

Notable Trade Book Lesson Plan

Rudy Rides the Rails: A Depression Era Story

by Dandi Daley Mackall

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*This technology-infused lesson uses the historical fiction book, *Rudy Rides the Rails*, which is based on the real “Ramblin’ Rudy” who rode in railroad cars searching for work during the Great Depression. Instructional development focuses on students working collaboratively as they investigate how economic factors directly affect living conditions. This lesson incorporates history and basic economic concepts that allow students to understand how global and national conditions affect the lives of people, not only in the past but also currently. This lesson is designed for students in the middle grades but can easily be adapted for high school students.*

Book Title

Rudy Rides the Rails: A Depression Era Story by Dandi Daley Mackall
(Notable, 2007). Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press.
Suggested age level: 4-6
ISBN-13: 978-1-58536-286-8
Estimated time length for the following activities: 2 – 3 days

Book Summary

This book is historical fiction and is based on a real “Ramblin’ Rudy” who rode in railroad cars in search for work during the Great Depression. It depicts the hopelessness of workers who lost their jobs and couldn’t support their families. In 1932, Rudy leaves Akron, Ohio, in a railroad car going West to look for work in order to send the money home to his family. With his father out of work, Rudy’s family survives on food from relief lines and soup kitchens. While on the journey, he meets other hoboes who teach him survival skills he needs as a hobo. He also learns how to read signs hoboes leave outside of houses to show which offer kindness and which houses to avoid. When he finally arrives in California, Rudy discovers many hoboes, all looking for work. He decides to return home to Akron and to his family. The book contains a “hobo glossary” which explains terms used by hoboes and the signs they carved outside of homes and other places. It also contains a hidden story about learning to lean other others.

**NCSS
Standards**

Standard Topics

- II. Time, Continuity, and Change
- III. People, Places, and Environment
- IV. Individual Development and Identity
- VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Materials

1. A copy of the novel *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting
2. Whiteboard and markers
3. Notebook paper and pencils
4. Computers with Internet access
5. Handouts with research task for each team
6. Memory sticks to save PowerPoint presentations
7. Student copies of *Rudy Rides the Rails* by Dandi D. Mackall
8. A copy for each student of the report, *Homeless Families Today: Our Challenge Tomorrow*, published by the [Homes for the Homeless](#)
9. Primary documents and pictures of the homeless during the Great Depression Era
10. Copies of Venn Diagrams

Objectives

- Students will identify and conclude alternative living forms arise due to economic factors.
- Students will be able to identify and conclude that economic conditions led to hardships of the American people during the Great Depression.
- Students will identify alternative living forms brought on by economic hardships faced during the Great Depression.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast homelessness during the Depression to the homeless of today.

Procedures

**Exploration/
Introduction**

1. The teacher poses the question, "What is a home"? Students are directed to do a concept web with home at the center. They are then directed to list different characteristics of a home branching out from their web.
2. The teacher discusses the students' choices while listing them on the board.
3. The teacher then instructs students to list different kinds of homes branching out from their web.
4. The teacher discusses students' selections, questioning their replies, while listing their examples on the board. Students identify why there are different kinds and levels of homes.
5. The teacher reads *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting and discusses the concept of home mentioned in the book.
6. The teacher and students refer back to the original list made by the students. The teacher asks if any changes need to be made to the list. The teacher relates to the students that the story by Eve Bunting is based on a real event in which a man and his son were arrested for living in an airport.
7. The teacher mentions that economic factors can determine how and where people live.

Development

1. Students, in teams, are assigned the task of researching in order to determine the effects of the Great Depression on the American people.
2. Each team is given a task to complete.
 - Task 1: Determine what alternative forms of living took place during the Great Depression.
 - Task 2: Determine what a Hooverville was and the reason for the label.
 - Task 3: Determine the locations of Hoovervilles and analyze the reasoning for their position.
 - Task 4: Determine the factors that led to the wide loss of jobs and thereby leading to the loss of homes.
 - Task 5: Determine how life changed for people who lost their jobs and homes and wound up living as hoboes.

**Development
(Continued)**

3. Students go to the computer lab in order to research their team's individual task. Use the following three sites for research:
 - <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/depwwii/depress/hoovers.html>
 - http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/01794/first_hand_accounts.htm
 - <http://www.eroluys.com/RidingtheRails.htm>
4. Each team compiles a short PowerPoint identifying their task and presents their findings.
5. Each team presents their PowerPoint and leads in discussing their findings.
6. Each team lists one main idea from their findings on the board.
7. Note: This can be done in a poster presentation if access to computers is limited.

Assessment: Check for comprehension and provide feedback on students' posters and their collaborative efforts in the work on posters.

Expansion

The teacher reads *Rudy Rides the Rails: A Depression Era Story* while referring to the students' main ideas. During the Great Depression, many families lost their homes because they lost their jobs. The loss of jobs came as a result of the economic hardships placed on banks after the stock market crash. Many people had no choice but to seek alternative forms of shelter. Hoovervilles were named after President Hoover who was blamed for the problems of the depression and were formed throughout the United States. Many Americans took to riding the rails in search for employment and were referred to as hoboes.

1. Students each will receive a copy of the report *Homeless Families Today: Our Challenge Tomorrow* published by the [Homes for the Homeless](#). Students will be given time to read the report and then discuss it in small groups.
2. Students are then given primary documents and pictures that depict homeless life in America during the Great Depression.
3. Students, working in small groups, discuss the documents and pictures and how life of the homeless was similar and different from that depicted in the report on today's homeless.
4. Students complete a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the homeless of the Great Depression era and those of today.

Assessment

Exploratory: The teacher will evaluate the written responses of the concept web and the oral responses provided through discussion to formatively assess prior knowledge.

Invention: PowerPoint presentations and group presentations will be assessed to determine if students were able to identify that economic conditions led to hardships Americans faced during the Great Depression.

Expansion: The Venn Diagram will be used to assess whether students are able to successfully compare and contrast homelessness of the Great Depression era to the homeless found in America today.

**Suggested
Extension
Activities**

- Students could create their own book, similar to *Rudy Rides the Rails*, in which they address homelessness of today including a hobo glossary of signs.
- Students could research the music of the Depression Era and find elements pertaining to the economic situation of the time. They could then write their own song
[\[http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/cherries.html\]](http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/cherries.html)
- Students could research recipes that were created to deal with the economic depression
[\[http://www.geocities.com/NapaValley/1918/great.html?\]](http://www.geocities.com/NapaValley/1918/great.html?) and create their own recipe that would substitute ingredients.
- Students could complete one of the Webquests found at <http://webtech.kennesaw.edu/jcheek3/depression.htm>

**Additional
References
and Weblinks**

Basic information concerning the Great Depression.

<http://www.42explore2.com/depresn.htm>

Bunting, E. (1991). *Fly away home*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

First-hand accounts from people who lived during the Great Depression.

http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/01794/first_hand_accounts.htm

Homes for the Homeless

<http://www.HomesfortheHomeless.com>

Homelessness today as well as during the Great Depression.

http://www.wtps.org/wths/imc/teacher_assignment/english/barnett/barnett%20grapes%20of%20wrath.htm

Hoover Administration information.

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1998/4/98.04.04.x.html#c>

Hooverville information and photos.

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/depwwii/depress/hoovershtml>

Mackall, D. (2007). *Rudy rides the rails: A depression era story*. Chelsea: Sleeping Bear Press.

Other valuable resources linked to the Great Depression.

<http://webtech.kennesaw.edu/jcheek3/depression.htm>

Teenagers who rode the rails during the Great Depression.

<http://www.eroluys.com/RidingtheRails.htm>

About the Author

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Handouts

Team 1

Research Task

Your Goal: Determine what alternative forms of living took place during the Great Depression.

As a team, research the following web sites:

- <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/depwwii/depress/hoovers.html>
- http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/01794/first_hand_accounts.htm
- <http://www.eroluys.com/RidingtheRails.htm>

Determine what different forms of living took place during the Great Depression. When you have discovered the different forms of living, you will need to make a simple PowerPoint presentation. On your PowerPoint slides, you will need to include things that show and tell your classmates about these different ways of living. Each person in your group is responsible for creating and presenting one PowerPoint slide.

Team 2

Research Task

Your Goal: Determine what a Hooverville was and the reason for being named “Hooverville.”

As a team, research the following web sites:

- <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/depwwii/depress/hoovers.html>
- http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/01794/first_hand_accounts.htm
- <http://www.eroluys.com/RidingtheRails.htm>

Determine what a Hooverville was and who it was named after. Also, find out why it was called a “Hooverville.” When you have discovered the answers, you will need to make a simple PowerPoint presentation. On your PowerPoint slides, you will need to include things that show and tell your classmates what a Hooverville was, who it was named after, and why it was called a Hooverville. Each person in your group is responsible for creating and presenting one PowerPoint slide.

Team 3

Research Task

Your Goal: Determine the locations of Hooverilles and analyze the reasoning for their position.

As a team, research the following web sites:

- <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/depwwii/depress/hoovers.html>
- http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/01794/first_hand_accounts.htm
- <http://www.erroluys.com/RidingtheRails.htm>

Determine where different Hooverilles could be found. Find these locations on the map. Think about where these Hooverilles were and discuss with your group why you think they were found in these areas. After you have completed your research, you will need to make a simple Power Point presentation. On your PowerPoint slides, you will need to discuss where Hooverilles could be found and also why your group thinks Hooverilles were located where they were. Each person in your group is responsible for creating and presenting one PowerPoint slide.

Team 4

Research Task

Your Goal: Determine the factors that led to the wide loss of jobs and thereby the loss of homes.

As a team, research the following web sites:

- <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/depwwii/depress/hoovers.html>
- http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/01794/first_hand_accounts.htm
- <http://www.erroluys.com/RidingtheRails.htm>

Determine what led to people losing their jobs. When you have discovered what led to people losing their jobs and homes, you will need to make a simple PowerPoint presentation. On your PowerPoint slides, you will need to include things that show and tell your classmates about what led to people losing their jobs. Each person in your group is responsible for creating and presenting one PowerPoint slide.

Team 5

Research Task

Your Goal: Determine how life changed for people who lost their jobs and homes and wound up living as hoboes.

As a team, research the following web sites:

- <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/depwwii/depress/hoovers.html>
- http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/01794/first_hand_accounts.htm
- <http://www.erroluys.com/RidingtheRails.htm>

Determine what life was like for a hobo and how it was different from their life prior to the Great Depression. When you have discovered what life was like as a hobo during the Great Depression, you will need to make a simple PowerPoint presentation. On your PowerPoint slides, you will need to include things that show and tell your classmates about this way of living. Each person in your group is responsible for creating and presenting one PowerPoint slide.