



Lesson Plan: Experiencing the Depression in Montana

MONTANA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This lesson plan works because it combines good literature with study of primary and secondary sources to help students create unique products. The concept will work with any good piece of literature that can be connected to a specific primary source, whether historical or contemporary.

The plans below are for use with *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck. They may be adapted for younger readers with *Out of the Dust*, by Karen Hesse.

Overview

Students reading *The Grapes of Wrath* will obtain first-hand recognition of the hardships and problems experienced in the Depression by reading letters written during the Depression years in Montana. They will relate the experiences described in these primary sources to those of the Joad family of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Further research using secondary sources will inform them of the circumstances that shaped the suffering experienced by many during the Depression. They will create a literary product such as a RAFTS writing, bringing to life the story of a fictional Montana individual or family who lived during the Depression. The acronym RAFTS stands for Role, Audience, Format, Topic, and Strong Verb. Finally, they may publish the RAFTS writing on a web page or in another format.

Objectives

Students will develop the following skills and abilities:

- Relate experiences in a novel to real-life experiences
- Recognize the value of authentic primary sources from a different time and place to document a situation
- Engage in research at an historical institution through primary and secondary sources
- Understand the hardships and problems experienced in the Depression through literature as well as through historical photographs and letters written in Montana to the governor by Montanans living through the Depression
- Bring to life through writing a fictionalized character and situation from the past in a RAFTS narrative or other literary product
- Follow the writing process: prewrite, draft, edit, finalize, publish
- Reference sources correctly in a Works Cited using MLA or other style guide
- Utilize a format such as Google Sites, Weebly, or Wix, to publish the writing

Time Required

Week 1: Read *The Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 1-5 (time spent in class will vary)

One or two days: Analyze images of the Dustbowl from the Library of Congress

Week 2: *Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 6 – 9

One or two days: Become familiar with on-line resources from the Montana Historical Society. Review at least one letter written during the Depression.

Week 3: *Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 10 – 13

Week 4: *Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 14 – 18

Read secondary source(s), background about the Depression

Week 5: *Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 19 – 25

Two days: Analyze primary sources, letters written during the Depression taken from MHS website.

Week 6: *Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 26 – 30. Finish novel. Four days: Draft the RAFTS writing, edit, finalize. Post to web page or publish in another format.



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Recommended Grade Range

Grades 10 – 12: *Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck (Lexile 680, Young Adult)

Grades 3 – 8: *Out of the Dust*, by Karen Hesse (Reading Level 4.5)

Subject/Topic

English / Language Arts.

American Literature. Integrated U.S. History / American Literature class.

Materials

The Grapes of Wrath, by John Steinbeck, or *Out of the Dust*, by Karen Hesse

MLA Handbook or other style guide for citation requirements. One option: *The Research Guidebook*, found at Helena High School's Library page under Teacher Resources:

<https://hhs.helenaschools.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/10/ResearchGuidebook16.pdf>

Format for publication, such as Google Sites, Weebly, or Wix

RAFTS assignment sheet, Peer Editing Form, and Rubric (below)

Library of Congress

- Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/primary-source-analysis-tool/> or National Archives Photograph Analysis Tool, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo-novice> or National Archives Written Document Analysis Worksheet <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/document.html>
- Library of Congress Dustbowl Migrations: Images and Recordings. <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/dust-bowl-migration/>

Montana Historical Society

- At the Chapter 18 Educator Resources page for *Montana: Stories of the Land*, <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/StoriesOfTheLand/Part3/Chapter18/Ch18Educators> find the following:
 - Letters to the Governor in the Depression in Montana – may print copies for students to read and analyze, or use the website.
 - Part 1 of *Hope in Hard Times: New Deal Photographs of Montana, 1936-1942*, by Mary Murphy (Helena, MT 2003)
 - *Hope in Hard Times* PowerPoint (Optional secondary source with information on the Depression in Montana)
 - “The Great Depression Transforms Montana,” Chapter 18 of *Montana: Stories of the Land* (find linked under Part 3, top of page)
 - Related material for Montana in the Depression: Federal Works Project Administration, Fort Peck Dam
 - This lesson plan, from Jean O’Connor



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1. Timeline:

Week 1: Read *The Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 1-5 (time spent in class will vary)

One or two days: Analyze images of the Dustbowl from the Library of Congress

Week 2: *Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 6 – 9

One or two days: Become familiar with on-line resources from the Montana Historical Society. Review at least one letter written during the Depression.

Week 3: *Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 10 – 13

Week 4: *Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 14 – 18

Read secondary source(s), background about the Depression in Montana (see *Hope in Hard Times*, Ch. 18 of *Montana: Stories of the Land*, found at Chapter 18 Educator Resources page for *Montana: Stories of the Land*, <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/StoriesOfTheLand/Part3/Chapter18/Ch18Educators>)

Week 5: *Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 19 – 25

Two days: Analyze primary sources, letters written during the Depression taken from the Montana Historical Society website

Week 6: *Grapes of Wrath* Ch. 26 – 30.

Finish novel. Four days: Draft the RAFTS writing, edit, finalize. Post to web page or publish in another format.

2. Detailed Plan

Step 1: Exploring the Great Depression through literature, photography, and letters

a.) Students begin reading *The Grapes of Wrath* or another work of literature that is set in the Depression of the United States. After they reach approximately Chapter Six, start exploratory activities.

b.) Students use the analysis tools to closely examine the **Library of Congress Dustbowl Migrations: Images and Recordings.** <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/dust-bowl-migration/>

- o Follow-up: The class discusses similarities between specific elements students noted in the Dustbowl Migrations collection and in the novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.

c.) Students each read a printed copy of a letter written in the Depression in Montana, found on the Montana Historical Society Website:

<https://mhs.mt.gov/education/StoriesOfTheLand/Part3/Chapter18/HistoricalDocCh183>

- o Students analyze the letter using either the Library of Congress or National Archives analysis tool. In addition, they should identify the hardships and difficulties facing the letter writer.

Step 2: Acquiring Background Information:

a.) Students read one or more secondary sources that provide background on the Depression in Montana.

- o *Hope in Hard Times, Part 1*, by Mary Murphy. , <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/StoriesOfTheLand/Part3/Chapter18/Ch18Educators>
- o *Montana Stories of the Land Companion Website: Secondary source.* At the main Montana Historical Society Webpage, find Montana: Stories of the Land under Education (top). At Part 3 at the top, find Chapter 18, “The Great Depression Transforms Montana.”

b.) Students read more letters written in the Depression in Montana, found on the Montana Historical Society website:

<https://mhs.mt.gov/education/StoriesOfTheLand/Part3/Chapter18/HistoricalDocCh183>

- o Students recognize the experiences of the Depression in both the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* and in the Montana letters.
- o Students list elements they would like to incorporate in their final writing project, a narrative bringing to life a fictional story based on their experiences and observations of life at this time.



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Step 3: Final Writing:

- a.) When students finish reading *The Grapes of Wrath* they discuss writing a RAFTS. The acronym stands for Role, Audience, Format, Topic, and Strong Verb. They will take notes on the following:
 - Role – A person living in the Depression
 - Audience – The writing will be for the Governor, family member, friend, or the writer him or herself
 - Format – The format may be a speech, letter, journal, diary, memo, narrative, or other acceptable format.
 - Topic – Life during the Great Depression, or a particular incident that illuminates their imagined situation
 - Strong Verb – Describe, explain, persuade, or relate
- b.) Students write their own fictionalized experience that happened in the Depression, following the RAFTS guidelines. Any specific people or events they read about must be fictionalized when incorporated into the writing. For example, names should be changed. Their writing should be detailed and thoughtful, bringing to life experiences such as those that occurred in the Depression.
- c.) Students edit the draft version of the RAFTS, which should be typed in final, double-spaced format with a Works Cited. See the Peer Editing Form, below.
- d.) Students find or create a relevant illustration to accompany their final writing.
- e.) Students finalize the RAFTS, then following directions on the handout (below) to save it in an interesting, legible font, and paste it into the web page.

Examples of published RAFTS:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20201017120454/https://sites.google.com/site/experiencingthedepressioninmon/>

Extension Ideas

Students may engage in any of the following activities to further explore their experience:

- Visit a local museum and see exhibits that relate to the Depression.
- Create poetry bringing to life subjects that relate to the Depression.
- Explore more images of the Depression on-line.

EVALUATION

1. Edit: Student Peer Editing Form (below)

2. Rubric: Rubric for teacher use for final writing and web pages, if created (below)

CREDITS

This lesson was designed by Jean O'Connor, English teacher, Helena High School, Helena, MT and Martha Kohl, History Specialist, Montana Historical Society.



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Standards

Montana Common Core Standards for Reading Literature

- RL 11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text, including those by and about American Indians, and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RL 11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama, or oral or written history (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- RL 11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text, including texts by and about Montana American Indians, in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.
- RL 11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Montana Common Core Standards for Reading Informational Text

- RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, cultures, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
- RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text, including texts by and about Montana American Indians, in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

Montana Common Core Standards for Writing

- RW 11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- RW 11-12.2a Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- RW 11-12.2b Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
- RW 11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- RW 11-12.3a Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
- RW 11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)
- RW 11-12.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 11-12.)
- RW 11-12.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.
- RW 11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- RW 11-12.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation. RW 11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational



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R.A.F.T.S.

A RAFTS writing is a flexible piece allowing the writer to assume the role of a character or item from literature or history. Writing from the chosen point of view, the writer will create a letter, essay, narrative, speech, editorial, script, memo, dialogue, dream, or other written prose form that will present the story from the view of the chosen Role. A strong verb will frame the purpose of the writing; the audience will represent those for whom the writing is intended.

R= Role. An individual who lived in the Depression. The Role will suggest the tone and mood of the writing.

A= Audience. The writing will be for the Governor, a family member, a friend, or the writer him or herself.
Consider the point of view of the audience towards your role.

F= Format. Essay, narrative, journal, letter, speech, editorial, dialogue, or other prose form.

T= Topic. Your daily life and problems in the Depression, presenting the point of view of the character whose role you are assuming.

S= Strong Verb. Your writing purpose: convince, describe, share, assess, prove, persuade, evaluate.

For the project *Experiencing the Depression in Montana*, the writer will bring to life a story based on research of Montana families who lived through the Depression experiencing hardship. The story will present a fictionalized family or individual based on real stories and grounded in research. While details and experiences gathered in research can be included and characters can be based on real individuals, the story should be fictionalized, names changed and details of experiences integrated into an imagined situation. **Since the writing is based on research a Works Cited must accompany the final work.**

The writing should be approximately 3-4 pages in length, double-spaced in MLA format.

Draft: Present for editing on _____.

Final: Due on _____.

Web pages for the RAFTS: Set up the following four pages using Google Sites or other program.

Home: Write a one –two paragraph summary for the background of your project, which will be copied and pasted into your Home page. What did you read? How did you research?

Art: Design a page that reflects your RAFTS content. You may include your title and a statement about how your writing relates to the Depression in Montana. You may use Word or other program to design your page, or you may use paint, pastels, or other colored medium and scan your work as a .jpg. A third option is to create a composite of images from on-line sources; include a Works Cited referencing the images.

Writing: Your carefully edited RAFTS will be formatted in a font in your word processing program which is easy to read but may represent individual style. Copy and paste this into your third page, your Writing page.

Works Cited: Copy and paste your carefully formatted and edited Works Cited here.

View sample RAFTS here:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20201017120454/https://sites.google.com/site/experiencingthedepressioninmon/>



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RAFTS PEER EDIT

Name _____

Editor _____

Check each of the following:

Beginning (Introduction). Are the **role** and main idea clear?

Could another organization pattern be applied? For example, would a flashback work?

Is the **audience** clear?

Is the **format** apparent?

Is the **topic** clear?

Middle: Development (sufficient? Could details be added to improve the ideas?)

End: Is the conclusion worthy of the main idea?

Can you tell the **strong verb** used? (convince, share, assess, prove, persuade, translate, evaluate, etc.)

Introduction

_____ 1. The writer attempts to provoke the reader's interest with a "lead".

_____ 2. The introduction develops the main idea.

Body

_____ 3. Transition words help the paper's ideas flow.

_____ 4. Sentences are varied in length, type, and beginnings.

_____ 5. The writer "shows" the reader the events, descriptions, and characters through specifics, not just "tells."

_____ 6. Paragraphs are well developed.

Conclusion

_____ 7. The conclusion gives the reader a sense of completion. A conclusion follows logically from the rest of the piece of writing, affirms the importance of what was just said.

_____ 8. The writer provides some insight as part of the conclusion.

Style (Diction)

_____ 1. The writer avoids wordiness, vagueness, and clichés.

_____ 2. The writer uses clear, concrete examples (showing statements).

_____ 3. The writer avoids contractions, personal references, and first-person pronouns.

_____ 4. No use of "you" or "your" except in quotations.

_____ 5. The word "this" is always followed by a noun.

Mechanics

_____ 6. There are no run-on sentences or sentence fragments.

_____ 7. Commas are correctly applied.

_____ 8. Spelling is checked.

_____ 9. A creative essay title is correctly capitalized.

_____ 10. Dialogue or quotations are correctly punctuated.

Particularly check that in dialogue a new paragraph signals each new speaker.

_____ 11. If a final copy, MLA form is used

_____ 12. A Works Cited is correctly formatted.



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EVALUATION FOR RAFTS WRITING - EXPERIENCING THE DEPRESSION

1---10 (weak---strong)

Name _____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (A) RAFTS form and requirements

- Role** is clear and presents a story of the Depression
- Intended **Audience** is conveyed without confusion
- Topic** is appropriate – the problems and issues of the character are conveyed
- Strong introduction and conclusion
- Strong verb** – the purpose is asserted through continuity of idea (persuade, explain, describe, list, critique, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (B) Idea organization and development

- A chosen **Format** is followed without confusion – letter, journal, or other
- transitions: ideas are connected
- quality of supporting detail
- quantity of supporting detail
- description is adequate and appropriate

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (C) Diction: Sentence Fluency, Word Choice

- showing details; specific word choice
- logical expression
- sentences are varied

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (D) Mechanics, format

- spelling
- usage
- punctuation
- sentence errors
- miscellaneous rules
- Works Cited: At least three sources, including *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Hope in Hard Times*, and one or more letters from the Montana Historical Society Research Center



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Your paper is turned in in printed form with Works Cited and posted to a webpage or other final format.

The **webpage or final format** includes all of the following:

_____ **Home:** a title and 2-3 paragraphs describing the project and the process you followed

_____ **Writing:** the paper in final format, posted in clear, legible font.

_____ **Art:** a page dramatizing the story or situation in hand-created art or in images correctly cited

_____ **Works Cited:** a page presenting all sources used for the project.

Points _____ (40 possible)

40 = A+	26 = C
38 = A	24 = C-
36 = A-	22 = D+
34 = B+	20 = D
32 = B	18 = D-
30 = B-	1 – 17 = F