

The Black Blizzard Revisited

Wendy Wheaton-Craig, WCVE

Overview

Topic: The Dust Bowl. This lesson focuses on the plight of farmers and migrants leading to the westward migration during the 1930's. Through archived interviews, song lyrics, and Internet research, students will obtain information to create news articles, interviews and letters reflecting the point of view of the people involved in the natural disaster.

Time Allotment

5-6 Classes (90 min)

Subject Matter

English
History/Social Studies

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Use the WWW to research primary and secondary sources on the 1930's Dust Bowl and its effects on the people and the environment.
- Identify historical events leading to the causes and effects that the Dust Bowl and the Depression had on farm workers of the Plains.
- Understand "point of view" as it contributes to the realistic portrayal of individuals and experiences in another time and place.
- Analyze, evaluate, synthesize and organize information from a variety of sources into a written presentation.

(This lesson addresses Va. SOL English 11.4, 11.7, 11.9; History USII.1, USII.5, VUS.8, WG.6.)

Media Components

Geography in U. S. History #9 : New Deal for the Dust Bowl

Guthrie, Woody. "The Great Dust Storm". *Dust Bowl Ballads*. CD. Ludlow Music, Inc., N.Y. Buddha Records. www.BuddhaRecords.com.

Materials

For the teacher :

- TV/VCR with remote
- Cassette or CD player
- Chalkboard or chart paper
- Chalk and markers

For each student :

- "Video Notes" (attached)
- Song lyrics "The Great Dust Storm" (attached)
- "Internet Research : Guided Web Exploration" (attached)
- Handouts combined as research packet :
"Magazine Assignment/Directions" (attached)
"Web Sites" (attached)
"Notes: Web Site Citations" – at least three per student, with extra copies available (attached)
"Research Magazine Project Evaluation Form" (attached)



Prep for Teachers

- Reserve computer lab and/or media center to provide individual computer use.
- The teacher should bookmark sites on the computer for easier access, or if time permits, a folder or jump page can be prepared and placed on the desktop of each student's computer.
- Check to see that all computer downloads (Real Player and Real Audio) are available and working on interactive Internet sites.
- Prepare copies for student handouts and packet (all handouts are attached).
- Copy extra Notes/Citation page for additional research.
- Provide MLA bibliography format information and examples for Internet citations.

Day One

Introductory Activity

Say, "We will be examining a particular event and time period in American history. The time period is between 1930 and 1940. This was an important decade in America. We have been studying about the Great Depression. Can anyone define the Great Depression?" (*Time period of economic hardship, economic collapse, and stock market crash*). How did people live during that time – what can you tell us about the living conditions? (*Poor, soup kitchens, out of work, hard times*). Did bad times affect all Americans equally? (Some will say yes and others will say no). Was everyone poor and destitute?" (*Students will dissent – pointing out some were poorer than others, many managed to continue and even prosper during this time – legal and illegal activities, entertainment figures, wealthy families can be discussed.*) Say, "We are going to examine one particular group of people during this time – the farmers - who were not only victims of the Great Depression, but also, victims of another devastating event known as the "Black Blizzard" or the "Dust Bowl". Ask, "Has anyone heard of this natural disaster that occurred in the 1930's?" Have students share prior knowledge.

Learning Activities

1. The teacher should distribute "Video Notes" sheet (attached). Say, "First we are going to view and listen to the description of the Dust Bowl experience. As you watch and listen to the video, I want you to determine "who" is talking and "what" they are describing. I want you to note the information on your paper under the categories of who and what." **START** the *Geography in History #9: New Deal for the Dustbowl* at the beginning and **STOP** when a woman's voice is heard saying, "We all thought the world was coming to an end." The teacher should then direct the students to complete the information discovered on their note sheets. Ask, "Who was talking in the video?" Distinguish between the program narrator and the personal accounts of survivors (who). Discuss the description (what) of the storms by those who directly experienced it and compare that information to the introduction provided by the narrator. The teacher should ask students if they have any answers to the other 'W's. As students answer, the teacher should fill in ideas/answers on the board under the appropriate 'W' topic. Fill in any questions (?) under the last column.

2. **FOCUS:** Say, "Let's learn more about the *when* and *where* and *what* was happening from another voice. This is a song written and sung by Woody Guthrie about the Dust Bowl. He is an American folksinger/songwriter who documented the experiences of the thirties in words and music. I'll give you a copy of the words to follow as you listen." The teacher should distribute the lyrics and **PLAY** the audiocassette or compact disc. Ask, "Who can give me some specifics such as the time and place?" (*April 14, 1935, Oklahoma City, Rio Grande, Albuquerque, Dodge City*). Ask, "What general part of the country was affected? (*Great Plains, Intersection of Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, Colorado, New Mexico*). "What else can we include on our note sheet?" Allow students time to write and complete notes as class provides answers from song lyrics.

3. **FOCUS:** Say, "Direct your attention back to the video for a moment and let's determine which geographic area is the focus of these dust storms. **RESUME** the video and **PAUSE** at the map of the U.S. which shows the

area of the Dust Bowl shaded on the map. Ask students, “Does this location match the names and places from the song?” Point out matches (*i.e.* *Oklahoma City, Kansas, Denver, Colorado, Albuquerque, N.M.*) Point out the actual panhandle of Oklahoma on the screen map and how it borders the four other states and actually serves as the center of the Dust Storms.

4. RESUME the video and **STOP** when the narrator says “natural process that has been going on for thousands of years.” Say, “Students, we have just seen live footage of one of the most memorable geographic events recorded in American history. We also heard this event recorded in a song. We learned that the prolonged drought and poor farming techniques contributed to the disastrous dust storms. Be sure that you filled in your “Video Notes” sheet completely.” Teacher can add notes on board as the students provide answers from their notes, the song, or the video. Ask, “Which ‘W’ contains the least information?” (*The answer should be Why – but if it is not, any one of the topics can be used.*) Explain, “We have only just begun to answer these 5 W’s and over the next week you will become experts on the life and times of the people of the Dust Bowl. We’ll begin with an Internet search where you can view firsthand accounts, watch videos, and research some information further on your own.

Day Two

5. Guided research. Say, “The “Internet Research: Guided Web Exploration” (attached) I am distributing has questions about the Dust Bowl and Internet sites I would like you to explore. Use these sites to answer the questions on your paper. Don’t worry about using complete sentences – only when directed, but take the rest of the class period to read and respond.” Teacher passes out guided research sheet. This activity requires students to log on to bookmarked sites or open the folder on the desk top with questions and sites already available and automatically link to the site by clicking on the URL.

Days Three through Five

Culminating Activity (Online)

1. Take a few minutes at the beginning of the next class period to review questions and answers from the Internet Research guide. Point out the use of primary sources – audio, video, articles, photos, as well as information/reference sources. Then, introduce students to the group project or culminating activity. Say, “Now that you have information and details and have identified some good sites on the Dust Bowl, you can use this foundation to continue research and complete the Dust Bowl writing activity.”

2. Divide the class into groups of five. Say, “I have divided the class into groups of five, and each group will be responsible for producing the feature/cover story for *Life in the U.S. Magazine 1937*. The layout for the magazine will include 5 features designed to give the readers a full account of the Dust Bowl experience. Read each of the 5 “Magazine Assignments/Directions” (attached) carefully and consider the point of view from which each is presented. Each member of the group may assume responsibility for one assignment, or you may pair up to produce one or more, as long as everyone in the group is involved and working, and each of the five features is completed.” Distribute packet. Say, “Magazine Assignments/Direction” (attached) are included in your packets along with” a “Research Magazine Project Evaluation Form” (attached) and “Web Sites” (attached). Let’s review the packets and directions before we break into groups.” Distribute packets to students and explain to them that they will need to keep and refer to these packets and handouts over the next three days of the assignment. Read the assignment sheet to the class and answer questions. Then go through the directions for completing the writing assignments. Review other sheets included in the packet. Explain that a jump page or bookmark exists on each computer with the selected sites to facilitate their searching. Break class into groups and allow them 15 minutes or more to organize their roles and responsibilities.

3. Take students to lab to begin research. Teacher should remind students to record bibliographic information from the web sites (attached Notes: Web Site Citations) and follow directions in the packet.

Teacher should circulate and check student progress, assisting with searches and research.

Assessment

Each group will share its final project with the class and the teacher. The “Research Magazine Project Evaluation Form” (attached) will be used for members of the class to decide the merits of each presentation. After each group presentation, class discussion, and the completion of the Evaluation Form, the teacher will tally points and assign grades.

Cross-Curricular Extensions

Geography: Students could investigate several of the farming techniques introduced by the federal government in the 1930’s to prevent soil erosion and report on the current successes or failures.

Science: Students could research climate and weather patterns related to dry land environments and create a corresponding chart and map locating and comparing other areas of dry land throughout the world.

Social Studies: Students could research the objectives and impact of the first federal farm subsidies developed by the New Deal programs of the 1930’s and compare the findings to the objectives and impact of similar subsidies today.

Art: Students could work together to design and create a mural depicting the events, travels and travails of the Dust Storm and the Plains in the 1930’s.

English: Students could be introduced to historical fiction depicting the effects of the Dust Bowl, such as in John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* or in *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse.

Community Connections

1. Students could interview friends, neighbors, or relatives who remembered the era of the Great Depression

and the Dust Bowl. One topic of discovery could be to find out how much sympathy or concern the rest of the country had for the victims of the Dust Bowl.

2. Students could visit the public or university library and investigate folk songs, ballads, and other recordings that reflect historical events and/or experiences.

3. Students could research settlement and/or migration patterns that have affected their own community’s growth and development.

About the Author

Wendy Wheaton-Craig

After 20 years of teaching high school English and history, Wendy returned to VCU to study library/media. After receiving her library endorsement, she moved from the English classroom into the library at Orange County High School where she works with veteran librarian Betty Ryalls. In her role as library media specialist, Wendy enjoys developing lessons with teachers and helping students use the library. As sponsor of the high school literary magazine, she also serves on the technology committee. Her professional affiliations include VEMA and VSTE. Wendy earned a B.A. in American Studies from George Washington University and a M.Ed. from the University of Virginia. Married with two sons ages 12 & 16, Wendy enjoys gardening and reading.