Title of Lesson: *The Great Depression – Hard Times Hit America*

*(Suggested grade level: 11)*

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Tuscaloosa County School System

Tuscaloosa, AL

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>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.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Step 2 | Show slides four and five of the *PowerPoint*. Use the following as a basis for a discussion of the pictures:  
- 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? |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 3</th>
<th>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.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 4</th>
<th>Show a video clip about life during the Depression from either APT Plus or <a href="http://classroomclips.org/video/910">http://classroomclips.org/video/910</a>. Play the song “Brother Can You Spare A Dime?” The words are on slide fourteen of the <em>PowerPoint</em>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Step 5</th>
<th>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.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
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.)
R. F. J #1
Jordan, Ala.
Jan. 5, 1934

Dear B. M. Miller,

If something is not done our school will close January 26. Some seniors at Clanton High School in Geneva County. If school do close there will be hundreds who will not finish. You are the only man that can call the Legislature into an extra session. Please do this. We are looking to you for help. The attendance is increasing although education finances are decreasing. Spending millions of dollars for roads and to Convicts remaining the Costs speech 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 hand and the children grow up in ignorance. Education is only remedy.

Your Truly

Harry Peterson

Alabama Department of Archives and History
Selma, Alabama
Mar. 23, 1939

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 colored."

Your truly,

Rachel Wheeler,
1313 Franklin St.

Selma, Ala.,
March 24, 1934

Rachel Wheeler,
1315 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.
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 they have had their daddy arrested and they got to meet trial 2 days ago and I want you to please give me some advice at once and I have been to town and ask for help to get shoes and
clothes they are giving children clothes But thy wouldn't give my children any so I want you to please give me some advice at once.

Yours very truly.

Miss Jellee Williams

Brookwood, 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
Dear Miller,

Montgomery Ala.

I am a blind man, a negro. I am 64 years old. I got my eyes put out 10 years ago. I had plenty to live on and 10 years of a hot, dusty life. Since I have turned 60 I have lived in my house. I have a little house to live in but one little house is not enough. I have no children for income of any kind to the tax collector. Sold my little house, sold. He had to do what he did. I have no work to do. I used to go on the road with my kin, now I am here. I have no wife. I have no place to go. If I can stay, I can stay. I can make a little home. I can manage to keep my little house. I have always been honest. I have to work to keep the rent. I have always been honest. I am old, not fit. I am old, not fit. I am old, not fit. I am old, not fit. I am old, not fit.

Yours truly,

John Carter
March 22, 1936.

Mr. Frank Carter,
Flomaton, 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 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.
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  
appears 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
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 (Hemphill) State Representative No. 3.

COUNTY NOMINEES
JAMES E. EATON, County Attorney.
HARLAND A. CARTER, County Judge.
JOHN LENOX, (Morril) County Sheriff.
R. R. SHORT, County Assessor.
F. L. ROBERTS, (Hemphill) County Treasurer.
EDMUR JOHNSON, (Hemphill) Court Clerk.
W. H. BLACKBIRD, County Clerk.
EDGAR E. HARRIS, County Superintendent.
W. A. JENKINS, (Hemphill) Commissioner, Dist. 1.
W. G. BARRETT, Commissioner District 2.
HIS PAPP, (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 could accommodate 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 so as 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 food and clothes 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. Each one of these booths 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 could 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 prearranged 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 necessaries 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, perhaps, 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 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.
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 heard the Card came four weeks 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 and tho he is doing all he can. As of Parker and
I want to work as long as I am able. This is why I am writing you, as a man of my age get on the line. Work. I have no one to support but myself 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.D. Worthington
209 Franklin St
Andalusia, Ala.

This man can't write as this is his mark. T.
Jan. 13, 1934.

Mr. J. L. Worthington,
200 Rankin St.,
Gulalusia, 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

Alabama Department of Archives and History
Hartford, Alabama
Jan. 5, 1934

Dear Mr. Miller,

I am a student in Tuscaloosa High School. We have learned that the schools are to close in three more weeks. I am now close to finish my grade and I want you and the legislators to provide some place to continue the schools in order to make my grade. I shall do everything that you have to keep schools open. I am fourteen years old. I have some good teachers and they are also anxious for me and the rest of the classes to finish the grade. Please try to find some way to lengthen the school.

Yours truly,

(Miss) Blanche McPheal
Hartford
Route 2.

Alabama
July 12th, '33

To the Landers & Co.,
Montgomery

Dear Sir:

Monday, President 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 is
the problem —
my daughter has
just begun work

...
I was at Prattville and don't so mature for her years that they need to trouble questioning me as to their age. She is our only dependence. Her father is 70 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 garden and we have no pastureage nor anything to cultivate.
the crop — I mean livestock.

My daughter will be fifteen years old next month. There are seven in the family. Please help us if possible.

Respectfully,

Mrs. David Smoot

Address:
David W. Smoot
Vida, Ala.
Dunklowes, Ala.
July 7, 1933.

Dear B. M. Miller:

Honorable Sir,

I am writing to you concerning my P.T.S. job.

It is as [illegible], meadles here, very near all of the colored folks have been cut off. Some who haven't got it, and at the price now will not be able to get it. [illegible], large families.

I was cut off this week. I didn't know anything about it until I was told today. I do think that since 21 I'm of age, the folks should have asked me, of my condition with...
out taking some one else's
word. I have a family.
07-3. AM, aged, 69, blind
mother, to help care for. She
is in her late 70s, 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 $2.00 per
day and groceries are increase
very high. 35¢ per pk. for
meat. 40¢ for ½ lb. of
corn, 65¢ for ½ lb. of common
kind of dry salt.

I've hasn't been a man
on the job that worked any
better than I, either has it.
Once a time that she [sic] was late going on the job. I feel like I haven't been treated just fair and have much responsibility on my self and several others with large families. It's only a few colored people on the job now. Now, if I have said anything to cause any offense I'd humbly ask for your pardon.

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

Simon T. Hicksey,
Sunflower, Ala.
July 25, 1933.

Sr. Simon Trickey, Sr.,
Sunflower, Alabama.

Dear Sir:

Governor Hiller 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
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.

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

___________Total