

Lesson Plan 6:

The Great Depression: What would it be like today?

Grades

6-8, 9-12, College 100 level

Description

In this lesson students calculate the percentage decline in factors affecting the quality of life such as wages and unemployment, from before the Depression to the beginning of the New Deal. Students then calculate what the same percentage decline for these factors would mean for their lives if it happened today.

Learning Objectives

By fully participating in this lesson, students will be able to:

- (1) describe various measures of economic and social change;
- (2) explain how these changes are related, especially how economic decline is associate with social changes; and
- (3) calculate how America would change if an economic downturn of the magnitude of the Great Depression were to occur today.

Time Required

This lesson is expected to require approximately 2 hours of class time.

Materials and Resources

NOTE: You will need to have Adobe Acrobat installed on your computer to access the Student Worksheets. You may download Adobe Acrobat free of charge at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>.

For this lesson you will need:

1. Computers connected to the internet for conducting research and to access "The First Measured Century" website.
2. Television, VCR, and videotape of the first hour of "The First Measured Century," which can be purchased at <http://www.shop.pbs.org> , ordered by phone by calling 1-800-PLAY-PBS, or recorded during the broadcast:

The First Measured Century Premieres on PBS Wednesday December 20th, 2000 from 8:30 to 11:30 PM Check your local listings at:
<http://www.pbs.org/whatson/index.html>

Schools are permitted to tape The First Measured Century and use the program for educational purposes for one year following each PBS broadcast. Additional information about teacher taping rights can be found at PBSTeachersource:

http://www.pbs.org/teachersource/copyright/copyright_trights.shtm

3. Student handout on changes during the Great Depression.
4. Statistical Abstract of the United States 1999 (2000, if available). Available at (<http://www.census.gov/statab/www/>).

More statistical information can be found at <http://www.fedstats.gov>

5. Basic arithmetic calculators.

Teaching Strategy

Class Session 1

1. Prepare for this lesson by queuing "The First Measured Century" to the [Depression](#) segment of the program. You will find this segment at approximately 1 hour and 7 minutes into tape 1 where the narrative begins with "We've become accustomed to the images of bread lines...."

2. Once the video is set to begin, prepare students for learning by discussing definitions and concepts as described below:

- What was the Great Depression? The Great Depression (1929-1941) was the most catastrophic economic collapse in American history. Economic output fell by half. Millions upon millions of men lost their jobs. And the Depression went on for more than ten years.
- What were some of the consequences of the Depression? An entire generation of Americans was permanently marked with memories of hardship and attitudes of thrift and fear. The Federal Government underwent an unprecedented peacetime expansion as it struggled to jumpstart the economy. By many measures, most of the federal government apparatus we have today was started during the Great Depression.
- How did the Depression end? Only America's entry in World War II finally ended the Depression.
- What would it be like today if we had an economic collapse of roughly the same dimensions as the Great Depression? This is what the students are to find out and describe.

3. Show the Great Depression segment of the video, The First Measured Century.

4. Distribute the [handout](#) and explain to students that they are to research and find out the unemployment rate, the marriage rate, and other factors about America today. These facts can easily be found in printed reference sources such as almanacs, or they can be found online, especially at the Fedstats website (www.fedstats.gov), or in [The First Measured Century](#) book at this website.

Class Session 2

1. Explain how the students are to calculate the changes for a hypothetical Great Depression in the near future. The students are to calculate what would happen if a change similar to the Great Depression moved across the country over the next three years.
2. Hold a discussion.
 - What would happen if the same thing happened today?
 - What would be similar to the Great Depression?
 - What would be different than in 1933? [Hint: in the video, Professor Kennedy points out that a 25% unemployment rate would not be quite as bad today as it was then, because most households then had only one income earner, but today most households have two or more income earners.]
 - The students should develop and display their results in tables or graphs.

Assessment Recommendations

1. Students should all participate in the discussion. You may wish to call on students who do not volunteer questions or responses during the discussion.
2. Assess how well students are able to find the appropriate information, make correct calculations and enter them in the worksheet.

Relevant Standards

Standards for School Mathematics

From the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (www.nctm.org)

Data Analysis and Probability

Instructional programs from prekindergarten through grade 12 should enable all students to—

- formulate questions that can be addressed with data and collect, organize, and display relevant data to answer them;
- select and use appropriate statistical methods to analyze data;
- develop and evaluate inferences and predictions that are based on data;
- understand and apply basic concepts of probability.

Communication

Instructional programs from prekindergarten through grade 12 should enable all students to—

- organize and consolidate their mathematical thinking through communication;
- communicate their mathematical thinking coherently and clearly to peers, teachers, and others;
- analyze and evaluate the mathematical thinking and strategies of others;
- use the language of mathematics to express mathematical ideas precisely.

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Connections

Instructional programs from prekindergarten through grade 12 should enable all students to—

- recognize and use connections among mathematical ideas;
- understand how mathematical ideas interconnect and build on one another to produce a coherent whole;
- recognize and apply mathematics in contexts outside of mathematics.

Representation

Instructional programs from prekindergarten through grade 12 should enable all students to—

- create and use representations to organize, record, and communicate mathematical ideas;
- select, apply, and translate among mathematical representations to solve problems;
- use representations to model and interpret physical, social, and mathematical phenomena.

Algebra

Instructional programs from prekindergarten through grade 12 should enable all students to—

- understand patterns, relations, and functions;
- represent and analyze mathematical situations and structures using algebraic symbols;
- use mathematical models to represent and understand quantitative relationships;
- analyze change in various contexts.