

Title of Lesson: *The Great Depression – Hard Times Hit America*
(Suggested grade level: 11)

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Background Information:

- Information about the Great Depression in Alabama can be found in [Alabama Moments](#) published by the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

Overview of lesson: This lesson will use primary source documents to explore life during the Great Depression. This lesson would follow an introduction to the Great Depression and the stock market crash of 1929. Along with a *PowerPoint* presentation and video clips, the main activity will focus on an examination of letters written primarily from Alabamians during the Depression to either the president or the Alabama governor. Each letter will give students a personal view of how the Depression affected Americans.

Content Standards

[Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies](#) (Bulletin 2004, No. 18)
Eleventh Grade: Standard 6, p.77

[National Standards for History, 1996](#)

Era 8, Standard 1 – The causes of the Great Depression and how it affected American society.
1B – The student understands how American life changed during the 1930s.

[National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies](#), (Bulletin 111, 2010)
Chapter 6 Learning Expectations: High School
Standard 7– Production, Distribution, and Consumption, p. 146

Primary Learning Objective(s):

- The student will describe the impact that the Great Depression had on the nation as a whole, as well as on people in Alabama.
- The student will learn how to analyze letters written during the Depression seeking government assistance.

Additional Learning Objective(s):

- The student will explain how the Depression changed Americans' view of Herbert Hoover.

Time allotted: 55 minutes

Materials and Equipment:

- Print copies of the document package for use in Step 5.
- Copies of the Document Analysis – Great Depression Letters worksheet

- PowerPoint presentation- [The Great Depression: Hard Times Hit America](#)

Technological Resources:

- Computer
- Digital projector
- Internet connection for video clips

Background/Preparation:

Students should be familiar with the following:

- Long-term causes of the Great Depression – uneven distribution of income, stock market speculation, weak farm economy, excessive use of credit, overproduction of consumer goods
- Herbert Hoover’s economic policies
- Causes of the stock market crash – October 29, 1929

Procedures/Activities:

Engagement/Motivation Activity:

- Show slides one through three on [The Great Depression PowerPoint](#). Slides two and three depict a homeless family.
- Students are to view the pictures and note details in the pictures, such as people, clothing, expressions, and location, and determine why the family was homeless.
- Students are to imagine what the woman and child were thinking when picture was taken.

Step 1	Show video clips from History.com of Maya Angelou and Harry Belafonte interview segments about the Great Depression as they remember it. Give students time to react to the video clips.
Step 2	Show slides four and five of the PowerPoint . Use the following as a basis for a discussion of the pictures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the people in the pictures. • Describe the settings. • What is happening in these pictures? • What questions do you have about these pictures? • How could you find the answers to your questions? • Describe the irony depicted in slide five. • What are two inferences you could make from these pictures? • Why do you think these images are historically important?
Step 3	Show slides six through thirteen , and discuss conditions during the Great Depression. Emphasize that the Great Depression personally affected millions of Americans and was not just something they read about in the paper.
Step 4	Show a video clip about life during the Depression from either APT Plus or http://classroomclips.org/video/910 . Play the song “ Brother Can You Spare A Dime? ” The words are on slide fourteen of the PowerPoint .
Step 5	Arrange students into a circle with each student having a partner. Pass out the primary source documents, giving one document to each pair of students. Each pair will have five to seven minutes to read their document and complete the appropriate section of the document analysis handout. Then each pair will pass their document to the right for the next pair. Continue this procedure until each pair has read all of the documents and completed their document analysis worksheet.

Step 6	Ask students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Which letter do you think was the most compelling and why?” • “What similarities were in all the documents? What differences?” • “What do these letters tell us about these people and their faith in the government?”
Step 7	Have students discuss economic issues facing the United States today. Say, “These people wrote letters to express their needs to government officials.” Ask the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “How has communication changed since the 1930s?” • “Would you write a letter, an e-mail, a blog, a text message, or a tweet?” • “Do we expect answers sooner?” • “Do we know more about the government than Americans did in the 1930s?” • “Have our expectations of government’s response to personal economic situations changed?” • “Does the 24-hour news cycle impact what we expect from our government?”
Step 8	Have students summarize life during the Great Depression in one word. Then ask for volunteers and see how many different responses you have. Record and display student answers.

Assessment Strategies:

Have students write a letter as if they were living during the Depression. (rubric attached)

Extension:

- Have the student create a *Photo Story* or *PowerPoint* of modern economic situations such as homelessness, food banks, and unemployment, comparing problems which occurred during the Depression to current problems.
- Have the student complete an oral history by asking someone who was living during the Depression what life was like, and write their responses. This could be made into a project with *PowerPoint*.

Remediation:

- Give students hard copies of [slides six, seven, eleven, and thirteen](#).

Accommodation:

- For the document activity, assign partners and pair students who need additional help with stronger students (peer tutoring).
- Students may tape record the lesson to aid in studying for the test.

Modification:

- Review Individualized Education Plans, 504 Plans, and Gifted or ELL Plans for instructional and assessment accommodations or modifications.
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate comprehension and mastery of appropriate learning objectives.

Document Analysis - Great Depression Letters

Document One

Author:

Date:

Type of Document:

List four details in the document.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is the main idea of this document?

Document Two

Author:

Date:

Type of Document:

List four details in the document.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is the main idea of this document?

Document Three

Author:

Date:

Type of Document:

List four details in the document.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is the main idea of this document?

Document Four

Author:

Date:

Type of Document:

List four details in the document.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is the main idea of this document?

Document Five

Author:

Date:

Type of Document:

List four details in the document.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is the main idea of this document?

Document Six

Author:

Date:

Type of Document:

List four details in the document.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is the main idea of this document?

Document Seven

Author:

Date:

Type of Document:

List four details in the document.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is the main idea of this document?

Document Eight

Author:

Date:

Type of Document:

List four details in the document.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is the main idea of this document?

Document Nine

Author:

Date:

Type of Document:

List four details in the document?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is the main idea of this document?

Document Ten

Author:

Date:

Type of Document:

List four details in the document.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What is the main idea of this document?

Great Depression

Primary Source Document Packet

(Each item is hyperlinked. You may click on the document letter on each item to see the original on the Alabama Department of Archives and History web site.)

Document A

R. F. D # 1
Dothan, Ala.
Jan. 5, 1934

Gov. B. M. Miller

If something is not done our schools will close January 26, I am a senior at Sladcomb Hi School in Geneva County. If schools do close there will be hundreds who will not finish. You are the only man that can call Legislature into an extra session. Please do this. We are looking to you for help. The attendence are increasing although education finances are decreasing. Spending millions of dollars for roads and on Convicts, review the cost of each convict last year.

I guess Mr Feagin will fareing well right on.

The farmers of this section are getting tired of such business.

The roads will always be here, we will not have always to get an education. Are you going to sit there and hold your hands and the children grow up in ignorance. Education is ^{the} only remedy.

Yours Truly
Harry Peterson

Document B

Selma, Alabama

Mar. 23, 1934

Governor Miller:-

Your honor, I am writing asking you to please help me. I am in need. I have three small children and I am a widow. I can't get any work and I have applied to the relief office and they failed to help me. I have no way to get anything at all. Please your honor if there is any thing you can do I will be glad if you will help me. I can't get food part of the time.
"I am Colord"

Yours truly

Rachel Wheeler.

1313 Franklin St.

Selma, Ala.

12 P A - E) my - - -
No. 90 - - -
Red Cross - - -

March 24, 1934

Rachel Wheeler,
1313 Franklin St.,
Selma, Ala.

Madam:

Your letter of the 23rd asking for relief, received.

The State does not make any appropriation for relief work. You should see either the Administrator of Relief or the Red Cross in your county.

Yours truly,

B. M. MILLER,
Governor.

BMM:M

Document C

Brookwood Ala

March. 21/1934

Mr B M Miller.

Dear Sir.

I am writing to you about school. I have not been able to keep my children in school regular. for I just couldn't get them no clothes and shoes for time just so hard till I couldn't get them no clothes and shoes. for they have had they daddys arrested they got to meet trial 2 day april and I want you to please give me some advise at once and I have been to town and ask for help to get shoes and

clathes they are giving children
clothes But they wouldnt give
my children any. so I want
you to please give me some
advice at once.

Yours very truly.

Miss Della Williams

Brook wood
ala.

March 22, 1934.

Mrs. Deller Williams,
Brookwood, Ala.

Dear Madam:

Governor Miller has referred to me for attention and reply your letter asking about securing relief.

The State does not have any funds appropriated for relief work. You should see the Administrator of Relief in your County.

Yours very truly,

JOHN H. PEACH,
Legal Advisor to the Governor.

JHP:T

Document D



SAMUEL JOHNSON POST, No. 75

AMERICAN LEGION

FLOMATON, ALA. 3/21/34

Gov Miller

Montgomery Ala

Dear Gen I am a blind man a negro
I am 64 years old & got my eyes put out
16 years ago & had plenty to live on and
by my toes I have used up all I
had but one little house to live in
& have no children nor income of any
kind & the tax collector sold my little
house which I know he had to do they claim
for 3rd tax \$43.43 & what can I do where
can I go I have here begged for
that I have no wife or any kin
that I can appeal to but if I can
keep my little home I can manage to
live I have always & honest working man
until my eyes went & can get the best
recommendation from the best white people in
this town what can I do to keep my little
home with about 100.⁰⁰ Your humble servant
Frank Carter

March 22, 1934.

Mr. Frank Carter,
Flomston, Ala.

Dear Sir:

Governor Miller has referred to me for attention and reply your letter with reference to your home being sold for taxes.

The State does not make any appropriation for relief of individuals.

I suggest that you go to see your Probate Judge and other County officials and see if some plan for your relief can not be worked out, either through the government relief organization or through local charity.

Yours very truly,

JOHN H. PEACH,
Legal Advisor to the Governor.

JHP:T

Document E

MRS. VIVA PECKINPAUGH, VICE CHAIRMAN
HENRYETTA, OKLAHOMA

HARRY D. PITCHFORD, CHAIRMAN
420 COMMERCE BLDG. OKMULGEE

ELMER C. CROOM, SECRETARY
OKMULGEE, OKLAHOMA

Democratic County Central Committee

SLOGAN:--"A Democratic County"

Roosevelt-Garner Club

HARRY B. GREAVES, CHAIRMAN
OKMULGEE
MRS. MAYME GILLETTE, V-CHAIRMAN
HENRYETTA
W. H. CRUME, SECRETARY
OKMULGEE

Okmulgee, Oklahoma

September 21, 1932

file

Honorable B. M. Miller,
Governor of Alabama,
Montgomery, Ala.

Dear Governor Miller:

I have been giving more or less thought to the unemployment situation that we are going to be faced with this winter, and I have a plan in mind that I am submitting to you.

You will find this plan enclosed herewith and if it appeals to you I would certainly like to have your co-operation, and if you will assist in this, will you please appoint a committee as suggested in this plan and give this to the press at your next press conference.

Very sincerely yours,

Harry D. Pitchford

HDP:IW

If You Are Tired of
Hoover, Hunger and Hypocrisy
VOTE!



UNITED STATES NOMINEES

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, President
JOHN A. GARNER, Vice President.
ELMER THOMAS, United States Senator.
W. W. HASTINGS, United States Congressman.
WILL ROGERS, U. S. Congressman-at-Large.



STATE NOMINEES

JACK WALTON, State Corporation Commissioner.
DAVID M. LOGAN, State Senator.
DAN C. KENAN, State Representative No. 1.
JAMES M. HAYS, State Representative No. 2.
WILBUR MORSE (Henryetta) State Representative No. 3.



COUNTY NOMINEES

JAMES K. EATON, County Attorney.
HARLAND A. CARTER, County Judge.
JOHN LENOX, (Morris) County Sheriff.
R. R. SHORT, County Assessor.
E. L. ROBERTS, (Beggs) County Treasurer.
EDGAR JOHNSON, (Henryetta) Court Clerk.
W. H. BLACKBIRD, County Clerk.
EDGAR E. HARRIS, County Superintendent.
W. A. JENKINS, (Beggs) Commissioner, Dist. 1.
W. O. BASSETT, Commissioner District 2.
BEN FURR, (Bryant) Commissioner District 3.

I have been thinking for sometime upon a plan to help the unemployed this winter, and, in view of the fact that we have a National Election in November, I have thought out a plan that seems to me would accumulate a vast store of foodstuff and clothing for the unemployed in each State.

With the winter months coming on, and with thousands unemployed, it behooves every American citizen to pause and face the situation as it is and devise means to alleviate conditions as much as possible.

The public will be called upon this winter in various forms and through various agencies to assist in the relief that will be needed throughout the winter months.

The question is how to meet this situation as completely, expeditiously and economically as possible as so many people have been drained so far as financial help is concerned.

If we cannot raise funds, then we are confronted with the question of how to feed and clothe the unemployed which must be done.

I have in mind a plan that should and would be effective, and both Republicans and Democrats to whom I have submitted this plan have given it enthusiastic support for it would operate with so little expense and accumulate such a vast supply of foodstuff and clothing.

An organization should be perfected in the State that would urge and encourage a movement that every voter who was able bring some article of foodstuff or clothing to the booth on election day for the benefit of the unemployed. Most everyone could bring a can of corn, tomatoes, beans, molasses, jelly, etc., or some article of clothing, or both, and deposit it either at the voting place or in a booth in the approximate vicinity of the polls. Of course, one would not be confined just to one can of foodstuff for he could bring as many as he desired or he could bring both foodstuff and articles of clothing.

I would suggest that the Governor issue a proclamation requesting every voter on election day to take some article of clothing or foodstuff to the polls, and that the Governor appoint a committee composed of one member from each Congressional District, and this committee in turn select a committee to direct the publicity and arrange the details for the gathering and distribution in each county.

The County should be divided into zones and arrangements made for trucks in each zone to go to the polls after they have closed and assemble this, and it be taken to some central distribution point and be distributed through some recognized agency.

This entire organization would be absolutely free from politics for the organization would be personneled by both Republicans and Democrats looking forward to one purpose, and that is, to the help of the unemployed in the State.

By this means you would have a day set for assembling the necessities for the unemployed, and there would be comparatively few in the State but what would take something to the polls on election day that could be utilized by the unfortunate and unemployed.

If, perchance, one precinct or one county should be deficient in one thing, then an exchange could be made with a precinct or county that had a surplus, and, if some county should receive more than necessary to take care of the needs in that particular county, then let it be shipped to some other county. Of course, all these details would be worked out by the committee selected by the Governor.

The Republican and Democratic nominees in each County on their speaking itineraries could urge and encourage and give publicity to this movement. By this means, together with the press of the State, there would be no question but what every voter in the State would be reached.

Document F

Andalusia Ala

Jan 10 1934

Mr John H Peach

Montgomery Ala

Dear Sir

I am writing you in
regards of this C.W.A.
Work. I Rind the Card
some four week ago.

Now Mr Peach. I am seventy
years old. but my health
is good and I am willing
to do any thing I can.

as I am living with my
son. and he is not able
to make a living for his
family and me altho he
is doing all he can
as R. Barber and

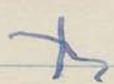
I Want to Work. as long as
I am able. this is why I am
Writing you can a man
of my age get on this
C. W. A. Work. I have no one
to support but my self. and
I need the Work Badly
as I told you I am more
able to Work than my
son. Please let me hear
from you

Sincerely

J. L. Warthrighton

209 Rankin St

Andalusia Ala

this man cant write so
this is his mark. 

Legal Advisor to the Governor.

JHP:T

Jan. 13, 1934.

Mr. J. L. Worthington,
209 Rankin St.,
Andalusia, Ala.

Dear Sir:

Replying to your letter of
the 10th, I do not have anything to
do with giving the CWA jobs. You
should apply to the Government Employment
man in your County.

Yours very truly,

JOHN H. PEACH,
Legal Advisor to the Governor.

JHP:T

Document G

Hartford, Alabama
Jan. 5, 1954

Hans B. M. Miller
Montgomery, Ala.

Dear Gov. Miller:

I am a first student in Kinsaul Jr. High School. We have heard that the schools are to close in three more weeks. I am anxious to finish my grade, and I want you and the legislature to provide some plan to lengthen the schools in order to make my grade. So please do everything that you can to keep schools open. I am fourteen years old. I have some good teachers and they are all anxious for me and the rest of the class to finish this grade. Please try to find some way to lengthen the schools.

yours truly
(Miss) Bertha Mae Byrd
Hartford
Alabama
Route 2.

Document H

att
m P

July 13th '33
To the Governor of Ala.
Montgomery.
Dear Sir:

Monday. presi-
dent Roosevelt's new
rule for textile Mills
becomes effective
and while it is a
wonderful move it
will certainly make
very uncomfortable
for us unless it is
possible for you to
assist us. There's
the problem —
my daughter has
just begun work-

ings at Prattville
and looks so mature
for her years that
they never troubled
questioning me as to
her age. She is
our only dependance,
Her father is 74
years old and I
have an infant
only 3 weeks old.

While we are
on the farm it
doesn't help us much
as drought has
ruined the gardens
and we have no
pasturage nor
nothing to cultivate

the crop - I mean
livestock.

My daughter will
be fifteen years
old next month.
There are seven
in family.

Please help us if
possible

Respectfully,
Mrs. David Smoot

address.

David W. Smoot
Vida, Ala.

Document I

att
mt

Sunflower, Ala.

July 7, 1933.

Gov. B. M. Miller

Honorable Sir;

I am writing you concerning my P. F. C. job. It is so many meddlers here. Very near all of the colored folks have been cut off. Some who hasn't got bread, and at the price now, will not be able to get it and have large families.

I was cut off this week I didn't know any thing about it until I was told today I do think that since I'm of age the folks should have asked me, of my condition, with

2
out taking some one else's
word. I have a family
of 5 am, aged, and blind
mother. to help care for, she
is in her late 70's. and
my wife has a very aged
cousin, of whom we have
to help care for, since she
hasn't any husband or children
or any close relatives
to depend on.

we only get \$1.00 per
day and groceries are unreason-
ably high. 35¢ per pk. for
meal. 40¢ for 12 lbs.
meat. 15¢ per lb. for common
kind of dry salt.

I haven't been a man
on the job that worked any
better than I. either has it

been a time that I've been
late going on the job.

I feel like I haven't
been treated just fair and
have such responsibilities
on my self, and several
others with large families
its only a few colored
people on the job now.

Now if I have said
any thing to cause any
offence I humbly ask for
appol.

Kindly let me hear from
you soon regarding this
matter. Since I need
some help or a job, will
work any place. I live a steady
now. Humbly yours.

Simon Tricksey Dr. (Col.)
Sunflower, Ala.

July 25, 1933.

Mr. Simon Tricksey, Sr.,
Sunflower, Alabama.

Dear Sir:

Governor Miller has referred to me for attention and reply your letter with reference to reconstruction finance corporation job.

The amount allowed to Alabama by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation has been reduced. We are working now to get more funds.

You should talk over with the people in charge of the matter in your county your situation and I am sure they will give careful consideration to it.

Yours very truly,

JOHN H. PEACH,
Legal Advisor to the Governor

JHP:T

Student Name _____

Letter Writing: The Great Depression

Directions: You will write a friendly letter to a relative, as if you are living during the Great Depression. You will use the information from your assigned readings, primary sources, and class discussion as a basis for your letter.

CATEGORY	4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point	Score
Salutation and Closing	Salutation and closing have no errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Salutation and closing have 1-2 errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Salutation and closing have 3 or more errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Salutation and/or closing are missing.	
Sentences & Paragraphs	Sentences and paragraphs are complete, well-constructed and of varied structure.	All sentences are complete and well-constructed (no fragments, no run-ons). Paragraphing is generally done well.	Most sentences are complete and well-constructed. Paragraphing needs some work.	Many sentence fragments or run-on sentences OR paragraphing needs lots of work.	
Grammar & spelling	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar and/or spelling.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar and/or spelling.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar and/or spelling.	
Ideas	Ideas were expressed in a clear and organized fashion. It was easy to figure out what the letter was about.	Ideas were expressed in a pretty clear manner, but the organization could have been better.	Ideas were somewhat organized, but were not very clear. It took more than one reading to figure out what the letter was about.	The letter seemed to be a collection of unrelated sentences. It was very difficult to figure out what the letter was about.	
Content Accuracy	The letter contains at least 5 accurate facts about the topic.	The letter contains 3-4 accurate facts about the topic.	The letter contains 1-2 accurate facts about the topic.	The letter contains no accurate facts about the topic.	

_____ **Total**