



How Secure is Social Security?

Student Handout

Group 1: HISTORIANS

Your group will research the history of the Social Security program, reporting on the reasons the program was instituted, what benefits it provided and some of its provisions to help meet people's retirement needs. You are encouraged to develop visual aids to assist in their presentation. Review the Social Security Timeline found at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/social_security/reform/timeline.html to prepare your presentation. Additional information can be found at <http://www.ssa.gov/history/>.

1. State when and explain why the Social Security Act was instituted. What kinds of problems were Americans facing during the Great Depression that led to this law?
2. State when Social Security benefits were first expanded and in what areas. Also, explain the change that occurred in how people received their retirement money.
3. State when the first cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) was enacted. Explain why this adjustment was made and identify the years other COLA adjustments were made?
4. Record the dates and details of other Social Security program expansions such as adding benefits for permanently and totally disabled workers or extending health coverage.
5. From the very beginning, funds for the Social Security program have come from a payroll tax. State the original percentage workers and employees had to contribute to the fund and the dates and amounts of subsequent increases to this payroll tax.
6. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan and Congress created the Greenspan Commission to study the Social Security program's financial problems and make recommendations. Describe the changes Congress put into place to help strengthen the program and how these actions would help strengthen the program. For further information on the provisions of the 1983 legislation, go to the Social Security Administration's History website at <http://www.ssa.gov/history/1983amend.html>.