Visions In the Dust:
A Child's Perspective of the Dust Bowl

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Modified by Scott Hruby

Much of history is interpreted from an adult point of view. This unit helps students gain an understanding of Dust Bowl history through the eyes of a child. Using Karen Hesse’s Newbery Award-winning Out of the Dust as an introduction to this aspect of the Great Depression, students have the opportunity to identify with the personal experiences of youth in the 1930s. In addition, students examine primary source materials of the period to correlate the fictional text with actual visual, auditory, and manuscript accounts as found in the American Memory collections.

Objectives
At the conclusion of this unit, students will be able to:

- examine primary source materials to gain knowledge of the Dust Bowl;
- use historical fiction to understand the human aspect of the Dust Bowl experience;
- relate primary source materials from American Memory collections to passages, characters, and events from the novel;
- develop research skills and strategies, such as keyword searches, for finding information.
- Participate in a radio broadcast skit from the time period and then create a new one.

Time Required
5 – 7 class periods

Recommended Grade Level
Grades 6 – 8; may be adapted for upper elementary students

Curriculum Fit
American history, language arts or an integrated American studies unit
Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening

Historical Understanding
Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

Language Arts
Standard 4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes
Standard 6. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts
Standard 7. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts
Standard 9. Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening

1. 5. 5. A. Write with a sharp, distinct focus identifying topic, task and audience.
1. 5. 5. B. Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic.
   - Gather, organize and select the most effective information appropriate for the topic, task and audience.
   - Write paragraphs that have a topic sentence and supporting details.
1. 6. 5. C. Speak using skills appropriate to formal speech situations.
   - Use complete sentences.
   - Pronounce words correctly.
   - Use appropriate volume.
   - Pace speech so that it is understandable.

History

8. 1. 6. B. Explain and analyze historical sources.
   - Literal meaning of a historical passage
   - Author or historical source
   - Visual evidence
American Memory collections:

- *America From the Great Depression to World War II: Black-and-White Photographs From the FSA and OWI.*
- *Voices From the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection.*


Print Sources


Materials and Preparation

- Study Guide
- Images of the Great Depression
- Guided Reading Journal
Procedure

Step One: Accessing Prior Knowledge, Initial Reaction (1 class period)

1. Before doing the introduction, the students will take a look at the Dust Bowl picture and will be allotted about ten minutes to do a personal journal. “If you were standing in the field next to that house, how would you feel? Why?” Do see any people in the picture? What does the sky look like? Describe the condition of the house in the picture.

   West Texas “family farm” On edge of the Dust Bowl.

   <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b31958>

2. As an introductory activity, use Images of the Great Depression and present students with these three images from America from the Great Depression to World War II: Black-and-White Photographs from the FSA and OWI, ca. 1935-1945:
   - Farm house: Dust piled up around farmhouse. Oklahoma.
   - Farmer's Son: Dust is too much for this farmer's son in Cimarron County, Oklahoma.
   - Topsoil: Stock watering hole almost completely covered by shifting topsoil. Cimarron County, Oklahoma.

3. Using Images of the Great Depression, ask students for:
   - their personal reactions to photographs;
   - knowledge gained from viewing photographs; and
   - questions to be answered during this unit.

Step Two: History Through Fiction (2-3 class periods)

1. Students read Out of the Dust, noting Billy Jo's experiences in the Dust Bowl.
2. Using the Guided Reading Journal, students keep a guided journal noting specific passages relating to:
   - school life
   - community life
   - family life
   - government assistance
   - agriculture

3. After reading the novel, as a group examine the cover of Out of the Dust, noting the photograph of Lucille Burroughs. She was used to visually depict Hesse's character, Billy Jo. Using the same photoanalysis technique in Step One, discuss with students the possible origins of the photograph. Why was this photograph used? After a brainstorming session, students can review the original image of Lucille Burroughs with its bibliographic record found in America from the Great Depression to World War II: Black-and-White Photographs from the FSA and OWI, ca. 1935-1945.
Step Three: Depicting the Text (3-4 class periods)

1. Using their Guided Reading Journal, students generate keywords and concepts for searching America from the Great Depression to World War II: Photographs from the FSA and OWI, ca. 1935-1945 collection for images that portray sections of free verse found in Hesse's Out of the Dust. Students locate photographs that represent meaningful passages from the novel.
2. After image selection, students compile a presentation (poster, collage, scrapbook, multimedia presentation, etc.) to be shared with others. The presentation should include the picture with the accompanying passage from the text.

Evaluation & Extension

Student assessment is determined by teacher and peer evaluations based on how closely student-selected images depict text selected in the student's Guided Reading Journal.

- Students use Voices from the Dust Bowl: the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940-1941 to look for songs that Billy Jo may have played on her piano or that Mad Dog Craddock and the Black Mesa Boys may have sung. (2-3 days)
- Students use American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers Project, 1936-1940 to compare the experiences of Billy Jo and her family to those in other parts of the nation during the Great Depression. (2-3 days)
- This lesson lends itself for use with other works of historical fiction teamed with other collections within American Memory.
- Classes could also read Christopher Paul Curtis’ Bud, Not Buddy to learn a Michigan child’s perspective of the Great Depression and compare it to Out of the Dust.

| The students could take a close look at the newspaper article on the overhead projector. “What news stories do you see on the front page of the newspaper? What is the “big” story? How does this relate to the Dust Bowl? “This newspaper on the overhead projector should generate a lengthy class discussion.
| “Community Mobilizes For Big event At Woodville, June 14”.
| < http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=afcts&fileName=hu420614/hu420614.db&recNum=0 > |

| The students could reenact a radio broadcast using the radio script from 1941. I play the violin so I could provide the musical aspect of the broadcast. The students could work in groups and even write their own scripts making sure to model it after the one that has been provided.
| “Song of the Okies” – Radio Script.
| < http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=afcts&fileName=script01/script01.db&recNum=0> |