



STINGING DUST & FORGOTTEN LIVES

THE DUST BOWL



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Lest We Forget

Subjects:

Geography, American History, Social Studies

Background:

Vast lands were available...Crops were planted and harvested. The economy was strong as money poured into the hands of the producers. Then, the economy crashed. The rains stopped and the people felt the stinging dust. In the aftermath, thousands were left to struggle. Lest we forget the warning from forgotten lives.

As the dust settled across the Plains, inhabitants began to assess the damage. For as far as the eye could see, it was a scene from science fiction. Desolate and silent. Colorless and gritty. Questions of the future would be on the minds of nature's victims. Or were they humanity's victims? The Dust Bowl of the 1930s was an extraordinary period in environmental and human history. It was a benchmark between human complacency and changes that would protect the landscape from further degradation.

In this lesson, students will examine the causes of the Dust Bowl and the lives that were affected by the nearly decade long drought.

Opening Activity:

Prior to viewing the excerpts or the film in its entirety, ask students to take out a sheet of paper and complete a writing assignment that answers the following questions:

- What do you believe is the force behind expansion of population?
- What do people think are the benefits of expansion?
- What are the effects of drought on humans?
- How do humans react to environmental disasters (drought, climate change, or floods) today?
- Describe how a major drought would affect your town.
- Who, in your town, would be affected the most, the least during a major drought event.

Activity 1: Riches Beyond the Mississippi

Put students into small groups and have them create a table with columns labeled Advantages and Disadvantages of the Eastern Land and the Great Plains. Students will fill in characteristics of the two regions while they view the clip.

The clip describes the conditions of the east that forced many to migrate to the Great Plains. After students view the clip, discuss their findings while focusing on the reasons behind human expansion.

Film Clip:

<http://vimeo.com/17639421>

Activity 2: Mechanized Creatures

With students still in groups, view the next clip, "Mechanized Creatures." Have students describe how agricultural technology enhanced the spatial expansion of the Great Plains.

Now discuss the following questions:

1. The clip shows moving images of different types of agricultural technologies that increased the modification of the land. How did the technology of agriculture change over time?
2. What are the benefits of technology on agriculture? Whom does it benefit? Who and/or what does it not benefit?
3. What are the effects of modifying the land from the use of new technologies?
4. Today, what reasons do we modify the land? What are the advantages and disadvantages of that modification?

Film Clip:

<http://vimeo.com/17640158>

Activity 3: The Effects of Drought on Humans

With students still in groups, have a couple of groups be a farming family and others be a family from the city. After viewing the clip, "Dusty Silhouettes," discuss the impact of harsh conditions on people in rural and urban communities.

Now discuss the following questions:

1. What are the significant effects of drought on daily living for people in farming communities and in urban communities?
2. When a drought occurs, which part of society is affected the most, the least?
3. If water shortages follow a drought event, explain and justify who deserves priority use of water?

Film Clip:

<http://vimeo.com/17664555>

Activity 4: Documenting Historical Events

Stinging Dust & Forgotten Lives uses several audio clips of human struggle from the Library of Congress. These clips, recorded by

witnesses of the Dust Bowl, present poems and songs that tells a story of human persistence during a time of struggle. After students view the clip, “Job’s Just Around the Corner,” have students complete a scrapbook or visual poem that describes how they would have dealt with living during the Dust Bowl. Tell students that they will be a member of a family whose farm is greatly affected by the Dust Bowl and describe through a scrapbook or poem how they dealt with the harsh conditions. Students will use the items on this site for their scrapbooks or poems.

Prior to assigning this activity, discuss with the students why people during this period would write poems, record stories, or sing songs about their experiences. What is the overall purpose of the Library of Congress keeping archives of these histories?

Scenario 1: Ask students to consider what kind and how much food a family would have acquired and eaten on a daily basis during the Dust Bowl.

Scenario 2: Ask students to be a father or mother of a family in the Great Plains. How would they deal with raising their family during harsh conditions? How would they attempt to solve the problem?

Scenario 3: As conditions worsened for farming families in the drought areas of the Great Plains, many left to find better opportunities. Describe the daily life of one week of a family’s migration to California through a travel journal.

Scenario 4: Ask students to research what the Farm Security Administration camps were, the conditions, and daily life of a person living in the camp. Write a diary, make a scrapbook, or write a poem of their experience in an FSA camp.

Scenario 5: Ask students to make a map using Imogene Chapin’s poem, “The Job’s Just Around the Corner,” to show how she and her family moved from place to place as well as what happened along the way.

Scenario 6: Ask students to search for a photograph of a child their age from the Library of Congress, FSA-OWI website. Have them describe the facial expression, the surroundings, and overall experience of that child from the photograph.

Scenario 7: Ask students to consider that their family had to leave their farmhouse during the Dust Bowl. What would they take with them? What things would they have to do without?

Film Clip:

<http://vimeo.com/17666202>

Activity 5: Lest We Forget

Throughout the world drought is a major problem for many cultures. Have students research and present where current droughts are occurring in the world and explain what the effects are on the people of those locations. In the conclusion of their presentation, they should describe the solutions that are being considered to reduce human struggle and minimize future droughts.

Standards

McREL (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org>

Geography

Standard 14: Understands how human actions modify the physical environment.

Level II (Grades 3-5)

Benchmark 1: Knows the ways people alter the physical environment

Level III (Grades 6-8)

Benchmark 4: Understands the environmental consequences of both the unintended and intended outcomes of major technological changes in human history

Level IV (Grades 9-12)

Benchmark 3: Understands the global impacts of human changes in the physical environment

Standard 15: Understands how physical systems affect human systems.

Level III (Grades 6-8)

Benchmark 5: Knows the effects of natural hazards on human systems in different regions of the United States and the world

Level IV (Grades 9-12)

Benchmark 1: Knows changes in the physical environment that have reduced the capacity of the environment to support human activity

United States History

Standard 23: Understands the causes of the Great Depression and how it affected American Society.

Level II (Grades 5-6)

Benchmark 1: Understands economic aspects of the Great Depression

Benchmark 2: Understands the environmental and social impact of the Great Depression

Language Arts

Standard 1: Use the general skills and strategies of the writing process

- Uses strategies to address different audiences
- Writes expository compositions; synthesizes information from different sources
- Writes fictional, biographical, autobiographical and observational narrative compositions
- Writes descriptive compositions; reflects on personal experience
- Writes in response to literature; analyzes and interprets

Standard 2: Uses stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

- Uses precise and descriptive language
- Develops effective paragraphs in logical sequence; uses supporting details
- Varies sentence structures
- Uses a variety of transitional devices
- Develops personal styles and voice

Cameron Douglas Craig has been a geography instructor since 2000. He holds a Bachelor of Science in History and a Master of Arts in Geography from Indiana State University. He is currently working toward receiving his Doctor of Philosophy in Physical Geography at Indiana State University that focuses on Geographic Education. His area of expertise includes geographic education, climatology, broadcast meteorology, physical geography, and geographic filmmaking. Currently, he is a faculty member of the Department of Geology/Geography at Eastern Illinois University.