

Introduction for Parents or Teachers

This unit study is designed to give you a flexible way of helping your students learn about the Great Depression. All of the subject areas and activities are optional, though it is suggested to do at least the history section and do it first to give students a backdrop for additional projects. Some subjects include more than one activity so that you can adjust the study to fit the needs and interests of your students. You can work through the unit at any pace; it is designed to fit comfortably within two weeks or less. Above all, enjoy helping your students discover this period of history and what we can learn from it!



Great Depression

Welcome to our study of the Great Depression. You are probably thinking the topic sounds kind of, well, depressing. It is true that the Great Depression was a very sad and serious time for people in the United States and in many other countries around the world. It's also true that, just like in all times in history, good things happened, too. Many people worked hard to provide for their families when they could have just given up. They swallowed their pride and took jobs that they might not like and wouldn't have done before the depression in order to take care of the people they loved. They stuck together and helped each other, sometimes even sharing food with their neighbors when they didn't know where their own dinner would come from the next day. We're going to take a look at some of the different parts of the Great Depression and see what we can discover.

History

Let's start by building a timeline of events that happened before, during, and after the Great Depression. Put the following dates on your timeline:

- 1918: World War I ended
- 1928: President Herbert Hoover elected
- 1929: Stock Market crashed
- 1930: Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act
- 1930: Work began on the Boulder Dam/Hoover Dam
- 1932: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt elected
- 1933: Civilian Conservation Corps began
- 1933: Public Works Administration began
- 1935: Dust Bowl
- 1935: Works Progress Administration began
- 1939: World War II began in Europe
- 1941: Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, attacked; United States entered World War II

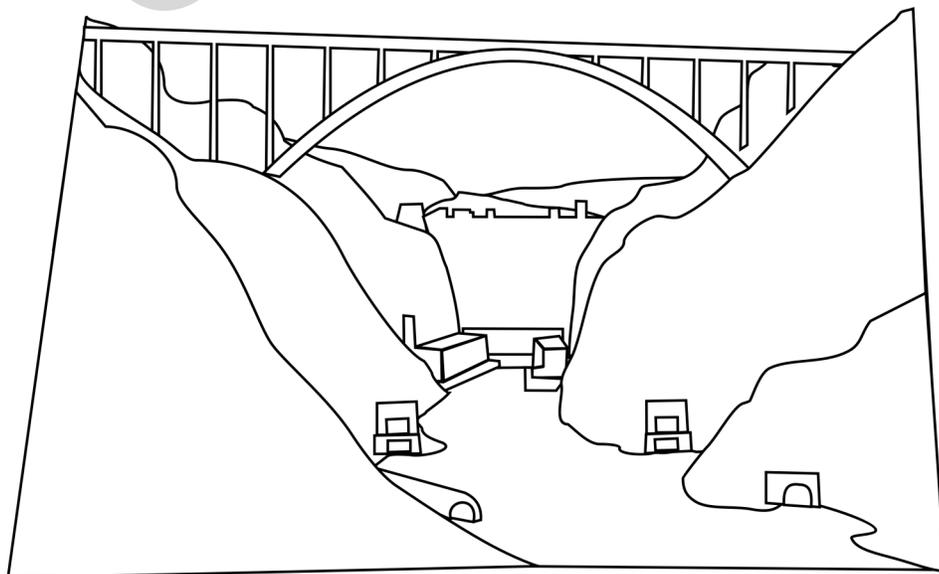
Now let's look at what those events had to do with the Great Depression. World War I was a terrible war that cost millions of lives. After the war, the economy of some nations did very well. Their businesses boomed, and they had a lot of goods and food available for other nations to buy. But so much food became available that countries didn't have to pay as much for it. This hurt American farmers who couldn't sell their crops for as much money as they used to.

Plus, after the war, the United States and other countries were in debt. They had spent millions of dollars to fight the war. In order to try to pay off the debt, the U.S. government made some decisions that ended up causing inflation, which is when prices go way up. This spelled even more trouble for the farmers. Now they had to pay more for the seed, machines, and other materials needed to grow their crops, but they got less money than before when they sold them.

In 1928, President Herbert Hoover was elected. He was already known around the world for work he had done in government before. He had organized a team that helped get more than 100,000 Americans back home when they were stranded in Europe when World War I broke out. He helped organize food relief for people in Belgium during World War I and helped save millions of lives. He worked to organize much in the government, helped grow the airplane business, and helped get workers treated more fairly by their employers.

In October 1929, the stock market crashed. There were many reasons why, but one reason was because people had gotten so used to having lots of money after World War I that they made some poor choices and risked it all to try to make even more. When it didn't work out, they lost all their money, which caused other people to lose money. One business or bank going out of business affected another and another, and soon, the whole country was feeling the effects of the Great Depression.

President Hoover tried many things to help the nation get back on track. He worked with Congress on the Smoot-Hawley Act, which raised the prices on the goods other countries bought from the United States. He also got work started on the Boulder Dam, which created jobs and supplied water to people in the Southwest. It was later renamed the Hoover Dam in his honor.

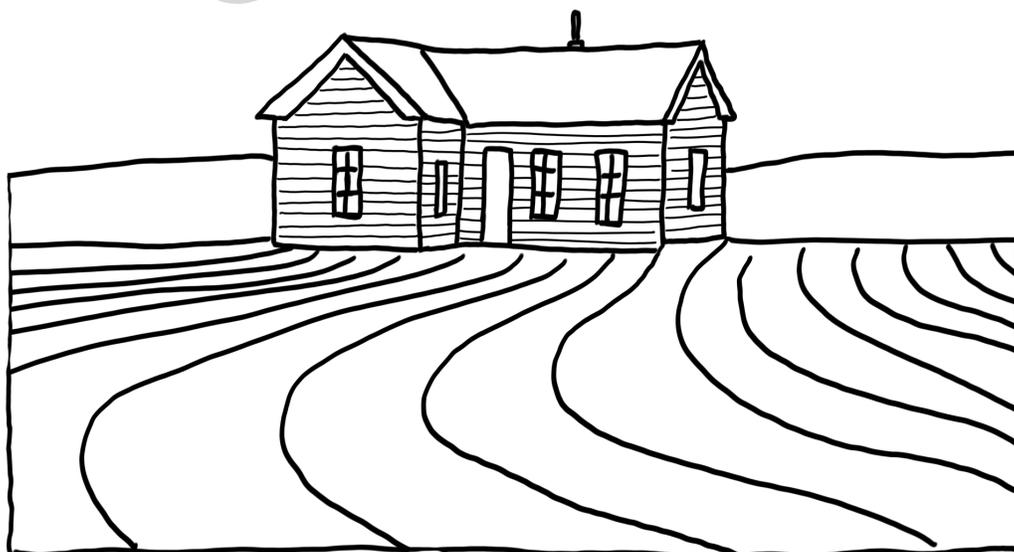


The Great Depression continued, however, and in 1932, President Hoover lost his reelection race to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. President Roosevelt started several agencies to try to create jobs and provide for people including the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Public Works Administration, and the Works Progress Administration.

During the 1930s, terrible droughts and windstorms hit the Midwest and destroyed many crops and farms.

There isn't a certain date that you can say the Great Depression ended, but businesses started to grow again after World War II started in Europe in 1939 and the United States entered the war in 1941. Businesses had to manufacture everything the military needed.

Now, do some more reading about the 1930s and early 1940s. Try to find at least four more dates you can add to your timeline.



Art

During the Great Depression, there weren't many jobs that were safe from the effects of the depression. Businessmen, clerks, lawyers, farmers, artists, and everyone felt it. The Works Progress Administration (which was later called the Work Projects Administration), put people to work building community buildings such as hospitals and schools. They also built bridges, roads, and parks. The agency also employed artists who were out of work to create paintings and other art that made communities more beautiful.

Imagine you are an artist during the Great Depression. You are given the job of creating something to make one of the buildings in your town more beautiful. What building would you pick? What would you create?

The agency also gave jobs to writers. They wrote books and advertisements to convince people to come visit their towns or cities. How would you get people to visit your community?

Now create a picture or representation of the art you would create to help your community. You can draw it, paint it, or create it digitally or in any other format you like. When you are done, write about what you've created and write a few paragraphs to convince people from other towns to come and see it.

