

0. THE GREAT DEPRESSION - Story Preface

1. THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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At a time when Americans could afford neither cars nor gas, they used horse-drawn wagons even in New York City. This image depicts a photo by Walker Evans taken during the summer of 1938. Public-domain image online via the Library of Congress.

The "Great Depression" was a time of unprecedented despair. After the 1929 [stock market crash](#), America (and many other countries) endured long, trying years of economic downturn, [lost fortunes](#) (the link is a picture of the stock exchange floor just after the crash), and [personal tragedies](#).

People were [uprooted](#) when out-of-work families packed up everything they owned and moved to California, Texas and other states. By 1932, the [worst](#) year of the depression (follow the link to see the dramatic downturn in U.S. rates of production), nearly 25% of the American work force was [unemployed](#).

Without means of transportation, people had to walk miles just to see their families. Living in "[miserable poverty](#)," in [squatter's camps](#) (called "[Hoovervilles](#)"), or tents in "[migrant labor camps](#)," dislocated families tried to stay together.



Sometimes people created bathrooms (called a "privy") which was nothing more than a shack floating on a river. These floating privies had no systems to process human waste.



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In other parts of the country, men left their families "at home" while they went to the industrial north to find work. Their "bachelor cabins" were nothing more than shanty towns. But there was also "No Work" for people in the north. The bustling docks of New York City were quiet.

Before the days of the FDR along the East River, and the Westside Parkway along the Hudson, an artist (like Russian emigre Raphael Soyer) could walk to the water's edge where he drew images of human hopelessness. Employment agencies in New York City were inundated with applications from well-dressed, out-of-work people. The "land of plenty" had become the land of hard times.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-GREAT-DEPRESSION-Great-Depression>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-GREAT-DEPRESSION-Great-Depression>

Media Stream

Impact of Great Depression in New York City

During America's "Great Depression," people were uprooted from their homes and their lives.

When we think about American resettlement, which took place during that time, we often focus on what happened in California where people frequently sought jobs as farm workers. But it wasn't just California which underwent depression-era changes.



This image depicts a family on the move in New York City. At a time when it was hard to purchase gas, people returned to a different form of transportation—horse-drawn wagons which carried their possessions.

Walker Evans (1903-1975) took this picture during the summer of 1938 (while he was working for the federal government's Resettlement Administration, later known as the Farm Security Administration). The original negative is maintained by the Library of Congress, where the photo has this [title and description](#):

New York, New York. 61st Street between 1st and 3rd Avenues. A tenant is moving on horse-drawn wagon.

Moving possessions, 317 East Sixty-first Street

Click on the image for a better view.

Walker Evans photo, taken during the summer of 1938, for the government's Resettlement Administration; online via the Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Impact-of-Great-Depression-in-New-York-City>

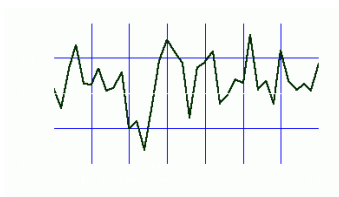


Great Depression - Migrant Family Trailer in Texas

Image, described above, online via the U.S. Library of Congress. Public Domain.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Great-Depression-Migrant-Family-Trailer-in-Texas>



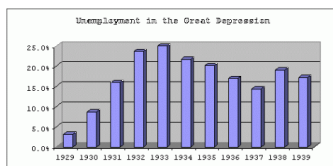
Graph Depicting Yearly Depression Levels

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Archives.

PD

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Graph Depicting Yearly Unemployment Levels

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Archives.

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Great Depression - Migrant Labor Camp

Image, described above, online via the Library of Congress. Public Domain.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Great-Depression-Migrant-Labor-Camp>



Great Depression - Hooverville in New York City

Photo, described above, by Berenice Abbott (1898-1991) in 1935. Online via New York Public Library Digital Collection, [image 482853](#). Public Domain.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Great-Depression-Hooverville-in-New-York-City>

Great Depression - A Floating Outhouse

In July of 1936, Americans were suffering from the impacts of a "Great Depression." Many people lost their jobs, then lost their homes. They were forced to seek employment elsewhere, causing them to move away from their hometowns.

With the promise of a better life in places like California and Oregon, migrants were often disappointed to learn life was not always better somewhere else. Jobs were still scarce and people built shacks for shelter.

When people built shacks on other people's land, they were known as squatters. A lean-to shack did not have running water or bathroom facilities.

Arthur Rothstein (1915-1985) was one of the photographers hired by the U.S. Farm Administration to document the lives of displaced families. He took this picture in July of 1936. It depicts a squatter's outhouse—in those days called a "privy"—floating along an Oregon River. It has [this original title](#):

Privy floating in Willamette River. Squatters. Hooverville, Portland, Oregon

As a result of the floating outhouse, human waste was discharged directly into the Willamette River. That might not cause a problem if there is a [waste-recovery system in place](#) to avoid polluting the river. But at a time when desperate people were just trying to "get by," they were not thinking about waste-recovery and pollution-avoidance.

Click on the image for a better view.

Image, described above, online via the Library of Congress. Reproduction number: LC-USF34-004821-E

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Great Depression - Americans Live in Miserable Poverty

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Great Depression Squatter Camp in Porterville

When the orange-picking season began, during the Great-Depression years, people lived in squatters' camps near orange groves.

Dorothea Lange, working for the federal government's Farm Security Administration, took this picture in February of 1938. It depicts living quarters for migrant families who picked crops near Porterville, California.

The Library of Congress maintains this photo which has this [original caption](#):

Squatter camp on the flat where families live during the orange picking season. Near Porterville, California.

As you study this image, look at the billboard next to the camp. Featuring the picture of a young child, that billboard sign says:

What Hurts Business Hurts Me

Why do you think such a sign was positioned next to this "squatter camp?"

Click on the image for a better view.

Image by Dorothea Lange, described above, online via the Library of Congress. Its reproduction number is LC-USF34-018307-E. Public domain.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Great-Depression-Squatter-Camp-in-Porterville>

Great Depression Hooverville at the Town Dump

As homeless people desperately tried to find work, and build new lives—during America's Great Depression—they faced endless challenges which did not improve for many years.

Children, who spent the first decade of their life in the 1930s, sometimes lived in shacks or tents or worse. In this picture, which Dorothea Lange took in April of 1936, we see a community of people living in Bakersfield, California—an area of fertile farmland.

According to the [original caption of this photo](#), which is maintained at the Library of Congress, this Hooverville is located near the town dump:

Hooverville of Bakersfield, California. A rapidly growing community of people living rent-free on the edge of the town dump in whatever kind of shelter available. Approximately one thousand people now living here and raising children.

Click on the image for a better view. As you study it, look for Dorothea Lange's shadow in the foreground.

Photo by Dorothea Lange, described above, online via the Library of Congress where its reproduction number is LC-USF34-001774-C. Public Domain.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Great-Depression-Hooverville-at-the-Town-Dump>

