

CHAPTER
14

Section 2

GUIDED READING

Hardship and Suffering During the Depression

A. As you read about how people coped with hard times, use the chart below to summarize the Great Depression's effects on various aspects of American life.

1. Employment
2. Housing
3. Farming
4. Race relations
5. Family life
6. Physical health
7. Emotional health

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B. On the back of this paper, define each of the following terms.

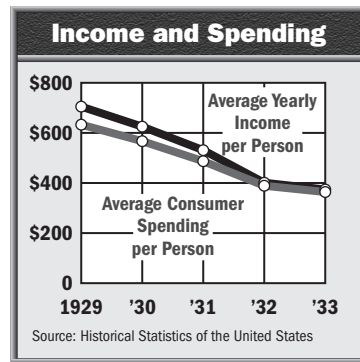
Dust Bowl shantytown soup kitchen bread line direct relief

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SKILLBUILDER PRACTICE *Interpreting Graphs*

Depression statistics often have the most impact when shown graphically. Read the title of the graphs below to identify the main idea. Read the vertical and horizontal axes of the graphs. Look at the legends and note what each symbol and unit represents. What trends do you see over certain years? When you compare the two graphs, what conclusions can you draw? Write a paragraph to summarize what you learned from the graphs. (See Skillbuilder Handbook, p. R28.)



Write a Summary

Write a paragraph to summarize what you learned from the graph.

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RETEACHING ACTIVITY *Hardship and Suffering During the Great Depression*

Finding Main Ideas

The following questions deal with the daily suffering during the Great Depression. Answer them in the space provided.

1. What advantage did people in rural areas have over city-dwellers during the depression?

2. Why were conditions for African Americans and Latinos especially difficult during the Depression?

3. What factors helped to cause the Dust Bowl?

4. How did the Depression affect the country's children?

5. Why did working women meet with such resentment during the Depression?

6. What social and psychological impact did the Depression have on Americans?

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GEOGRAPHY APPLICATION: MOVEMENT

The Great Depression Takes Its Toll

Section 2

Directions: Read the paragraphs below and study the map carefully. Then answer the questions that follow.

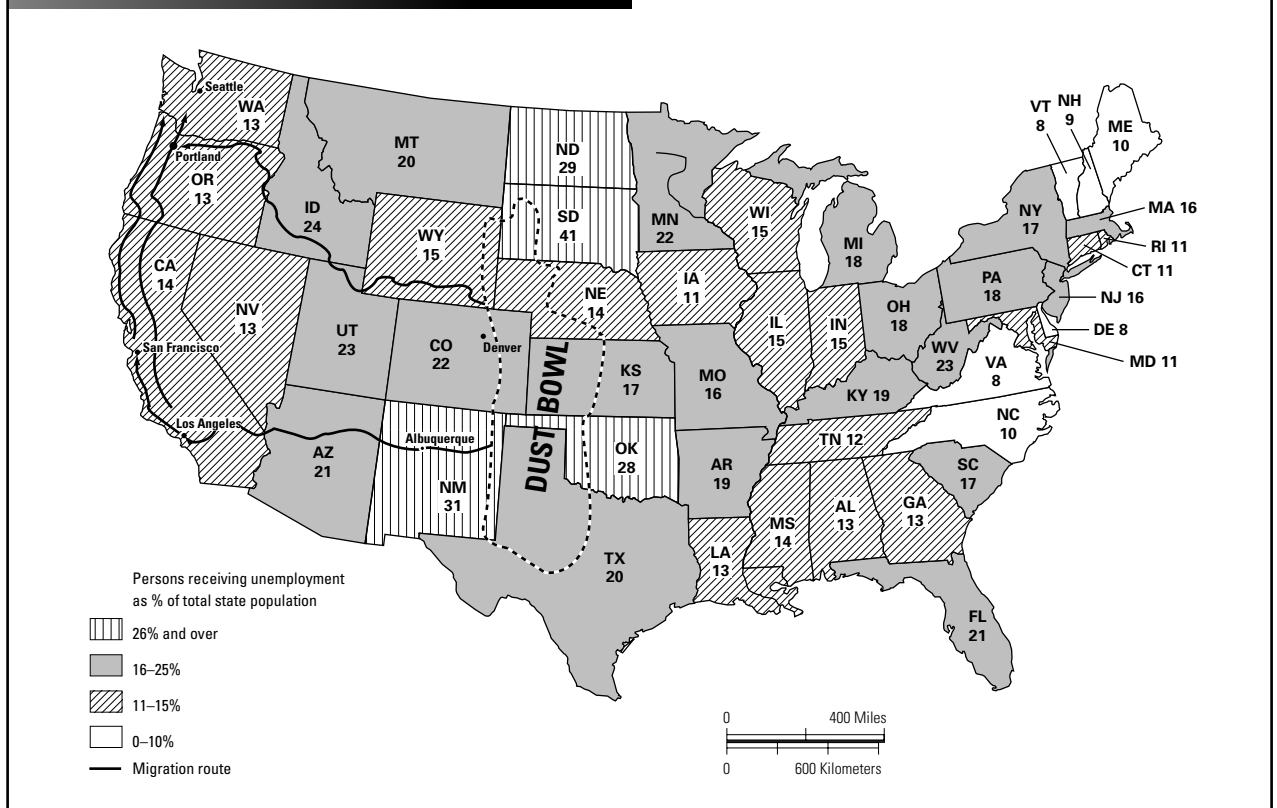
The effects of the Great Depression were heart-breaking. In 1932, for example, not a single person was employed in 28 percent of the families in the United States. Widespread unemployment contributed greatly to the steep 40 percent fall in average family income in the four years 1929–1933. In 1933 nearly 13 million workers, about 25 percent of the U.S. total, had no jobs.

Rates of unemployment, though, were far from uniform across the country. Some states—with industries such as radio and airplane production—were relatively well off, so that at one point, in 1934, there was a 33 percent difference between the highest and lowest state unemployment rates.

This disparity in unemployment rates started people moving all over the country. At the begin-

ning, many unemployed city dwellers moved to the countryside, hoping that farms were better off economically than cities. But soon agriculture suffered just as much as other businesses, especially during the Dust Bowl drought that began in 1933. Tens of thousands of families in the hardest-hit states—North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Texas—put everything they owned into cars and trucks and left home. (By 1936, some areas were ghostlike, with more than half of the houses abandoned.) By the end of the decade, all of the hardest-hit states except for Colorado and Texas had experienced population declines, even though the U.S. population grew by 9 million people during the decade.

Unemployment and Major Migration Routes, 1934



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Interpreting Text and Visuals

1. Which four states had the highest unemployment rate in 1934?

2. Which region of the country—east or west of the Mississippi River—was better off in 1934? _____

What statistics support your choice? _____

3. Which of the hardest-hit Dust Bowl states lost population in the 1930s?

4. What was the main destination of most people leaving the northern part of the Dust Bowl? _____

Through which states did they travel? _____

5. What was the first destination of most people leaving the southern part of the Dust Bowl? _____

What does the migration northward from Los Angeles imply? _____

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PRIMARY SOURCE Letter from a Dust Bowl Survivor

The following letter was written by a survivor of the Dust Bowl in McCracken, Kansas. What problems does she attribute to the drought in the Great Plains?

March 24, 1935

Dear Family,

Did some of you think that you had a dust storm? I'll tell you what it was. It was us shaking our bedding, carpets, etc.

For over a week we have been having troublesome times. The dust is something fierce. Sometimes it lets up enough so we can see around; even the sun may shine for a little time, then we have a frenzied time of cleaning, anticipating the comfort of a clean feeling once more.

We keep the doors and windows all shut tight, with wet papers on the sills. The tiny particles of dirt sift right through the walls. Two different times it has been an inch thick on my kitchen floor.

Our faces look like coal miners', our hair is gray and stiff with dirt and we grind dirt in our teeth. We have to wash everything just before we eat it and make it as snappy as possible. Sometimes there is a fog all through the house and all we can do about it is sit on our dusty chairs and see that fog settle slowly and silently over everything.

When we open the door, swirling whirlwinds of soil beat against us unmercifully, and we are glad to go back inside and sit choking in the dirt. We couldn't see the streetlight just in front of the house.

One morning, early, I went out during a lull, and when I started to return I couldn't see the house. I knew the direction, so I kept on coming, and was quite close before I could even see the outline. It sure made me feel funny.

There has not been much school this week. It let up a little yesterday and Fred went with the janitor and they carried dirt out of the church by the scoopful. Four of them worked all afternoon. We were able to have church this morning, but I think many stayed home to clean.

A lot of dirt is blowing now, but it's not dangerous to be out in it. This dirt is all loose, any little wind will stir it, and there will be no relief until we get rain. If it doesn't come soon there will be lots of suffering. If we spit or blow our noses we get mud. We have quite a little trouble with our chests. I understand a good many have pneumonia.

As for gardens, we had ours plowed, but now we do not know whether we have more or less soil. It's useless to plant anything.

Grace

from Deb Mulvey, ed., *"We Had Everything but Money"* (Greendale, Wis.: Reiman, 1992), 43.

Discussion Questions

1. According to Grace's letter, what problems did people living in the Dust Bowl encounter?
2. How would you describe Grace's attitude about the dust?
3. What qualities or traits do you think helped Grace and her family survive the difficulties that they faced?

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LITERATURE SELECTION *from In the Beginning*
by Chaim Potok

In the Beginning, set during the Great Depression and World War II, traces events in the lives of the Luries, a Jewish family living in the Bronx. As you read this excerpt from the novel, think about how the narrator, first-grader David Lurie, views the hardship and suffering caused by the Depression.

They sat in the living room talking and I lay in my bed listening. I heard words in Yiddish and English that I did not understand. How could it happen? someone would say. Who could have foreseen it? There were those who predicted it, someone else would say. No one listened. What good is it to complain? my father would say. We have to think what to do. Tell us, they would say. What should we do? It's lost, a despairing voice would say. There is nothing to be done. That is not a helpful attitude, my aunt would say. But it's the truth, the despairing voice would say. There is nothing to be done. Nonsense, my father would say. We must stay together and we will plan what to do. They would talk back and forth in low voices. Sometimes a voice would suddenly be raised in anger. Once I heard a man cry out, "How long can I go on, Max? They are tearing pieces from me!" And they quieted and soothed him, and I heard my mother say she would bring him a glass of tea. Often there were sudden silences, dense chasms in the uneven contour of their speech, and I imagined I could hear the darkness of the night seeping into the room through the minute crevices in our windows. I thought often of the picnic in the clearing. When had that been? Before the summer? I could barely remember. I thought of the way my father had sounded the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, had prayed the Afternoon Service on Yom Kippur, had danced with the Torah on Simchat Torah. The joy of his friends, the ringing happiness that had filled the little synagogue. Now they sat as if it were the start of a war and they needed to make plans to flee from the Angel of Death. Had they met this way in Lemberg during the big war? I listened and was very tired and wished I could sleep. But sleep remained a cool and distant stranger. I wondered if there were some kind of special prayer one could offer for sleep. Mrs. Horowitz would have known. I stayed awake late into the nights, and slept and daydreamed in my classes during the days. My teachers left me alone.

All through the winter and into the spring those meetings continued. They brought strange dread into the house. With the coming of the warm weather, I began to have the feeling that my father and his friends were having all those meetings not so much for the purpose of making plans as for the simple need to be together and support one another, to drink glasses of tea in each other's homes, to offer one another words of encouragement, to keep away despair. I did not know what they feared, and I was afraid to ask. I lay awake in the night and listened to the meetings, or to Saul practicing his Torah reading, or to my parents talking very quietly in the kitchen and then listening to the radio—I lay awake and felt alone and filled with dread.

I was ill often in the spring, once with a raging fever that kept me in bed more than ten days. They met at our apartment during that time. One night I heard their voices distorted through fever; they seemed the cries of dark and fearful birds. The pain in my face and forehead was almost unendurable. The light stung my eyes. I slid down beneath my sheet and blanket. In the living room I heard my uncle's voice raised in a hoarse shout. There were loud, angry responses. I began to cry. The voices continued, subdued once again, a rushing, murmuring, voice-interrupting-voice multiple conversation of frightened people. I lay beneath my sheet and blanket, crying silently in pain and fever, waiting for the darkness to invade my impregnable sheet world.

It seemed to be everywhere, that darkness; and it grew darker still with the passing weeks. I was ill for the first two days of Passover. But I was in our synagogue for the final two days of the festival and it seemed a weary congregation. There were many empty seats. There was no picnic in the pine wood that June. On the final day of school I was told by my teachers that it had been decided to skip me an entire year. In September I would begin third grade.

I went gratefully to our cottage that summer

and had a restful time rowing and swimming and lying in the sun. My father and uncle were rarely with us the first three weeks. They remained in the city and came up for the weekends.

Then in August, my father abruptly stopped going to the city. “There is nothing happening in the city,” I heard him tell my mother early one morning in the last week of July. “The city is like a cemetery. Its dead sell apples instead of lying still. It depresses me. Who needs a real estate broker now? I will stay here for August.”

He would wake late and come out of the cottage unshaven and stare across the beach at the sun on the lake. He would sit hunched forward on a wicker chair in the shade of the elm and stare down at the grass, his veined muscular arms dangling loosely between his thighs. He grew silent. I feared going near him. His dark eyes burned fiercely and his square bony face seemed a block of carved stone. Long into the nights I would hear my mother talking to him, softly, imploringly. It seemed she did most of the talking now; he was silent.

One Shabbat afternoon he went into the forest and was gone so long that my mother grew afraid. She was about to ask my uncle to search for him when he emerged from its bluish depths and, without a word, went into the cottage. I saw my aunt and uncle look at each other forlornly. My mother went inside and came back out a few moments later and sat down in the wicker chair. She tried reading one of the German storybooks she had brought with her that summer, but in the end she put it aside and sat gazing at the afternoon sun on the lake. After a while she rose and returned to the cottage and did not come out until it was time to call Alex and me in for supper.

Far into the night my mother and father and aunt and uncle sat on our screened-in front porch and talked. I lay awake and listened but they were speaking in such subdued tones that I could make out nothing of what they were saying. On occasion one of their voices would rise above the surface of their conversation, but the others would immediately make mention of the children, and the loud voice would sink into a level of sound inaudible to my ears. I was at my window when they left and I saw my uncle embrace my father. He held him in the embrace for what seemed to me to be a very

long time while my mother and aunt looked on and, finally, looked away. Then my aunt and uncle went to their cottage and my parents went to bed.

But they did not sleep. Through the darkness and the thin wall that separated our bedrooms, I heard whispers and my mother’s soothing words and my father’s strained, subdued voice. “I cannot understand it, Ruth. There is nothing we can do. I have never been in a situation like this before. In Lemberg [a city in Poland] we could do something and see results. Why did I bring them here?”

“You did nothing wrong, Max. You advised them. That was all you did.”

“But I told them it would be better here. Do you see how some of them look at me? I feel like a criminal.”

“It isn’t only here, Max. It’s the whole world. Is it better where they were?”

“But I brought them *here*, Ruth. I worked like a slave—to bring them *here*. Now it is a catastrophe and nothing we can do will help. God in heaven, what have I done to my friends?”

And there were more whispers and it all went on a long time until I fell asleep numb with weariness and dread.

My father did not go horseback riding that summer, though he took us often to the movies. Sometimes

he went to the movies alone, and I knew it was a war film. We returned to the city in the first week of September, and my father and uncle sold the cottages and we never saw them again.

The meetings continued, less frequently now but with greater rancor than before. Often I heard the gentle voice of my uncle raised in defense of my father. Who hadn’t put money into the market? he would shout. Who hadn’t invested in real estate? They were lucky he had pulled out as much as he had or there would be no money now to maintain the cemetery, to keep up the death benefits, to maintain the sick fund. No, there was no money for travel loans to get families from Europe to America. Not now. Not until times were better. But what were they complaining about? Why were they shouting at Max? Didn’t they read the newspapers? People were jumping out of windows. At least there was still enough money in the treasury to keep the Am Kedoshim Society from bankruptcy.

***Far into the night
my mother and
father and aunt and
uncle sat on our
screened-in front
porch and talked.***

I would lie in my bed and listen to his voice and imagine his gentle face red with anger, his eyes flaring behind their lenses. and I would remember how he had once said to me, “What should we have done, David? Sometimes you have to smash.” His voice had been soft then, but I thought I could remember some of the anger that had been embedded within it. His eyes had flashed for the briefest of seconds; the face had gone rigid. It was strange how a gentle person could turn so suddenly raging.

There were more empty seats in the synagogue now; people were moving from the neighborhood. Often on my way to meet Saul on the boulevard where we waited for our trolley car, I would see moving vans parked on the curb and brawny men carrying furniture out of houses.

“Why are so many people moving, Saul?” I asked him one morning when we had taken seats in the trolley car.

“They can’t pay the high rent. They move to a less expensive neighborhood.”

“Will we have to move, Saul?”

“No, we won’t have to move, Davey.” . . .

Saul hunched his thin shoulders and pulled his heavy jacket more tightly around him. It was cold in the trolley car. People rode in silence, reading newspapers or staring at the slatted floor or out the windows at the gray morning. I gazed out my window a moment, then opened my Chumash and reviewed some passages on which we were to be tested that morning. I closed the Chumash and went over the passages again inside my eyes. Then I sat looking out the window.

I counted four moving vans that morning parked along the streets, their backs open like black mouths. One morning in January, as the trolley car turned into the street beyond the small park, I saw men moving furniture onto the sidewalk and leave it there. I did not see any moving van. The next day, Yaakov Bader came over to me during the mid-morning recess and said, “Come on and have a game with us, Davey.”

I shrugged and continued looking through the chain-link fence at the street.

“Come on, Davey. My uncle told me to make sure and take good care of you. I don’t want my uncle to be angry at me.”

I turned to him. A red wool cap framed his fair-skinned features which were flushed pink by the cold.

He led me to a sheltered corner of the yards where, in a basement doorway beneath the outdoor fire stairs, I joined a game of baseball cards. The boys played with their gloves off. They blew into their hands and stamped their feet. I played seriously against the background noise of the recess and lost all my cards.

“Boy, Davey, you may be a big brain, but you’re lousy at this. Look at all these Babe Ruths,” one of them said.

“You ought to take your gloves off when you play, Davey,” another said.

“It hurts my fingers to do that.”

“Look at these hands,” a third said. He thrust a pair of chapped and reddened hands in front of my eyes. “My mother will kill me. What did I spend money on gloves for if you don’t wear them? She’ll absolutely kill me. How can you play with gloves on, Davey?”

I shrugged and moved away from them. Yaakov Bader walked with me through the noisy yard back to the chain-link fence.

“They were only kidding you, Davey. Don’t be so serious.” We looked out at the deserted winter street.

“Is your uncle still in Europe?” I asked.

“He’ll be there until the summer.”

“What does he do?”

“He’s living in Switzerland this year.”

“Is he still in business?”

“Yes.”

“So many people went out of business. My father doesn’t have much business now. He’s home a lot.”

We were quiet, staring through the fence at the street.

“And so many people are moving. One of the boys in my house moved the other day. Monday, I think it was. Joey Younger. He’s in second grade. Do you know him?”

He shook his head.

“I never liked him too much. But I was sorry he had to move.”

Activity Option

1. Role-play a conversation in which Max and Ruth Lurie explain to their son David what is happening to the nation’s economy and how this economic situation affects their lives.