



Teenage Hobos During the Great Depression

About the plan

EDUCATOR'S NAME	Sandra Mazingo
SCHOOL	Horn Lake High School
DISTRICT	DeSoto County School District
GRADE LEVELS	11
SUBJECT	History / Government
UNIT/THEME	The Great Depression
COMPETENCY NUMBER	U. S. History, 3 3. Describe the relationship of people, places, and environments through time. (Civics, History, Geography, and Economics) MC07 - Discuss the Great Depression
OBJECTIVES	Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe what they already know about the Dust Bowl• Determine the reasons for the Dust Bowl• Identify the economic reasons that family structures sometimes changed, forcing some teenagers from their homes• Conduct Internet research on the lives of the teenage hobos• Conduct Internet research on the music written by hobos <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Analyze human migration patterns since 1877 (e.g., rural to urban, the Great Migration, etc.)2. Analyze how changing human, physical, geographic characteristics can alter a regional landscape (e.g., urbanization, Dust Bowl, etc.)
INSTRUCTIONAL FORMAT	Individual and small groups
PRIOR PREPARATION	Have certain books about the Great Depression, hobos, and the Dust Bowl readily available for student use. Go through MAGNOLIA resources to help students with their searches.
MATERIALS NEEDED	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internet and MAGNOLIA access• Map of Dust Bowl region• Books about the Great Depression, hobos, and the Dust Bowl

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer access for every student
DURATION OF ACTIVITY	2-3 hours
FORMAL ASSESSMENT	Students will be graded based on written content, mechanics, group participation, facilitation, interpretation, and delivery.

Overview

The Great Depression affected every aspect of the life of the United States. Not only was the national economy in ruins, but the lives of individuals were drastically changed as well. Many of these changes altered the structure of the family, especially the status of teenagers, who were in some cases forced out of their homes to fend for themselves.

This lesson focuses on the teenage hobos who joined their elders in riding the rails in search of jobs, or sometimes just to find an adventure. Especially hard-hit were families who lived in the region known as the "Dust Bowl."

Procedures

1. Have students recall what they know about the Dust Bowl. Use a map to locate the five-state region known as the Dust Bowl, and complete information on the causes of the Dust Bowl, the general weather patterns, and the economic activity of the region (farming, ranching, etc.)
2. Have the class brainstorm what they know about hobos. What is their general attitude about hobos? What circumstances lead people to become hobos before and during the Depression and today? What were the special circumstances involved in people becoming hobos during the Great Depression?

Using MAGNOLIA for [EBSCOhost](#), type in the keywords "Great Depression." Select [The Great Depression](#) by Kate Houston Mitchoff, and select "Riding the Rails." Under Special Features, select "Tales from the Rails," which includes stories of seven teenage hobos, and "Added Obstacles," which documents the stories of African American hobos.

An additional source is [When Homeless Teens Rode the Rails](#) by Roy Schaumburg.

After reading the selections, instruct the students to:

- Write a letter from a teenaged hobo to his/her family, describing the life on the rails. Limit the letter to two full pages.
- Write a journal entry describing a typical day on the rails, reflecting on what they have left behind and what their hopes are for the future. Entries should include the difficulties in finding food and work, and any dangers and/or joys they experience.

Under Special Features, select "Striking a Cord," and read the hobo songs from the 1930s.

- Divide students into groups, and instruct them to construct a hobo song, using the information they have learned from their research. They may use an existing tune, or make up their own.

Concluding activity

As a class, have students discuss how the readings have changed their perceptions of hobos. Discuss what they think they would do if they were forced out of their homes and had to support themselves. Finally, have the students write a short essay on the lives of the teenage hobos during the Great Depression. Student essays must be no more than three typed pages, double-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman script.

Explore activity

Have students read John Steinback's *The Grapes of Wrath* by Viking Press, 1939. Students may go to MAGNOLIA, click on Searchasaurus, type in "Dustbowl" and "hobos" under Images section, to download pictures. Students may also go to Discovering Collection, click on U.S. History, and type in "The Great Depression," to read articles. Students may get information about the book, *The Dust Bowl: An Agricultural and Social History* by R. D. Hurt, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981.