

GREAT DEPRESSION LESSON PLAN

SUBMITTED BY

Michael Stevens

stevens@prsd.org

Pentucket Regional High School

24 Main Street

West Newbury, MA 01985

GRADE LEVEL- *This lesson is designed to be used by high school students studying American history.*

TIME FRAME- *This lesson can be employed in at least two ways. The original design is intended to use the documentary film **Brother Can You Spare a Dime**¹ as a component of a complete unit on the Great Depression. The film would be split and shown in short (ten to fifteen minute) segments over seven class days, in the course of a larger two to three week unit of study. In conjunction with this film, students will be engaged in a variety of activities including primary source readings, lectures discussions, viewing parts of other films such as **Cinderella Man; Riding the Rails, and FDR**, and a small research project. Each segment of **Brother Can You Spare a Dime** would be used as a visual “starter” or “hook” for the class that day. It is also possible to compress the viewing of the film to two or three class meetings.*

MASSACHUSETTS FRAMEWORKS

USII.11

USII.12

USII.13

ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to identify and analyze fundamental causes of the Great Depression. Students will be able describe conditions faced by individuals who lost their jobs, homes and savings as a result of the Great Depression.

Students will identify important individuals in politics, government, and culture during the 1930s.

Students will be able to analyze, describe and evaluate the major New Deal programs.

Students will be able to identify, describe and analyze the criticisms and critics of the new Deal.

Students will be able to describe and evaluate the contributions and roles of women, labor, and African-Americans during the 1930s.

Students will be able to assess the role of popular culture, movies, and sports in the 1930s.

¹ **Brother Can You Spare a Dime**, Visual Programme Systems LTD, Image Entertainment, 1974

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

The lesson is designed to have students look at the Great Depression through the eyes of the participants. Students will view extended video clips and examine primary source documents in order to gain a better understanding and perspective of the impact of the Great Depression on average Americans. Throughout the course, students have been asked to examine lives of average Americans. This film will be the first experience students will have to view popular culture as seen by people who lived through the era.

PROCEDURE

*The viewing of **Brother Can You Spare a Dime**, will be divided into six segments. Each segment will be approximately fifteen minutes in length. The segment will most often be preceded by a short primary source reading, assigned for homework the night before. The unit will open with a small group W.A.S.H. activity. This is used as a pre-assessment activity to determine what students may know or not know about the topic. In groups of four students will be asked to respond a set of four questions, **WHY** did the Great Depression happen? **WHAT** changed in the United States as a result of the Great Depression? **HOW** did the Great Depression impact the lives of average Americans? **WHAT IF** the Great Depression had not happened. After sharing their responses to this set of questions, students then will view a set of iconic photo images designed to evoke responses from the students and help them to connect knowledge of the time period. The six photos are a WPA Join The March poster; a photograph of a dust storm; a photograph of street apple sellers; a photo of FDR; a picture of a soup line; a recruiting poster for the CCC. After these opening activities the unit will begin. Each of the viewing segments of **Brother Can You Spare a Dime**, will be explained separately.*

SEGMENT ONE- *Students will prepare for this segment by reading the lyrics of **Brother Can You Spare a Dime**² and the first hand account “Hooverville” by Charles Walker³. The video segment starts at the beginning of the film and runs the first fifteen minutes. The segment focuses on the crash, the immediate aftermath, the widespread devastation and the Bonus Army. After viewing the video segment the class will revisit the question, why did the Depression happen and how did it impact the average American.*

SEGMENT TWO- *Prior to the second day students will read FDR’s **First Inaugural Address**⁴. The second (eleven minute 16:00 to 27:00) segment presents the election of 1932, bank runs, FDR’s inaugural and a variety of movie clips. Following the video, students will be asked to discuss the psychology of “fear” in politics and FDR’s use of media to attempt to allay those fears.*

² Robert McElvaine, *The Depression and the New Deal: A History in Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) p 36

³ Ibid, p28-29

⁴ Ibid, p 42-43

SEGMENT THREE- *This 18 minute (30:00 to 48:00) clip will be shown several days later in the unit. Prior to this viewing, students will have completed readings from the **Andover Emergency Committee**⁵ and song lyrics “WPA”⁶ The twelve minute clip concentrates on FDR’s NRA, CCC, and WPA programs Several supporting movie clips present the ideas of combating and “beating” the Great Depression. The post clip discussion will be centered on the role of public works projects, the purpose and function of specific programs, what some of the local projects were, and the long term success and failure of these programs.*

SEGMENT FOUR- *This 11 minute (51:00 to 1:02) segment will be shown the next day. Prior to this student will read Huey Long’s **Share the Wealth**⁷ address. The clip shows Huey Long, J. Edgar Hoover, gangsters (real and film), the 1936 campaign with several FDR speeches. The follow up activity for this segment will have students in small groups to examine the question of whether the United States could have accepted a dictator in the 1930s. Students will also listen to Woody Guthrie’s song **Pretty Boyd Floyd** and*

SEGMENT FIVE- *Prior to viewing this clip, students will read, **Clause 7A of the NRA and National Labor Relations Act**⁸. This 18 minute (1:02 to 1:22) segment includes FDR’s 1/3 of a nation speech, clips of the dust bowl, strike violence, and a number of short movie clips, and concludes with the Schmelling-Louis rematch. Two follow up questions for this segment will be Why the United States was able to avoid a violent uprising from labor during the era; and what was the role of mass entertainment (movies, sports, and radio) during the Great Depression. As noted above students will have watched the movie **Cinderella Man** earlier in this unit.*

SEGMENT SIX- *This final 10 minute (1:22 to 1:32) segment is entitled “I am an American” is an interesting, humorous hodgepodge of shots from the time period. Later in the clip the shots become more ominous with clips about the KKK, a Nazi zeppelin over New York city, and ending with a clip on Orson Welles’ War of the Worlds. There will be two discussion questions (one to be a written essay response) at the conclusion of the film. The first is What is an American? This is a question that is presented throughout the year as a foundation for the course. The second question is: How were Americans shaped by the Great Depression?*

LINKS TO THE UEH SEMINAR

*The film **Brother Can You Spare a Dime?** Was presnetd as part of the seminar. In addition, many of the primary source reading selections are taken from the book distributed for the seminar.*

⁵ “Andover Emergency Committee, Letter to the People of Andover, 1932” Andover Historical Society, Ms 499.

⁶ McElvaine, p 56-57

⁷ Ibid, p 97-98

⁸ Ibid, p 70-71

ASSESSMENT

Students will encounter a variety of pre-assessments (such as the W.A.S.H.), formative assessments (such as discussions) and summative assessments (such as written essay, unit exam) throughout the unit. The written essay in response to; How were Americans shaped by the Great Depression?, will serve as a direct assessment of the students understanding of the film.

PRIMARY DOCUMENTS USED

A number of primary sources are incorporated in the lesson plan starting with the film segments. Additionally a number the readings (referenced above) assigned are primary documents.

LOCAL RESOURCES USED

Students will learn about a number of local sites that were created by public works projects during the Great Depression. These include sites in Newburyport, Amesbury, Merrimac and Haverhill.