Lesson 2 Life During the Great Depression

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
What causes changes in the economy over time?
How do depressions affect societies?

Reading HELPDESK

Content Vocabulary
- **bailiff** minor officer of the courts
- **hobo** a homeless and usually penniless wanderer
- **soap opera** a serial drama on television or radio using melodramatic situations

Academic Vocabulary
- **suspend** to cease or stop
- **colleague** a person who works in the same, or a similar, profession
- **technique** a method of achieving a desired aim
The Great Depression Begins, 1929-1932

TAKING NOTES: Organizing

ACTIVITY Use the following graphic organizer to list the effects of the Great Depression on American society.

Effects of the Great Depression

IT MATTERS BECAUSE...

Large numbers of people lost their jobs and homes during the Depression. To help people forget their troubles, popular entertainment offered funny, upbeat movies and radio shows. Novelists and photographers made more realistic pictures of American life.

The Depression Worsens

GUIDING QUESTION How did economic changes affect everyday life during the 1930s?

The Depression became steadily worse during Hoover’s administration. In 1930, 1,352 U.S. banks suspended operations. That was more than twice the number of bank failures in 1929. In 1932 alone, around 30,000 companies went out of business. By 1933 about one-fourth of the workforce was unemployed.

Struggling to Get By

People without jobs often went hungry. The hungry waited for free food in breadlines or outside soup kitchens run by private groups. People who could not pay their rent or make house payments lost their homes. Some people were too embarrassed or afraid to leave their homes. They were evicted, or forced to move, by court officers called bailiffs. Throughout the country, newly homeless people built small, poorly built houses called shacks on unused or public lands. They formed shantytowns, or small neighborhoods made up entirely of shacks. People called them Hoovervilles because they blamed President Hoover for the hard times.

Homeless, jobless people searched for work or a better life. Some of them walked to other towns. Others took rides from people they did not know or “rode the rails” across the country. These hoboes sneaked past railroad police to slip into open boxcars on freight trains. Hundreds of thousands of people, mostly boys and young men, wandered from place to place in this way.

The Depression also made many immigrants return to their home countries in a process called repatriation. Sometimes, immigrants left voluntarily because they could not find jobs in the United States. In other cases the federal government forced them to leave. The government sped up efforts to deport, or send back to their home countries, immigrants who had broken the law. In the Southwest, federal officers rounded up Mexicans and returned them to Mexico by force. However, some of the immigrants were U.S. citizens.
The Great Depression Begins, 1929-1932

The Dust Bowl
During the 1920s, crop prices went down. Farmers tried to make up for the lower prices by planting more wheat, but a long period of dry weather, or a drought, hurt the Great Plains. Without rain, the soil dried to dust. From the Dakotas to Texas, farmland turned into a “Dust Bowl.”

Winds blew the dry soil into the air, causing dust storms. The dust made the sky dark for hundreds of miles. Dust buried crops, cattle, and farm animals. People and animals caught outdoors sometimes died when the dust filled their lungs. It was so thick that they could not breathe. During most of the 1930s, an average of 50 dust storms a year happened in the Plains.

Some Great Plains farmers were able to keep their farms, but others were not as lucky. If they had borrowed money to pay for their land and other property, they had to give the property to the banks. A lot of nearly penniless farm families traveled west, where they hoped to find a better life in California. Because many of these homeless farmers were from Oklahoma, people called them “Okies.” Life in California was just as hard.

☑ PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining  What changes to daily life occurred for people affected by the economic hardships of the Great Depression?

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Arts and Entertainment

GUIDING QUESTION  In what ways did culture reflect the Depression experience?

The hard times of the 1930s led many Americans to want to forget their worries. Movies and radio programs grew more and more popular. During the 1930s, more than 60 million Americans went to the movies each week. Child stars delighted viewers, and comedies provided a relief from daily worries. The Marx brothers made audiences laugh with funny movies like Animal Crackers. Moviegoers also loved cartoons. Walt Disney made the first full-length animated movie, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, in 1937.

Serious movies were often about everyday people who led good lives by following small-town values. In Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Jimmy Stewart played a kind but inexperienced senator. He does not give up his beliefs, and he reveals the dishonesty of some of his colleagues.

In 1939 the movie studio MGM made The Wizard of Oz. This colorful musical lifted people’s spirits and made them feel happy. That same year, Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable thrilled audiences in Gone with the Wind. This movie about the Civil War won nine Academy Awards. Hattie McDaniel won Best Supporting Actress, becoming the first African American to win an Academy Award.

Just as movies captured the imagination of Americans, radio gave them information and entertainment. Tens of millions of people listened to the radio every day. Comedians such as Jack Benny were popular. So were the adventures of superheroes like the Green Hornet. Daytime dramas continued their story lines...
from day to day. Programs such as *The Guiding Light* were about the personal difficulties of middle-class families. The sponsors, or businesses that helped pay for the shows, were often makers of laundry soaps. As a result, the shows were nicknamed *soap operas*. Radio also helped people listen to different musical styles. Americans enjoyed hit songs—from movies and Broadway musicals to swing music to country.

The 1930s were also a creative time for literature and art. Writers and artists showed life around them. Often they told the stories of homeless, jobless people. Novelists developed new writing *techniques*. In *The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner shows what characters are thinking and feeling before they speak. This technique came to be called stream of consciousness because it puts dreams and daydreams into words. Using this technique, Faulkner shows the hidden attitudes of the people who live in an imaginary county in Mississippi.

Images were also growing more influential. Photographers traveled the nation with the new 35-millimeter cameras, seeking new subjects. In 1936 *TIME* magazine publisher Henry Luce introduced *Life*. This weekly photojournalism magazine quickly became popular. The striking pictures taken by photojournalists Dorothea Lange and Margaret Bourke-White showed how the Great Depression affected average Americans.

Painters of the 1930s included Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood. Their work emphasized traditional American values, especially those of the rural Midwest and South. Wood’s best-known painting today is *American Gothic*. The portrait honors no-nonsense Midwesterners while gently making fun of their strictness.

**PROGRESS CHECK**

**Examining** How did the Depression influence culture?

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