



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

Curriculum Guide Objectives
What Does it Mean to Think Historically?
How are Historical Records Helpful in Teaching?



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Curriculum Guide Objectives

The purpose of this curriculum guide is to provide material aimed at meeting two goals. The first is to help students gain an understanding of the difficult living conditions faced by Americans during the Great Depression, and the government's effort to document the problems. The second is to familiarize students with the use of primary sources, and to train them in using document-based historical research techniques. Interpreting historical documents and photographs helps students gain a better understanding of history as the rich tapestry that it is, rather than a series of loosely connected facts, dates, and events. It also helps them to develop and refine their critical thinking skills.

Students will learn that a primary source is a record created by someone who participated in, or who had first-hand knowledge of an event. Examples of primary sources include letters, reports, diary entries, maps, drawings, newspaper and magazine articles, sound recordings, films and videos, artifacts, and photographs. The exhibition entitled *"This Great Nation Will Endure": Photographs of the Great Depression* at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum uses photographs as primary sources presenting documentary evidence of the hardships of life during the Great Depression.

General Objectives: Document Based Questions

When students have successfully completed the exercises included in this packet they should be able to examine a primary source and

- identify factual information;
- identify points of view;
- gather, arrange and evaluate information;
- compare and contrast information;
- draw conclusions;
- prepare, present and defend arguments.

Specific Objectives: The Great Depression

Students should also be able to

- identify specific challenges faced by people during the Great Depression;
- describe the living conditions endured by people during the Great Depression;
- empathize with people facing major economic difficulties;
- explain the attitudes and values of people living under duress;
- compare and contrast conditions in the various regions of the United States.



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What Does It Mean to Think Historically?

In order to really understand history, students need to *think historically*. They have to be taught the mental skills needed to not just ingest and regurgitate “facts,” but to *examine, evaluate, and understand* history. Thinking historically requires a complex set of skills similar to those used by a detective trying to solve a mystery.

These skills include:

- **Finding Evidence:** The first step to understanding history is to know where to find the photographs, documents, and artifacts that tell the story of the time, place, people, and events under examination.
- **Classifying and Categorizing:** Organizing bits of information from both primary and secondary sources in a manner that reveals a broader story is an important skill.
- **Checking and Cross Checking:** Information must be checked and then rechecked in order to build a contextual understanding. This is called corroboration. Special attention must be paid to make sure that information is both valid and reliable.
- **Identifying Sub-Texts:** Are there political, social, economic, cultural or other sub-texts at play?
- **Constructing a Viable Interpretation of Events:** What “story” does the information seem to tell? Is this a plausible account of what may have happened?
- **Filling in the Blanks:** Sometimes historians must fill in the gaps when specific evidence does not exist. Great care must be taken to do so in a way that does not introduce excessive bias or contemporary beliefs and attitudes. Historic events must be viewed within the context and attitudes of their own time. However, no matter how pure the intentions, interpretation is always tainted by the assumptions and prejudices of the interpreter.
- **Promoting and Arguing your Point:** Once a plausible story has developed, it needs to be told so that it can be examined and scrutinized by outside, objective sources



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How are Historical Records Helpful in Teaching?

Historical records are useful to teachers in a variety of ways. They help students learn to:

- interpret
- explain
- apply
- clarify
- analyze
- evaluate
- assess
- describe
- form opinions
- empathize
- identify
- compare and contrast
- develop self-knowledge
- establish perspective
- identify contradictions
- determine what is accepted as fact and what is rejected as fiction
- draw conclusions
- weigh generalizations
- recognize multiple interpretations
- examine evidence
- analyze raw data
- develop confidence in their ability to gather information
- draw upon visual, literary and musical sources
- develop a sense of excitement about learning about history

These skills can be developed or enhanced by those who participate in document-based learning programs. In addition to skill development, students find working with objects and documents to be fun and exciting. Teachers often have the same reaction.