

Student Handout 1

Great Depression Scenarios

Directions: The following scenarios represent the experiences of different people during the Great Depression era in the United States. Read the scenarios and choose three to respond to. Put yourself in the place of that person or group.

Scenario 1: You are a factory owner in Detroit. Over the last two years you have seen your profits drop tremendously. Although you are producing the greatest amount of products ever at a decent price, people are just not buying.

What will you do? Why? _____

Scenario 2: You are a wheat farmer in Oklahoma. You have been farming your whole life. Your farmland is turning to dust due to a lack of rain and poor farming practices. You are out of money and have been unable to grow or sell anything for a year. You have 5 kids and a wife.

What will you do? Why? _____

Scenario 3: You are a Mexican-American who was born and raised in California. You are a law-abiding citizen who has been working at a ship-yard. You have been hearing rumors of a government plan to take away your job and send you to Mexico so that a "real American" can take your place.

What will you do? Why? _____

Scenario 4: You are a mother of three young children living in Sacramento, California. Your husband has been out of work for 18 months and you are being evicted from your home. Your sister in San Francisco has offered to take your children until you and your husband find work.

What will you do? Why? _____

Scenario 5: You are a sheriff in Arizona. Every day numerous unemployed young men from across the country are coming to your city either by train or on foot. The local citizens are fearful that these outsiders are going to ruin the town.

What will you do? Why? _____

Scenario 6: You are a teenager from Harlem, New York. Your father and most of the other African-American men from your community have lost their jobs. Many have lost their homes since they cannot afford to make the payments.

What will you do? Why? _____

Student Handout 2

Historical Background Reading on the Impact of the Great Depression

Directions: Read Document 1 and take notes below of important facts and details from each section of the document. After, answer the focus question based on your analysis of the important facts/details you made notations from the reading.

Focus Question: How would you characterize the impact of the Great Depression?

Life during Depression	Latino/African American	Farmers	Political Movements	Culture during Depression
Facts/Details • • • •	Facts/Details • • • •	Facts/Details • • • •	Facts/Details • • • •	Facts/Details • • • •

Answer
Focus
Question

Background Reading: The Impact of the Great Depression

Directions: Read the information below and take notes on Student Handout 2.

Notes/Questions

The Great Depression began in the late 1920s and continued through the 1930's, impacting the United States economically, socially, and politically.

Life During the Depression

The Great Depression changed the lives of millions of Americans. People in cities lost their jobs and homes, lived in shantytowns, and got food from soup kitchens and bread lines. David Kennedy, Professor of History from Stanford University writes:

In that era, the typical household had only one wage earner in it. So when we talk about one in four people being unemployed, we're really talking about one in four households in the country with no visible means of support, no reliable income. Today the typical household has two wage earners.

Families suffered as men became hoboes riding freight trains or hitchhiking across the U.S. looking for work. Many women were forced to look for jobs for the first time and often for low wages. Suicide rates rose by 30%, alcoholism rates went up, and the numbers of people who were sent to state mental hospitals from nervous break downs increased by 50%. Children's health suffered and some children died from diseases caused by their malnutrition. From 1929-1939, over 250,000 young people left home in hope and desperation looking for work and leaving families forever. Many children resorted to writing letters to Eleanor Roosevelt begging for her old clothes. Every element of society in every region of the country was touched by the social and economic impact of the Great Depression.

Latino and African American Experiences of the Great Depression

The economic collapse of the Great Depression impacted people of color. Latinos were targeted for attacks and deportation (being forced to leave the country). Kennedy writes:

... there were a lot of forcible deportations of Mexicans, and Mexican-Americans, both citizen and non-citizen alike. And although the exact numbers may not be precisely known, at least tens of thousands and perhaps hundreds of thousands of Mexican immigrants who'd been in the country a decade or so were exported back to Mexico, most of them against their will in the 1930s.

African American unemployment was over 50%. In many instances African Americans were the last hired and the first fired. In northern cities like Chicago, the vast majority of African Americans were far below the poverty line earning less than \$1,000 a year. Furthermore they faced discrimination by local officials when attempting to receive government relief.

Notes/Questions

The Life of Farmers During the Depression

The Dust Bowl changed the life of the farmer and the demographics of the United States. To grow more crops during World War I, farmers removed grass and trees from huge areas of the Great Plains from Canada to Mexico. The land was quickly exhausted of nutrients and became useless for much farming. A drought for several years in the early 1930s turned soil to dust; high winds at the same time blew dust for hundreds of miles. Timothy Egan account of events of the Dust Bowl in his book, *The Worst Hard Times*.

... a storm in May 1934 carried the wind blown shards of the Great Plains over much of the nation. In Chicago, twelve million tons of dust fell. New York, Washington—even ships at sea; three hundred miles off the Atlantic coast—were blanketed in brown.

With more people unable to buy food in the cities, farmers found that their already low income dropped by one half. Many farmers lost their farms because of low crop prices and huge debts. Farm foreclosure sales grew by 25%. Hundreds of thousands of people packed their belongings and left the Great Plains to look for work. Egan states:

At its peak, the Dust Bowl covered one hundred million acres. An area the size of Pennsylvania... More than a quarter-million people fled the Dust Bowl in the 1930s. . . . American meteorologists rated the Dust Bowl the number one weather event of the twentieth century . . . historians say it was the nation's worst prolonged environmental disaster.

The influx of workers to migrant states drove wages down and strained social services, particularly in California. Many Californians looked down on the migrants, calling them "Okies" and posted signs along the highways announcing that they were not welcome and should go back where they came.

Political Movements During the Great Depression

No other twentieth century president enjoyed the levels of popular admiration than President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Yet by 1935, his New Deal legislation of the previous years had aroused growing voices of criticism on the left and right of the political spectrum. Persisting severe economic difficulties fueled the rise of powerful demagogues (leaders who use emotion and/or prejudice to gain power) who offered alternative solutions to the nation's economic problems. Senator Huey Long offered a "Share the Wealth" Program of heavy taxation of the wealthy and large handouts to the poor. His plan attracted support across the country from citizens who bitterly resented the uneven distribution of wealth. Ambitious to be president, Long was outspoken about the shortcomings of the New Deal.

At the same time, Dr. Francis E. Townsend, a California physician, called for a \$200 pension for every person over 60 years old. By 1935, the Townsend Plan had developed into a mass movement, winning the support of at least 10 million Americans who joined Townsend clubs.

A third critic of President Roosevelt, Father Charles E. Coughlin, a popular radio priest in Detroit, began to speak out against the New Deal. He was convinced that there were serious flaws in the nation's banking system. Father Coughlin called for the nationalization, or government ownership of the banks.

An even greater pressure for a change in the president's New Deal programs came from the Supreme Court. In 1935, the Court began to rule New Deal programs unconstitutional or not allowed by the U.S. constitution.

Culture of the Great Depression

The sufferings of people during the Great Depression changed the popular culture of the 1930s, as people sought inexpensive and escapist leisure activities. Spectator sports and amusement parks remained popular, but fewer people could afford to attend. Instead, family and friends played miniature golf, softball, pinball machines, and the new board game *Monopoly*.

The most popular leisure activity at home became listening to the radio. Even during this hard economic time, radio sales increased during the 1930s. President Roosevelt used this new technology to win the support of the people by giving radio speeches which were called *Fireside Chats*. Entertainment on the radio included comedians, popular music, and shows such as *The Lone Ranger* and *Little Orphan Annie*. When people listened to the programs, they were able to temporarily forget their problems.

Another popular activity which grew during the 1930s was going to the movies. By the end of the 1930s, more people were going to the movies than in the 1920s. Most movies provided an escape for viewers. These movies, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *the Wizard of Oz*, and *Gone with the Wind*, allowed people to dismiss from their minds the economic hardship surrounding them.

Conclusion

In the late 1920s and through the 1930s the economic collapse tore apart the lives of millions of people. The Great Depression cut a wide path through the U.S. society, leaving an indelible imprint on every American. Day after day, for a decade, the human impact of the Great Depression could be observed in every region of the United States.

Student Handout 4

Data Analysis Graphic Organizer

Directions: Complete the following organizer as you analyze the graphs on Document 2.

Focus Question: What does the data tell you about people's lives during the Great Depression?

Graph Information	Which of the following sentences about the graph is true? Circle the correct answer.	What might be some possible explanations for this?	Graph Category
<p><u>Title:</u> <i>Personal Income</i></p>	<p>A. Personal income increased to record levels in the 1930s. B. Personal income decreased from 1929 to 1933. C. An individual's income was about \$400 a month in 1932. D. Taxes caused a decrease in personal income in the 1930s.</p>		<p>Economic Political Social</p>
<p><u>Title:</u> <i>Unemployment</i></p>	<p>A. Unemployment levels remained the same throughout the 1930s. B. Unemployment decreased drastically from 1930 to 1935 C. Unemployment increased dramatically from 1929 to 1933. D. Unemployment levels were highest in the northeast.</p>		<p>Economic Political Social</p>
<p><u>Title:</u> <i>PCE: Food</i></p>	<p>A. Food prices increased in the 1930s. B. Food expenditures decreased in the 1930s. C. Food expenditures cost the government more in the 1930s. D. People spent about \$15,000 for food in 1931.</p>		<p>Economic Political Social</p>

Student Handout 4

Graph Information	Which of the following sentences about the graph is true? Circle the correct answer.	What might be some possible explanations for this?	Graph Category
<p><u>Title:</u></p> <p><i>PCE: Gas/Oil</i></p>	<p>A. Fuel consumption decreased in the 1930s.</p> <p>B. Gas/oil expenditures rose in the 1930s.</p> <p>C. An individual's average expenditure of gas/oil in 1936 was less than \$2000 a year.</p> <p>D. The price of gas/oil increased in the 1930s.</p>		<p>Economic</p> <p>Political</p> <p>Social</p>
<p><u>Title:</u></p> <p><i>PCE: Housing</i></p>	<p>A. Housing expenditures rose throughout the 1930s.</p> <p>B. Housing prices declined on average during the 1930s.</p> <p>C. Home sales declined to record levels in 1936.</p> <p>D. In the 1930s home sales decreased by over \$8,000.</p>		<p>Economic</p> <p>Political</p> <p>Social</p>
<p><u>Title:</u></p> <p><i>PCE: Entertainment</i></p>	<p>A. More people went to the movies from 1932 to 1934.</p> <p>B. Spending for entertainment in the 1930s returned to pre-Great Depression levels.</p> <p>C. Movie tickets prices increased during the 1930s.</p> <p>D. More people attended spectator sports than movies.</p>		<p>Economic</p> <p>Political</p> <p>Social</p>

Student Handout 4

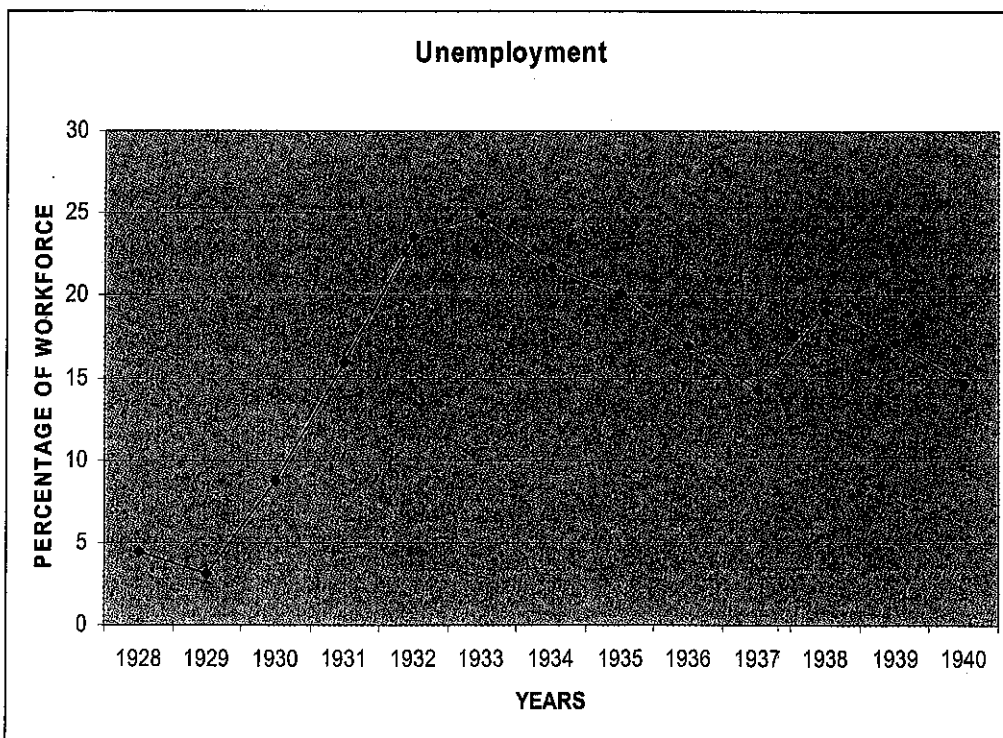
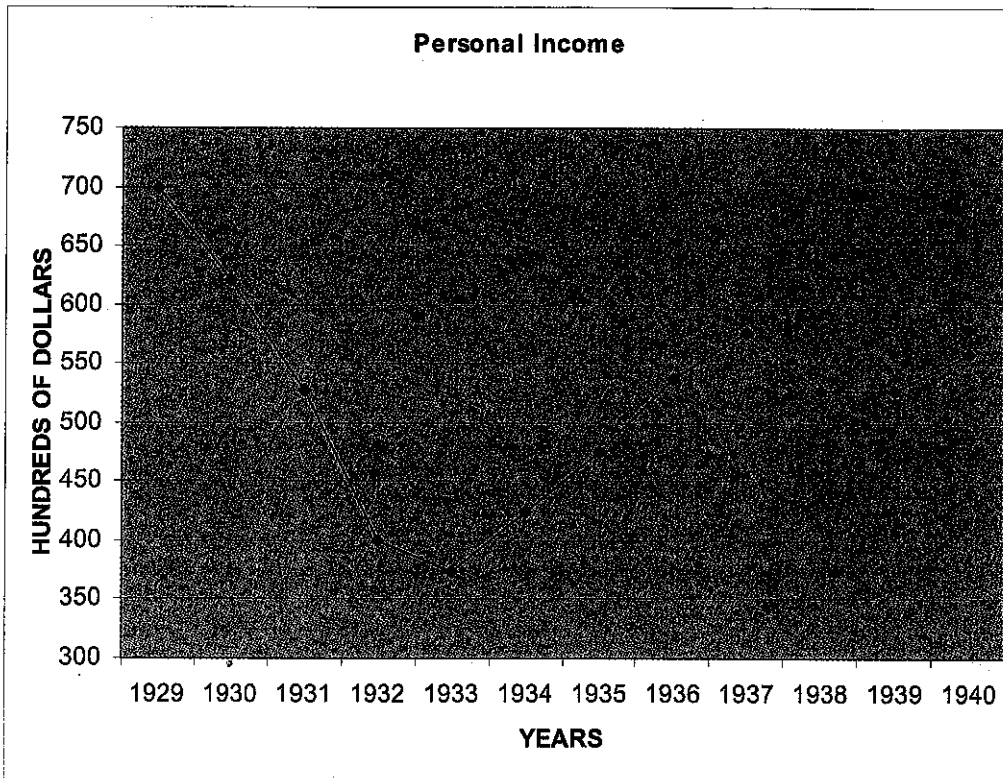
Graph Information	Which of the following sentences about the graph is true? Circle the correct answer.	What might be some possible explanations for this?	Graph Category
<p><u>Title:</u></p> <p><i>Population Net Change by State</i></p>	<p>A. The population went down in California.</p> <p>B. The population went up in all states.</p> <p>C. The population rose in California between 1930 and 1940.</p> <p>D. The population stayed the same during the 1930s in all states.</p>		<p>Economic</p> <p>Political</p> <p>Social</p>
<p><u>Title:</u></p> <p><i>Membership of Political Movements 1935</i></p>	<p>A. The Share Our Wealth Club increased in membership from 1935 to 1938.</p> <p>B. Most of the political movements in the 1930s were socialist movements.</p> <p>C. The Townsend Club was mainly people from the Mid-west.</p> <p>D. Millions of people were politically active in the 1930s.</p>		<p>Economic</p> <p>Political</p> <p>Social</p>

Focus Question: What does the data tell you about people's lives during the Great Depression?

Document 2

Data Analysis of the Great Depression

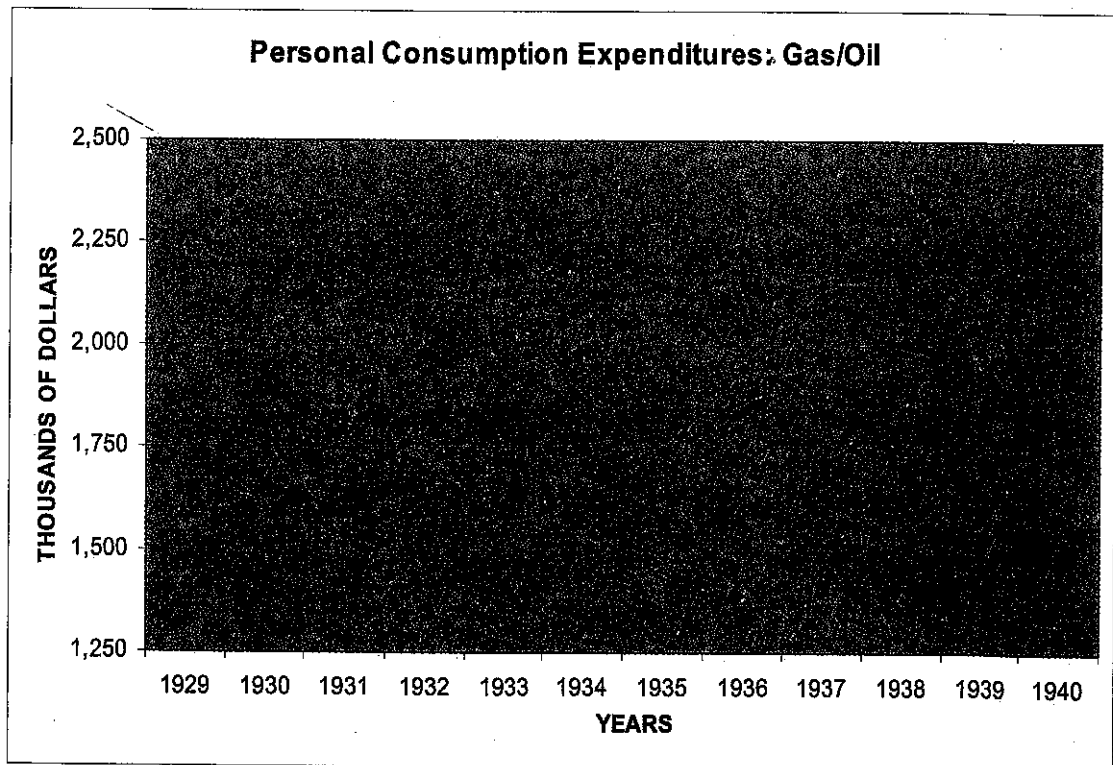
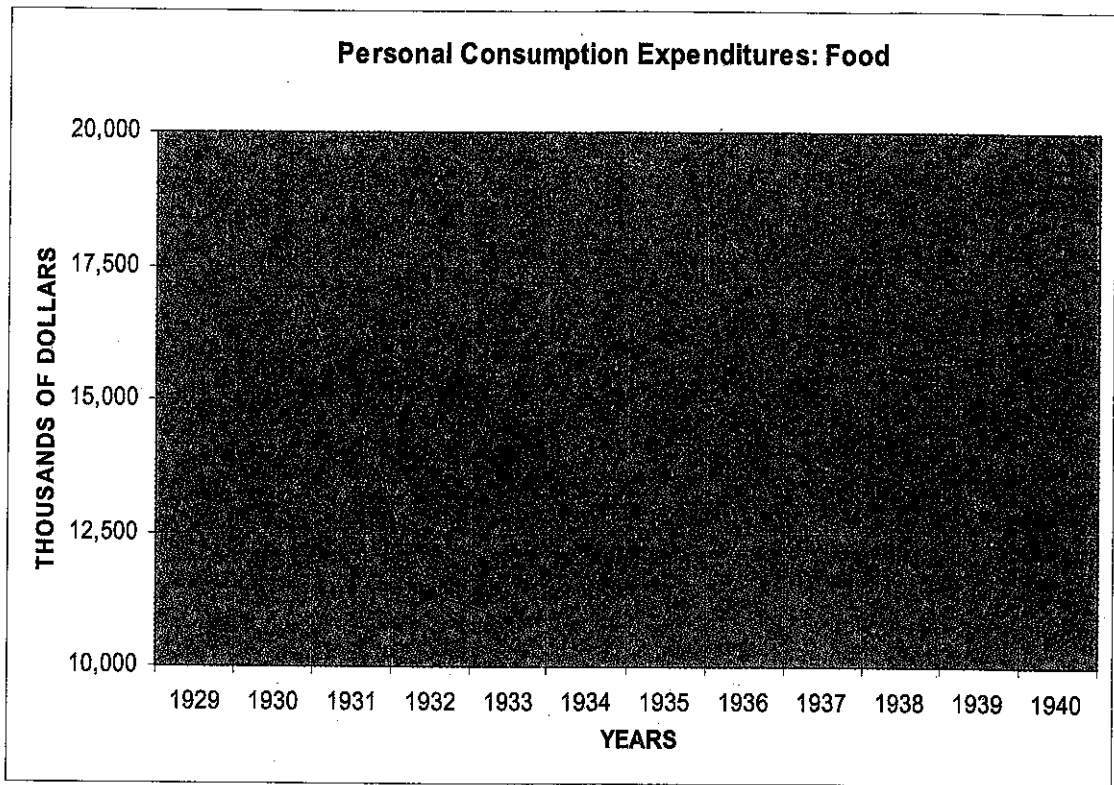
Directions: Analyze the graphs and complete Student Handout 4.



Document 2

Data Analysis of the Great Depression

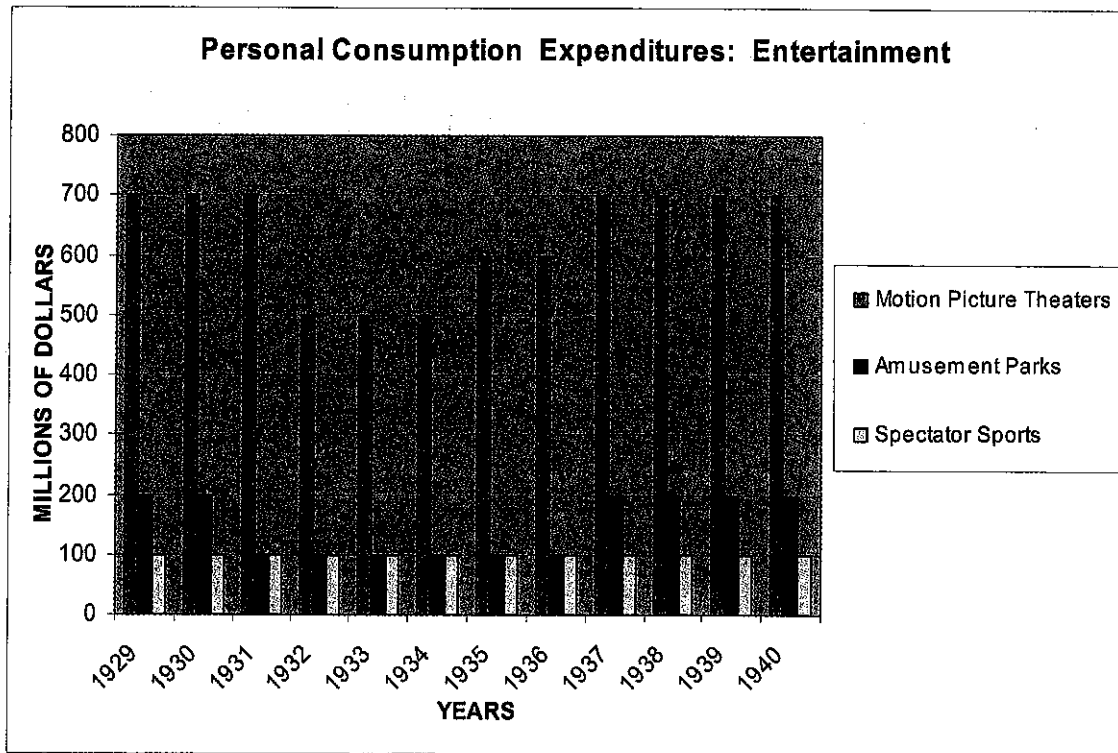
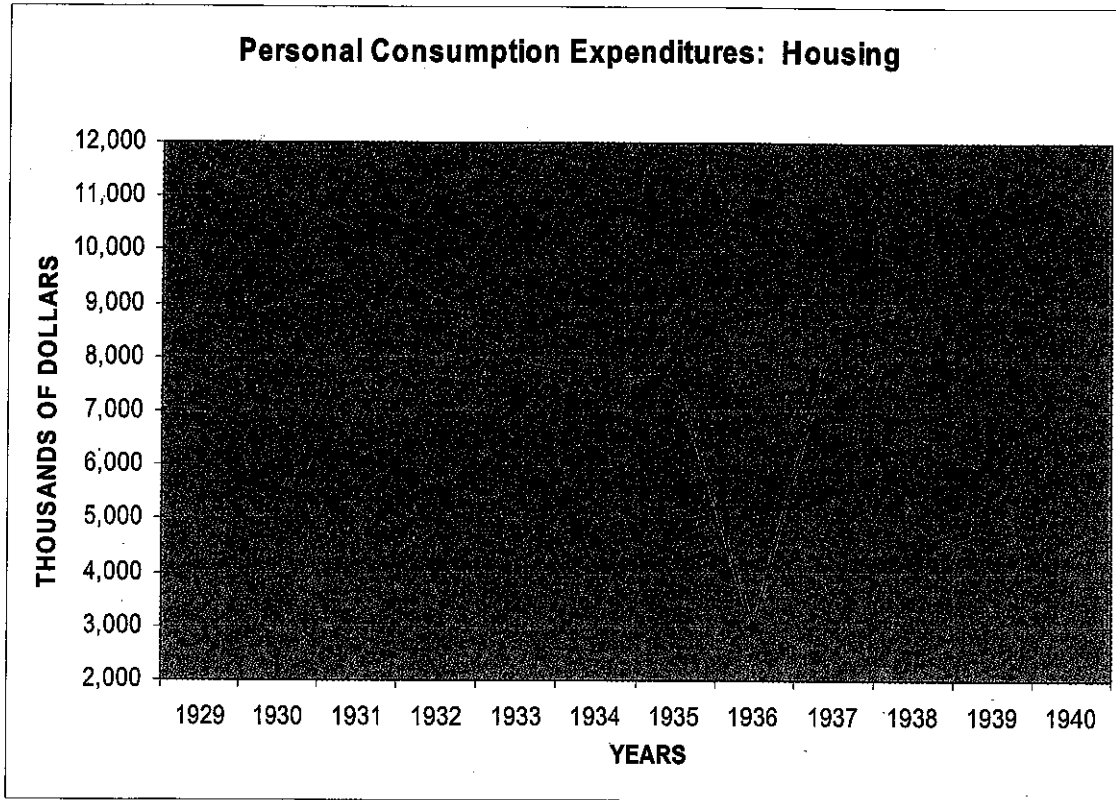
Directions: Analyze the graphs and complete Student Handout 4.



Document 2

Data Analysis of the Great Depression

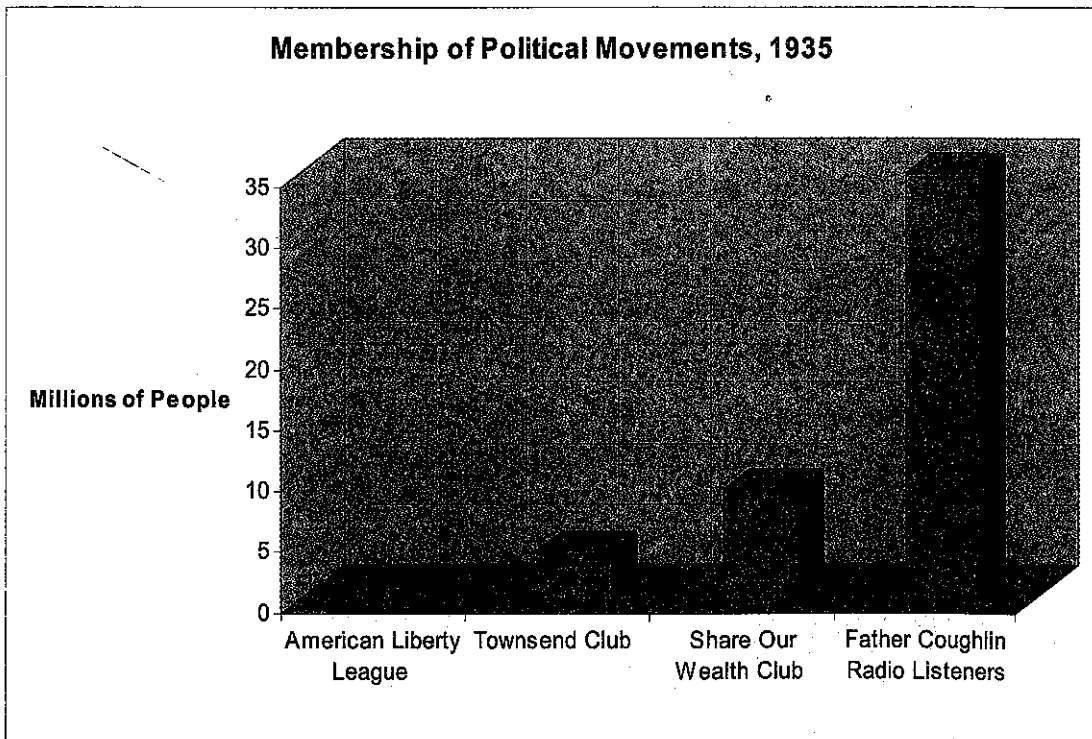
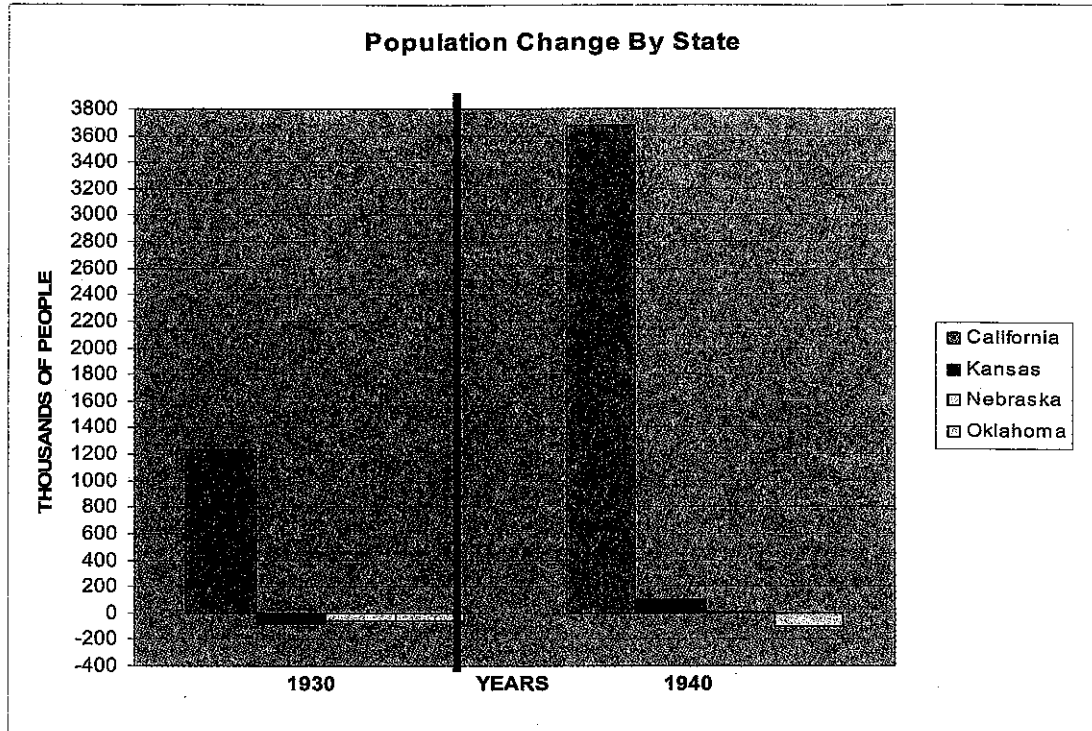
Directions: Analyze the graphs and complete Student Handout 4.



Document 2

Data Analysis of the Great Depression

Directions: Analyze the charts and complete Student Handout 4.



Document Analysis Graphic Organizer

Directions: Complete the following organizer as you analyze Documents 3 - 11.

Focus Question: To what extent did the Great Depression impact the United States?

Document Information	What is the main idea of the document?	How does the document show the impact of the Great Depression on people?	What is the evidence from the document that supports your claim?	Circle Document Category
<u>Document 3</u> <u>Source:</u>				Economic Political Social
<u>Document 4</u> <u>Source:</u>				Economic Political Social
<u>Document 5</u> <u>Source:</u>				Economic Political Social

Student Handout 5

Document Analysis Graphic Organizer

Directions: Complete the following organizer as you analyze Documents 3 - 11.

Focus Question: To what extent did the Great Depression impact the United States?

Document Information	What is the main idea of the document?	How does the document show the impact of the Great Depression on people?	What is the evidence from the document?	Circle Document Category
<u>Document 6</u> Source:				Economic Political Social
<u>Document 7</u> Source:				Economic Political Social
<u>Document 8</u> Source:				Economic Political Social

Document Analysis Graphic Organizer

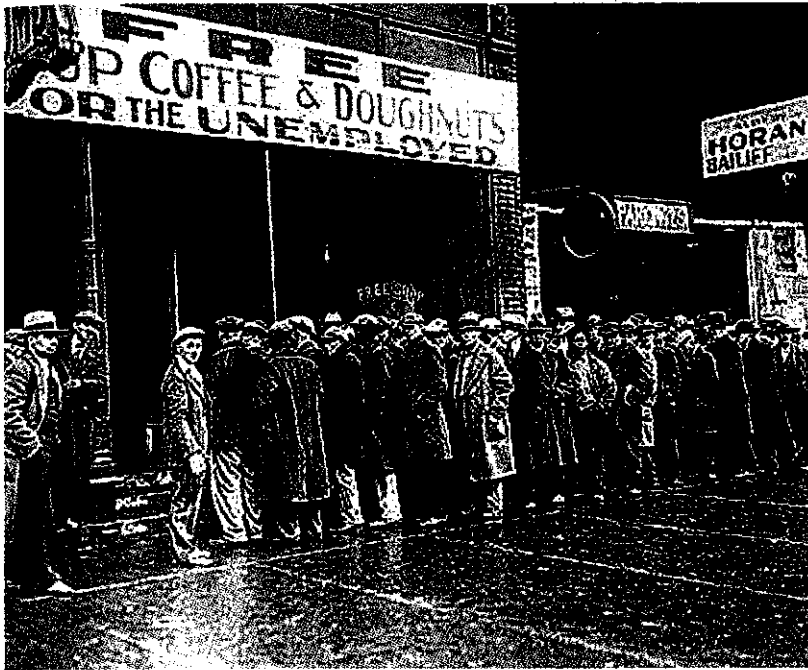
Directions: Complete the following organizer as you analyze Documents 3 - 11.

Focus Question: To what extent did the Great Depression impact the United States?

Document Information	What is the main idea of the document?	How does the document show the impact of the Great Depression on people?	What is the evidence from the document?	Circle Document Category
<u>Document 9</u> <u>Source:</u>				Economic Political Social
<u>Document 10</u> <u>Source:</u>				Economic Political Social
<u>Document 11</u> <u>Source:</u>				Economic Political Social

Document 3

Primary Sources: Impact of the Great Depression



During the Great Depression soup kitchens, like this one sponsored by Chicago gangster Al Capone, provided meals for the unemployed.

Photo by Social Security Administration in 1935



The Great Depression was hardest on people of color. African American unemployment was over 50% during the 1930s.

Photo by Margaret Bourke-White in 1937

Document 4

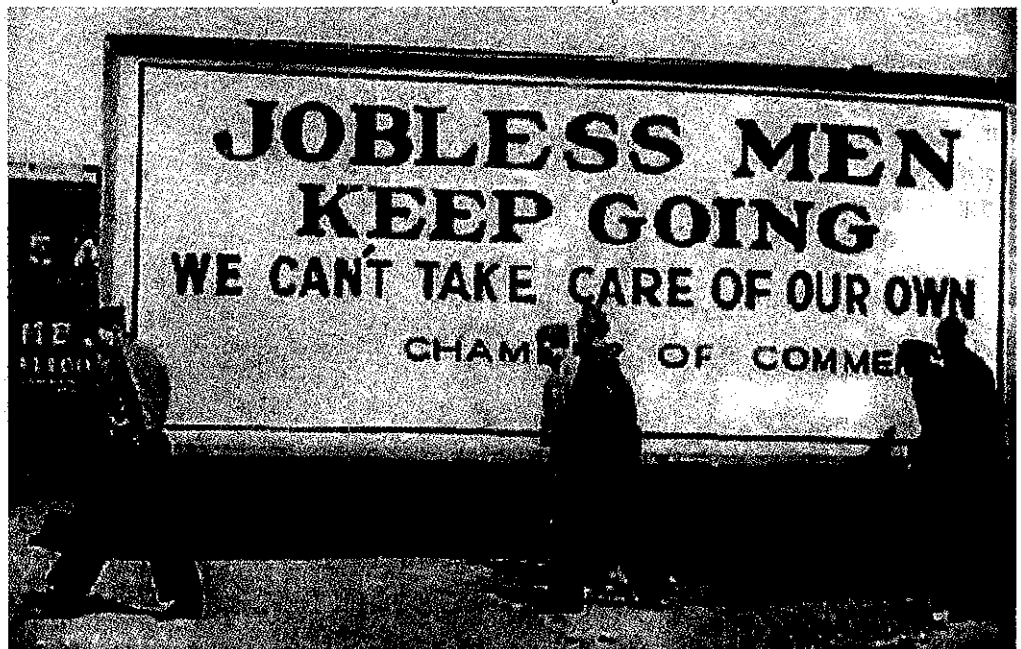
Primary Sources: Impact of the Great Depression



The Dust Bowl of the 1930s sent many families from Oklahoma west toward California. These migrants were referred to as "Okies" and populated migrant work camps throughout California. Many drove in their automobiles referred to as "jalopies".

Photo by Dorothea Lange, February 1937

Hundreds of thousands of migrants descended upon California, though they were not always welcomed.



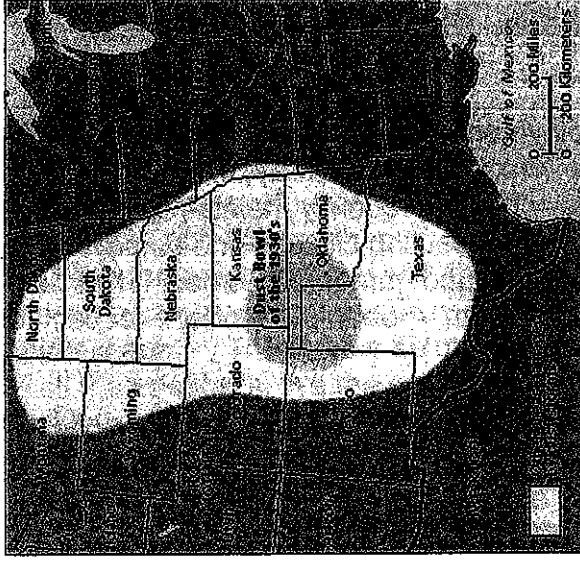
WPA Photo by John E. Allen

Primary Sources: Impact of the Great Depression



Photo from the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, 1935

The term Dust Bowl refers to an environmental disaster during the Great Depression in the United States. As a result of poor farming techniques and severe drought, winds carried off the topsoil of a large area in the Great Plains, resulting in an environmental disaster known as the Dust Bowl. This photo shows an immense dust cloud threatening a number of houses.



Map of the Dust Bowl, 1930s

The Dust Bowl of the 1930s lasted about a decade. Its primary area of impact was on the southern Plains, but its effects were felt throughout the Midwest. The agricultural devastation helped to lengthen the Great Depression.

Document 6

Primary Sources: Impact of the Great Depression

The study of the human cost of unemployment reveals that a new class of poor and dependents is rapidly rising among the ranks of young sturdy, ambitious laborers, artisans, mechanics, and professionals, who until recently maintained a relatively high standard of living and were the stable self-respecting citizens and taxpayers of the state. Unemployment and loss of income have ravaged numerous homes. It has broken the spirit of their members, undermined their health, robbed them of self-respect, and destroyed their efficiency and employability.

. . . The law must step in and brand as criminals those who have neither desire nor inclination [desire to do something] to violate accepted standards of society. . . . Physical privation [lack or loss of things one needs i.e. shelter/food] undermines body and heart. . . . Idleness destroys not only purchasing power, lowering the standards of living, but also destroys efficiency and finally breaks the spirit.

Report of the California Unemployment Commission, 1932

Document 7

Primary Sources: Impact of the Great Depression

It was the Depression; there was no work. I was a burden to Mother and Gus, my step-father. I took the blanket and hurried home. I said nothing to Mother then only that I was going down to Scott's [store] to get a flat fifty box of cigarettes. Ordinarily I was reluctant to add to the delinquent [past due] account; today I found abundant courage. Besides the tin of cigarettes, I asked for two sacks of Golden Grain. "Charge it," I said. Scott looked taken aback but said nothing.

I returned home and told Mother I was leaving. She didn't fight it, but she was sad. Mother owned no suitcase or tote. All she had was a black satin bag, the size of a pillow case. I jammed my new sleeping bag inside it, three or four pairs of socks, shorts, an old sweater, the cigarettes and sacks of Golden Grain. Mother made two sandwiches. She went to her purse and gave me all the money she had: 72 cents. . .

High school graduate from Duluth, Minnesota, 1933

Document 8

Primary Sources: Impact of the Great Depression

It was for us the day of judgment. The *marciales*, deputy sheriffs, arrived in late afternoon when the men were returning home from working in the lemon groves. They started arresting people and holding them in the *rebote*, fronton [jai alai court]. The deputies rode around the neighborhood with their sirens wailing and advising people to surrender themselves to the authorities. They barricaded all the exits to the *colonia* so that no one could escape. . . There were so many arrestees; the fronton was not large enough to hold all the prisoners. We the women cried, the children screamed, others ran hither and yon with the deputies in hot pursuit yelling at them that their time had come and to surrender.

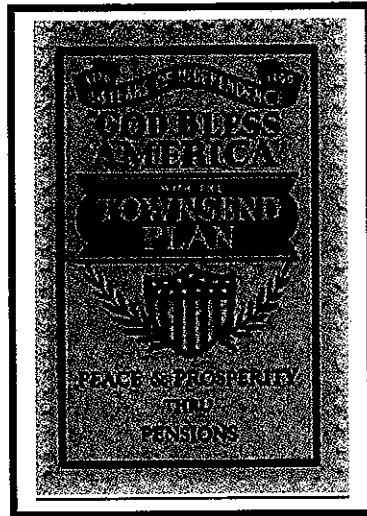
Maria Luna, witness to a deportation raid, 1931

Document 9

Primary Sources: Impact of the Great Depression

It is estimated that the population of the age of 60 and above in the United States is somewhere between nine and twelve million. I suggest that the national government retire all who reach that age on a monthly pension of \$200 a month or more, on condition that they spend the money as they get it. This will insure an even distribution throughout the nation of two or three billion of fresh money each month. Thereby assuring a healthy and brisk state of business, comparable to that we enjoyed during war times.

Dr. Townsend's Plan in a letter to the editor, Long Beach Press-Telegram,
September 30, 1933

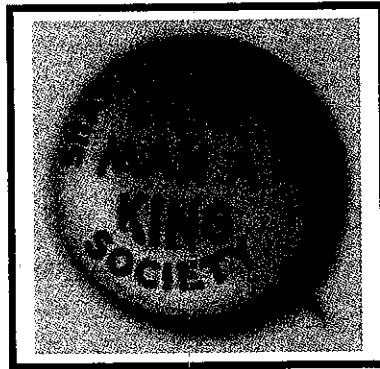


Document 10

Primary Sources: Impact of the Great Depression

The great wealth and abundance of this great land belongs to all of us . . . we propose laws [that use estate and income taxes to ensure that no family owns more than \$5 million in property or earns more than \$1 million in income] By limiting the size of the fortunes and incomes of the big men, we will throw into the government treasury the money and property from which we will care for the millions of people who have nothing; and with this money we will provide a home and the comforts of home, with such common conveniences as radio and automobile, for every family in America, free of debt.

Radio address by Senator Huey Long describing his "Share the Wealth" plan,
January 1935



Document 11

Primary Sources: Impact of the Great Depression

Continued influx of thousands of indigents from the Middle West into various California counties, adding to increasing relief burdens, has resulted in the calling of a statewide conference at Los Angeles to be held during the week of July 19. . .

L.A. County Hit

Los Angeles County is the most seriously hit of all the counties of the state. According to Supervisor McDonough, 19.36 percent of Los Angeles County's estimated population of 2,366,904 is on relief.

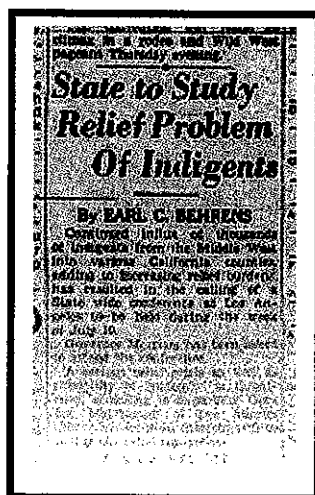
The Los Angeles Supervisors, through County Charities Superintendent Rex Thomson and Supervisor John Anson Ford, both of whom are now in Washington, have reported to the Federal authorities that 2,946,614 persons entered California by automobile during the 12-month period ending April 30 last. Of this total, 74 percent indicated Southern California as their destination, and a great proportion of these persons needed manual employment.

Dust Bowl Refugees

That approximately 70,000 persons, mostly families from the dust bowl areas, are overtaxing relief and health agencies in the San Joaquin Valley was reported by Harold H. Robertson, Field Secretary of the Gospel Army, a national social and relief body, has reported to the Supervisors. This report has hastened the calling of the relief conference, Supervisor McDonough announced.

*State to Study Relief Problems of Indigents
San Francisco Chronicle, July 11, 1937*

Courtesy of The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco

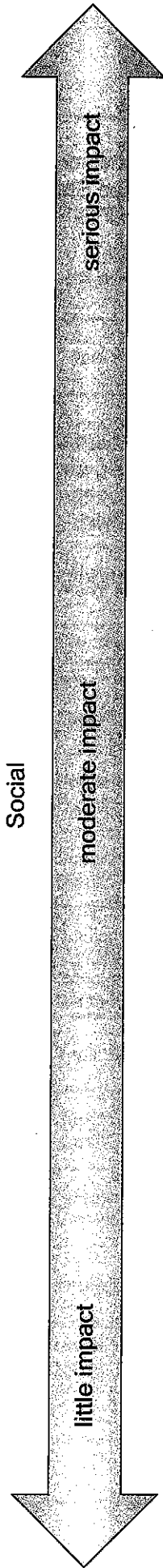


Student Handout 6

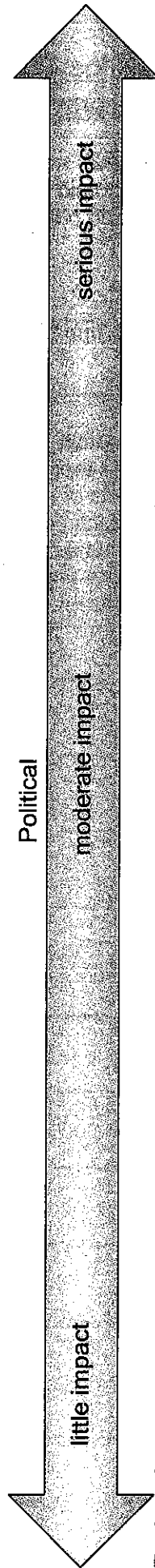
Effects of the Great Depression Spectrums

Prompt: To what extent did the Great Depression impact the United States?

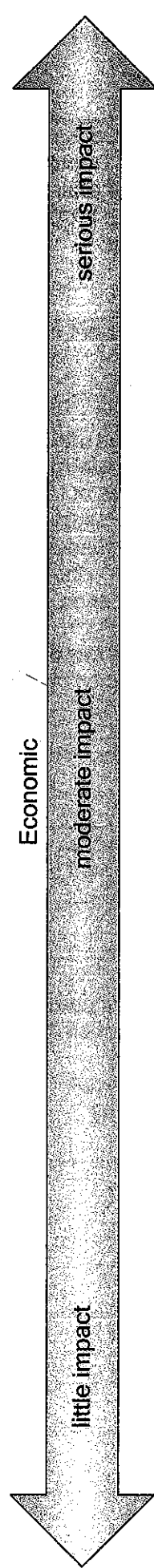
Directions: Mark X on each spectrum below based on your evaluation of the evidence. Explain why you placed an X where you did.



Explanation:



Explanation:



Explanation:

Student Handout 7

Writing Prompt and Task Sheet

Historical Background

The Great Depression which began in 1929 was the greatest economic crisis in U.S. history. This period altered the political and economic institutions in the United States. The Great Depression brought with it deep social and personal problems as well as new strains of thought and culture.

Prompt

To what extent did the Great Depression impact the United States?

Tasks

1. Write an introduction in which you explain the background of the Great Depression.
2. End the introductory paragraph with a thesis sentence which takes a clear historical position.
3. Address at least three specific impacts of the Great Depression on the United States.
4. Write multiple body paragraphs in which you support your thesis with appropriate evidence.
5. Use evidence from multiple documents and cite sources.
6. Write a conclusion in which you restate your thesis and add any additional insight, historical significance or connections to the present.

Suggested terms to use in your writing

social
economic
political
cultural
impact
significant
Great Depression
unemployment
foreclosure
drought
Dust Bowl
Okie
personal income
political movements
breadlines
soup kitchens
shantytowns
welfare

Student Handout 8

Writing Graphic Organizer

Paragraph 1	Historical Context: 2-3 sentence summary of the Great Depression.	
	Thesis: Your position on the impact of the Great Depression on the United States.	
Paragraph 2	Main Idea <i>Impact 1</i>	Topic Sentence
		Supporting Detail/Evidence
		Supporting Detail/Evidence
		Analysis
		Concluding Sentence
Paragraph 3	Main Idea <i>Impact 2</i>	Topic Sentence
		Supporting Detail/Evidence
		Supporting Detail/Evidence
		Analysis
		Concluding Sentence
Paragraph 4	Main Idea <i>Impact 3</i>	Topic Sentence
		Supporting Detail/Evidence
		Supporting Detail/Evidence
		Analysis
		Concluding Sentence
Paragraph 5	<i>Restate Thesis</i>	
	<i>Review Main Points</i>	
	<i>Final Thought</i>	