**TOPIC: MIGRANT WORKERS/THE GREAT DEPRESSION—“WHY CALIFORNIA?”**

**Discipline**

Language Arts, History

**Grade Level**

8 – 12

**Context**

* The 1920s
* The Great Depression
* World War II
* World War II Homefront

**Type of Activity**

Individual, Small Group, Primary Source, Document Analysis, Pre-reading, Introductory

**Objectives**

* Students will understand why people migrated West during the Depression
* Students will gain an understanding of the mythical image of California and the West
* Students will develop a more personalized understanding of the impact of the Depression and the Dust Bowl

**Overview**

The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl uprooted hundreds of thousands of Americans. At its worst, the Depression saw 25% of the work force unemployed. People lost not only their jobs, but their homes, their land, and any savings they might have had.

The average person struggling to survive the Depression is a common theme in the writings of Steinbeck. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Depression and the Dust Bowl are virtually characters in the novel, shaping the lives of the Joads and others around them.

Several hundred thousand people fled North and West during the [1930s](http://sits.sjsu.edu/context/historical/hist_context_1930s/index.html). Yet these regions were not immune from the effects of the Depression. Why then did so many people uproot their lives and head to California and the West? Using first hand accounts archived in the Library of Congress, students will attempt to help answer this question.

**Materials Needed/Preparation**

* Computer with external speakers (loud enough for the entire class to hear)
* An internet connection
* Bookmark the following interviews from the American Memory project of the Library of Congress:
  + [Mrs. J.W. Becker](http://memory.loc.gov/afc/afcts/audio/414/4145b1.mp3)
  + [Tom Higgenbotham (Part 1)](http://memory.loc.gov/afc/afcts/audio/414/4149a1.mp3)
  + [Tom Higgenbotham (Part 2)](http://memory.loc.gov/afc/afcts/audio/414/4149b1.mp3)
  + [Roy Turner, S.C. Loop, Bill Robinson, and Wayne “Gene” Dinwiddie](http://memory.loc.gov/afc/afcts/audio/513/5137a1.mp3)
* Pre-reading on the [Great Depression](http://sits.sjsu.edu/context/historical/hist_context_1930s/index.html).
* Students should also understand the concept of push and pull factors and how they relate to migration and immigration.
* Post links to the audio files online for students to access at home (optional).
* Copies of [guiding questions to distribute](http://sits.sjsu.edu/docs/1-07a%20Why%20California%20Organizer.docx) (optional)

**Estimated Time**

1 – 2 class periods

**Procedure**:

* Consider allowing students to work in pairs or in small groups.
* Discussion starter/journal entry:
  + Imagine that you had lost your job, your home, and even your land. What factors would pull you to migrate to another city, county, state, or even country?
  + Take time for a short discussion or sharing session.
* Post the following guiding questions on the board or distribute as a handout.
  + Why did the person being interviewed leave his/her home? (push factors)
  + Where did he/she go? Why?
  + What was life like once he/she arrived? Did this live up to expectations? Example/proof.
  + How does this relate to the novel? Example/proof.
    - Skip this prompt if this activity is being done as part of the introduction to the novel
* Play one of the interviews
  + Students should be taking notes (using the guiding questions as an Advance Organizer)
  + Give students some time to finish writing once the audio clip has finished
* Share out answers
  + Allow time for students to share their answers out loud to the class.
  + To help students prepare to share, consider allowing a brief amount of time to pair share.
  + Allow for time to discuss/react to the audio clip and/or the answers other students shared. See group-to-class discussion for more ideas on how to facilitate this activity.
  + Consider using the Fishbowl activity for this discussion.

**Post Activity/Takeaways/Follow-up**

* Post Activity
  + Interview: Have students work in pairs to script out an interview of their own. “Why did you come to California?”
  + Interview: Have students interview a family member who has immigrated or migrated.
  + Propaganda and Boosterism: Have students create advertisements, brochures, pamphlets, etc. that promote moving West.
  + Letters Home: Imagining that they have now arrived in the West, have students write home about the realities of life in California/the West during the Great Depression
  + Have students compare and contrast the experiences and motivations in the interviews with those of characters in the novel.
* Takeaways
  + Students should have a stronger understanding of life as a migrant farm worker while reading *The Grapes of Wrath*.

**Assessment**

* How well did students understand the different push and pull factors involved in migration during the Great Depression?
* How well did students provide proof for their conclusions? Did they reference parts of the interviews that support their ideas?

**Standards Met**

* History and Social Science Content Standards 11
  + Students analyze the different explanations for the Great Depression and how the New Deal fundamentally changed the role of the federal government: 3
* History-Social Science Content Standards 6-8
  + Research, Evidence, and Point of View: 1, 4
* Reading Standards for Literature 6-12
  + Key Ideas and Details: 1
* Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12
  + Key Ideas and Details: 1, 2
* Writing Standard 6-12
  + Research to Build and Present Knowledge: 8, 9
* Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12
  + Comprehension and Collaboration: 1, 2, 3
* Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12
  + Key Ideas and Details: 1, 2, 3
  + Craft and Structure: 6
  + Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: 8
* Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12
  + Text Types and Purposes: 1

**Why California**

**Great Depression and Dustbowl Migrant Interviews**

As you listen to the interview, answer the following:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Response/Notes** |
| 1. Who is being interviewed? |  |
| 1. How old was the person when she/he left home? |  |
| 1. Where did she/he travel from? |  |
| 1. Push factors: Why did she/he leave home? |  |
| 1. Pull factors: Why did she/he head to California? Or, why did his/her family head to California? |  |
| 1. What was life like once she/he arrived in California? Provide examples. |  |
| 1. Did life in California match his/her expectations? Provide examples. |  |
| 1. In what ways do this person’s experiences connect to *The Grapes of Wrath*? Give examples. |  |