Context: At the height of the Great Depression, about 13 million people were out of work – about one out of every four workers in the country.

immigrant

Definition: A person who comes to a country to live there

Context: African Americans, Mexican immigrants, and women were also hard hit by the Depression.

migrant

Definition: A person who moves regularly to find work, especially one who harvests crops

Context: Homeless and jobless, many migrants were left to fend for themselves, living in tents or cardboard shacks without water or electricity.

New Deal

Definition: A series of federal programs introduced by Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s to encourage economic reform

Context: FDR's New Deal aimed at rebuilding the economy, helping the jobless, and preventing future depressions.

sharecropper

Definition: A tenant farmer who is provided with credit for seed, tools, living quarters, and food, who works the land, and who receives an agreed share of the crop's value minus expenses

Context: Four generations had worked the land as sharecroppers.

speculation

Definition: Engaging in a big financial risk in hopes of making a big profit

Context: The Great Depression was caused by overproduction and speculation.

union

Definition: An organization of workers formed to protect its members' rights and to advance their interests, such as wages and working conditions

Context: The United Auto Workers was the strongest union in America.

Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

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

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- U.S. History: Era 7 – Understands how the United States changed between the post-World War I years and the eve of the Great Depression
- U.S. History: Era 8 – Understands the causes of the Great Depression and how it affected American society; Understands how the New Deal addressed the Great Depression, transformed American federalism, and initiated the welfare state
- Geography: Human Systems – Understands the nature, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environments
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Credits

NOTE: We've decided to drop the Credits section.