



The Great Depression: How the Black and Brown People Endured it All

by Jashonai Payne, 2013 CTI Fellow
Clear Creek Elementary School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Language Arts, Grade 5

Keywords: Great Depression, biography, African American, Latino/Hispanic, poetry, *Esperanza Rising*, *The Mighty Miss Malone*

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: When studying the Great Depression, there are many images and stories of poor suffering white Americans that can be found in books and on the internet. However, there is a dearth of literature, images, and information about the plight of African Americans and Latino/Hispanic Americans during the same time period. As a result, my unit highlights the children's literature novels entitled *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan and *The Mighty Miss Malone* by Christopher Paul Curtis. In these novels, the stories of a Mexican family and an African American family and their experiences during the Great Depression are weaved through these heartfelt books for children. We will compare their characters, settings, and events in order to find the similarities and differences of Esperanza's story set in rural California as migrant farm workers and Deza's story which takes place in urban landscapes such as Gary, Indiana and Flint, Michigan, as they both struggle to keep their families together. In the second part of my unit, my students will research famous African Americans and Latino/Hispanic Americans that are not well known, but are equally important. They will complete biography reports and make bio-poems which they will share in a class poetry jam. With these activities, I hope to increase the awareness of the crucial contributions these cultural groups bring to our American society. In this way, the stories of the Brown and Black people of the United States will be given a greater voice in the lives of my students.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 49 students in Language Arts/Grade 5.

I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.

The Great Depression: How the Black and Brown People Endured it All

Jashonai Payne

Introduction

At a bleak time in American history when the United States plummeted into one of its most difficult economic times ever, people suffered all across the country. Banks crashed, people lost homes, jobs, and the farms were ruined due to the dry harsh weather of the Dust Bowls in the Midwest. Although some kept up appearances and continued to thrive such as Hollywood, which kept producing movies such as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With the Wind*, and listening to songs such as “We’re in the Money”, people were suffering tremendously. Yet, the people we fail to see in the famous photographs lining up to get soup kitchen food are the brown and black people. Through the literature of Christopher Paul Curtis and Pam Muñoz Ryan, my students and I will travel through time into the lives of Deza Malone and Esperanza Ortiz, looking through the lens of literary characters that experience the hardships that the Great Depression brings to their families.

Rationale

“I want to teach my students history as a contextualized story. I want them to learn a story with rough texture, complete with flaws and conflicts and complexities, not a slick, sealed, sanitized version...I hope to teach them to become educated consumers of history and current events, who consider the perspective of the author and the authenticity of the documents referenced. I want them to become confident, critical thinkers, eager to dive below the surface to find deeper meanings and connections. I want them to grow as people who not only can recognize injustice but are willing and able to take an effective, principled stand for justice.”¹

The person behind this quote, Mary Cowhey, is the type of teacher I am striving to be: One who shows her students the world through literature and history, paired together as a dynamic duo. My principal had the five fifth grade classroom teachers at our school departmentalize by subject areas in order to achieve a level of expertise in our narrowed content areas. As a result, I am teaching Language Arts and Social Studies to two fifth grade classrooms. It behooves me to integrate as many social studies concepts into my

¹ Mary Cowhey, *Black Ants and Buddhists: Thinking Critically and Teaching Differently in the Primary Grades*. (Portland, Maine: Steinhouse Publishers, 2006), 124.

Language Arts lessons as possible in order to maximize my instructional time. As a result, I am truly enjoying this experience teaching history through novels and picture books. However, I also intend to play the devil's advocate. I want my students to understand and get an accurate picture of all points of view when learning these periods of American history. For instance, when we learn about the colonization of the New World, I want my students to not only learn the hardships that the European Explorers endured, but also the effects left by this colonization which ranged from disease, murder, and extinction of various Native American groups. I provide the accurate information from all points of view and I allow my students to create their own informed stances on each historical period or issue which we delve into.

One of the periods in history which I chose to focus on is the Great Depression. Upon my perusal of various children's literature which addresses this time period, I found quite a few beautifully crafted picture books about regular working families who struggled through the Depression, losing jobs, having to make sacrifices, yet maintaining the love to persevere through this difficult time. I noticed that there was always a mother, father, and children who were sent to a relative to live for a short period of time or the family had to briefly move or make lifestyle changes which yielded positive results and a more financial secure future. It is interesting to note that despite these hardships, the families stayed together. The most fascinating detail is that all of these families were white.

This left me curious, knowing that there were many other families who were present in America during the Great Depression. I wanted to know these stories. As a woman of color, I would want my daughter and son to know how their ancestors fared during this time period and what happened to the people of their skin color during the 30s and 40s in the United States.

As I searched for novels written by Latino/Hispanic and African American authors targeted for ages nine through eleven, I quickly discovered that there was a dearth of literature to which students could connect themselves. One of my goals is for my students to dive deeply into the literature of and/or about Latinos/Hispanics and their culture, as well as have a familiar character for with whom my Latino/Hispanic students can identify. *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan is a great novel that expresses one type of Latino/Hispanic perspective.

Esperanza Rising is about a wealthy rancheros family, owning thousands of acres in Mexico, whose father was killed by bandits. A series of heart-wrenching events left Esperanza, her mother, and their former loyal *campesinos*, or field workers, fleeing Mexico in search of work and a new life. Esperanza learned the importance of inner strength and being able to count on family to get her through difficult times.

This novel explores the tribulations of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans being as they were discriminated against, as well as conditions of the menial farming jobs that were available in the California valleys. Ryan also writes of the harsh effects of Valley Fever,

on various people in the area. Valley fever, which is still a concern of the CDC today in California's Central Valley², is a fungus which is found in the soil and the spores are inhaled by the people who work the land. There is no real cure and most people build immunity to it. However, there are smaller number of cases where they get quite ill and results in fatalities.

She also touches upon the Repatriation of the Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in which over two million people were sent to Mexico during the Great Depression³. This was a ploy by the American government and the large farms to squelch the uprising of striking workers who were fighting for improved conditions in the camps in which they lived, as well as an effort to assuage the fears of white Americans who felt their job security was being jeopardized by the Mexicans. One of the most unfortunate factors of this situation was that many of the people sent back to Mexico were legitimate American citizens born in the United States. Families were separated, some never to be reunited again.

Another issue which faced the Mexican immigrants in the book and in history was the presence of other ethnic groups at the camps. Ryan mentions the presence of Japanese, Filipinos, and the Oklahoman workers, who were also known as the "Okies", the migrant workers who came from Oklahoma posed a difficult dilemma for the Mexican workers. As a result of the Dust Bowl which consisted of the devastating droughts that swept the Plains area of the United States and the terrible dust storms which could swell from nowhere, many of the Midwestern farmers lost their farms and were left destitute. As a result, they too were desperate for work. In a desperate desire to get jobs and food for their families, the Oklahomans would cross the picket lines and offer to replace the striking Mexicans for less money than they were asking for. Since the large companies were only interested in getting their crops harvested and packaged for consumption, they would hire the Oklahomans, making it much harder for the Mexicans to get the fair wages and humane living conditions they fought so hard for. Although they were often despised and looked down upon, they were sometimes given better treatment and living conditions than the Hispanic/Latino communities⁴.

In the famous Pulitzer Prize winning novel of John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* chronicles the story of the Joad family and their struggles to keep their family together

² Paige St. John, "Valley fever treatment trials announced by federal officials", *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 2013, accessed September 25, 2013, <http://www.latimes.com/local/political/la-me-ff-federal-health-officials-announce-valley-fever-trials-20130923,0,445050.story>

³ Delgado Staff, "Delgado Bill remembering those who were deported during the Great Depression signed into law, Illinois Senate Democrats, August 25, 2009, Accessed September 25, 2013, <http://www.illinoisenedemocrats.com/index.php/sen-delgado-home/377-delgado-bill-remembering-hie> those-who-were-deported-during-the-great-depression-signed-into-law

⁴Oklahoma Historical Society's Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, "Okie Migrations", Accessed September 25, 2013, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/o/ok008.html>

during the times of the Great Depression. Like other Oklahomans, they are forced to leave their land due to the Dust Bowl and travel toward California in search for work to survive. They like many other Midwestern families of this time, drive their old cars or rickety pick-up trucks with hopes that they will be able to feed and clothe each person in the household. During the novel, many heart-wrenching events take place as people lose member after member of their families due to starvation, illness and unsanitary conditions in the camps, and even deaths due to uprisings and striking to create unions. This novel was one of the most famous responsible for depicting the struggles of farming white Americans.

Ryan also highlights the dynamic between the striking Hispanic workers and the white workers who chose to cross the picket lines and the stark differences of the conditions in which they lived. As the strikers protested and fought for a better quality of life, they were often kicked out of the camps and were forced to live in makeshift camps which were nothing more than sheets with very little food and opportunities to work. Yet, some continued to endure, hoping that their people would get the wages they deserved. Unfortunately, it wasn't until the 1960s that the United Farm Workers Association was formed and the well-known Cesar Chavez joined the ranks of the organization which began to make waves in the grape boycott in California.⁵

Meanwhile, off in the great urban city of Los Angeles, Mexican-Americans along with the African American youth began to fight back against this xenophobia and prejudice by embracing the unification of jazz music and zoot suits. They had feelings of being excluded and found this new style a way to embrace who they were with pride. Unfortunately, they were often mistaken for hooligans and were thought to participate in immoral and criminal behavior.⁶

In addition to the Latino/Hispanic experience, I thought it was also crucial to show the struggles of African-Americans and how the Great Depression took such a difficult toll on the Black family. As a result, the second novel we will read and discuss is *The Mighty Miss Malone* by Christopher Paul Curtis. This is a story about an African-American family living in Gary, Indiana during the Great Depression. The loving family of four is hit by the effects of the plummeting economy and the lack of jobs for Black men that made it extremely difficult for Deza's father to find employment in order to care for his family properly. Mr. Malone leaves in search of a job in Flint, Michigan and during this time, the family loses contact with him.

⁵ Claire Peterson and Susana Diaz, "Exploring the United Farmworkers History", <http://l3d.cs.colorado.edu/systems/agentsheets/New-Vista/grape-boycott/History.html>, Accessed September 25, 2013.

⁶ Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2008,) 84, 97-98.

It is important to highlight the history of Gary as an urban landscape in the Depression era. Prior to the Depression, Gary was known for its prominence in the Steel Industry and in turn, attracted many southern African Americans to seek unskilled labor jobs. However, discrimination continued to plague Blacks despite the many factory jobs available in Gary. "...a quota system kept their work force at no more than 15 percent. Most of the region had segregated public facilities, and housing was racially segregated as well. African Americans were relegated to live in "the Patch", the most undesirable housing in the city. Later, Mexican workers, who ironically were brought in as strike breakers, were also forced to reside in the Patch."⁷ After the Depression hit the country, Gary's economy took a major hit, reducing the amount of steel jobs by 80 percent. This greatly affected the 18 % of African American residents, making it even more difficult to find employment. This is portrayed in the Christopher Paul Curtis novel. He discusses the frustrations that the main character's father experiences in Flint. He can never secure permanent employment and is forced to work in more menial jobs such as a janitor or a laborer, despite having a skilled trade in carpentry.

As for the women, their job opportunities usually consisted of being maids and domestics for white families. Paule Marshall, who grew up during the Great Depression, speaks of the West Indian women from Barbados who lived in the Brooklyn borough of New York City in her novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. She describes the routine of a typical day for the working mother: "Each morning they took the train to Flatbush and Sheepshead Bay to scrub floors. The lucky ones had their steady madams while the others wandered those neat blocks or waited on corners-each with her apron and working shoes in a bag under her arm until someone offered her a day's work. Sometimes the white children on their way to school laughed at their blackness and shouted 'nigger', but the Barbadian women sucked their teeth, dismissing them. Their only thought was of the 'few raw-mout' pennies' at the end of the day which would eventually 'buy house.'"⁸

The second urban setting in the story is Flint, Michigan. The father, Roscoe Malone decides that he is tired of not being able to take care of his family in Gary and leaves in order to find work in Flint. He was born in Flint, so he hopes to get assistance from the friends and family he grew up with back home. Flint shared similarities with Gary as they both had economic success prior to the Depression due to their industrial big wigs: Gary had U.S. Steel and Flint had General Motors, which both brought a great demand for workers on the assembly lines. Flint is most famous for its Sit-Down Strike of 1936, lasted over forty days.⁹ Based on photographs and information, I was unable to locate any workers who were of color. Since white workers were often given priority when

⁷ "City-Data Gary: History", Accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-Midwest/Gary-History.html>

⁸ Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brown Stones*. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1981), 11.

⁹ "Remembering the Flint Sit-Down Strike 1936-1937", Accessed November 25, 2013, <http://flint.matrix.msu.edu/>

hired for factory jobs, we can assume that African Americans felt the same effects in Flint during the Depression.

Other issues addressed in this riveting novel are the differences in towns and the school systems. The main character, Deza, goes to an all-black elementary school in Gary which was nurturing and uplifting for a young lady such as Deza who was always a conscientious student. She received straight As at this school and great encouragement as one of the fine students helping in the cause of uplifting her race. However, when they moved to Flint, Michigan, Deza soon learned the differences in having white teachers in that no matter how hard she worked or how intelligent she was, she was never allowed to score the highest marks she deserved, based on the feeling that the white teachers did not want to acknowledge her ability as one of the most successful students in the class. This was done despite her ability to surpass many white students.

The conditions of the boarders and renters are also mentioned in Curtis' novel. As a result of the low wages and lack of working opportunities for African Americans during the Great Depression, people were forced to rent rooms and houses from others. The main character's family notified the landlord of their impending move and was forced out the house early, leaving them in the middle of the street clutching the few possessions they could carry in a car. It was a dehumanizing experience, but one that many African Americans experienced during this period in American History.

Other issues addressed in this riveting novel are the differences in towns and the school systems. The main character, Deza, goes to an all-black elementary school in Gary which was nurturing and uplifting for a young lady such as Deza who was always a conscientious student. She received straight As at this school and great encouragement as one of the fine students helping in the cause of uplifting her race. However, when they moved to Flint, Michigan, Deza soon learned the differences in having white teachers in that no matter how hard she worked or how intelligent she was, she was never allowed to score the highest marks she deserved, based on the feeling that the white teachers did not want to acknowledge her ability as one of the most successful students in the class. This was done despite her ability to surpass many white students.

The conditions of boarders and renters are also mentioned in Curtis' novel. As a result of the low wages and lack of working opportunities for African Americans during the Great Depression, people were forced to rent rooms and houses from others. The main character's family notified the landlord of their impending move and was forced out the house early, leaving them in the middle of the street clutching the few possessions they could carry in a car. It was a dehumanizing experience, but one that many African Americans experienced during this period in American History.

Deza, her brother and mother look for the father and have the experience of living in a Hooverville outside of Flint. A Hooverville was a neighborhood full of shanties made up of cardboard boxes which were usually established by the homeless and the jobless

Americans who had lost houses and/or jobs during this devastating economic period. These towns were named after the President of that time, Herbert Hoover, who was said to be the cause of the conditions leading to the Great Depression.¹⁰ These Hoovervilles were often raided and destroyed by the police who believed that many of the squatters were waiting to jump the trains in order to get a free ride on the railroad in order to search for job opportunities out West.

Christopher Paul Curtis also delves into how the Depression affected the Black family. With loss of jobs in the economy, those that were left were given first to the European immigrants, overlooking the African-Americans workers. As a result, some families were left with the option of the woman working and providing for the family alone or the father going to a different state in hopes of securing employment in order to maintain his “head of household” status. With the men unemployed, they sometimes felt a blow to their manhood. One account from Isabel Wilkerson stated that “People took to begging and scraping to eat.”¹¹ As people became more desolate, this in turn affected the dynamic of the family and sometimes broke them apart. In this book as well as *Esperanza Rising*, they show the importance of family when persevering through hard times, including the Great Depression.

My students will also research biographies of little-known yet influential Latin-Americans and African Americans in order to create a full picture of the vast range of these cultural groups. In a quest to find the full experience, we will be exposed to famous artwork, music, and food of these dynamic cultural groups. We will create a biographical report which includes illustrations, famous quotes, and important contributions of their people. They will then write a biographical “I Am” poem as a culminating activity and will share their poems by having a poetry slam in our classroom.

I hope that my students will be able to use these brief glimpses in order to tap into and capture a piece of their own stories which they can chronicle for their own gratification and growth as they celebrate their own culture, dreams, and memories of the lives they have lived thus far.

Background (School)

I teach two fifth grade classes Language Arts and Social Studies, totaling 49 students at Clear Creek Elementary, which is located in one of the largest urban school districts in the country, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Our school has over 700 students, where pre-kindergarten through fifth grade is taught. Approximately 55% of the student population receives free or reduced lunch. There are five students who have

¹⁰ “Library of Congress, Hoovervilles-Photograph Collage”, Accessed September 25, 2013, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/depwwii/depress/hoovers.html>

¹¹ Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 104.

Individualized Education Plans and receive special education services, two students who receive English as a Second Language services, two students who have a 504 plan, and seven students who are certified for the Talent Development program.

Clear Creek Elementary has a history which can be traced back over 100 years and historically serviced the needs of children from farming families who could not attend school all year around.¹² Much of the Clear Creek community resides in the town of Mint Hill, which is a suburb of Charlotte as well as the city of Charlotte itself. The school population consists of 45.2% White, 33.8% African-American, 15.8% Latino, 1.4% Asian, and 3.6% are classified as other.

Strategies

Integrating Various Subjects through Social Studies

Integrating various subjects allows the time constraints we encounter as teachers to be maximized by using as many subjects areas weaved together to create an enhanced curriculum which captures the interests of the students. According to Lindquist and Selwyn, “an integrated curriculum is at the heart of a teaching approach that places social studies at the center of the curriculum...Discrete skills related to the various subjects and disciplines are still taught, but there is a consistent thread of content that keeps the learning focused.”¹³

Cooperative Learning Groups

Cooperative Learning Groups is a skill that not only helps students to process concepts and complete activities with peer help and guidance but allows the development of social skills, along with cooperation, team building, and leadership skills. Students can benefit from being exposed to the various ideas and thought processes of peers in order to assist in developing their own thought processes.

Usage of Historical Fiction Books

The usage of historical fiction books to teach Social Studies bring the elements of fiction, and narrative into the context of a real historical occurrence. In my unit, I will use powerful historical fiction books such as *The Mighty Miss Malone* by Christopher Paul Curtis and *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan so that my students can create a story context in their minds using what they already know about characters, setting, and story in order to create new ideas in a historical context of learning of various cultures, places, and events in time. The story is more accessible as they are able to connect and

¹² <http://schools.cms.k12.nc.us/clearcreekES/Pages/AboutOurSchool.aspx>

¹³ Tarry Lindquist, *Ways That Work: Putting Social Studies Standards into Practice*. Chicago: Heinemann, 1997.

relate to the characters in the books, yet learn about the climate and the way of life during the particular era in history.

Many historical concepts can be quite complex and abstract to young learners. It is important to use all learning styles in order to make the concepts understood and internalized. This strategy addresses the kinesthetic learners as well as creating a real life scenario in which the students will be able to make concrete connections to the concept. I use this strategy in the unit during activity one, in which the students will get an opportunity to act out from the point of view of slave children, as well as the children of the wealthy plantation owners. They will then write journal entries to write their feelings during the process.

Usage of Pictures, Graphs, and Diagrams

Using pictures, graphs, and diagrams are essential to students who may process information in other ways besides verbal and auditory. This strategy makes learning more concrete and also assists the English Language Learners in making connections to the difficult concepts and vocabulary they may encounter in their daily interaction with unknown or complex vocabulary. I use this strategy in my unit by showing various primary source photographs of various conditions of African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos during the Great Depression time period. There are many rich and poignant photographs which are available during the 1930s. Viewing the pictures and any artwork which was representative of this era could make this experience through the literature more rich and concrete for my student learners.

Summarizing and Note-Taking

It is important for students to learn the strategy of summarizing and note taking. Students need to know how to synthesize and process information in a meaningful way. They need to learn how to take a large amount of text and filter through it in order to find the information that meets their needs. The students also need to be able to take the information and concisely list only the pertinent information into a summary. I will use this strategy in my unit during the final culminating research activity. The students will choose a specific person they would like to focus on for their biography project. They will then begin to gather their resources and materials they will need for their project. After they have the materials, I will guide them through the process of how to take notes and select important information and facts and to discard the frivolous information. I will also do mini-lessons based on how to take the information they gather and summarize it into a cohesive paper.

Journal Writing

I will use this strategy throughout my unit in order to have my students respond to various prompts and ideas we discuss in class. My hope is to make connections between

the Great Depression time period and the recession which rocked our nation in 2008 and whose effects continue to be felt today as the job markets attempt to recover. My students can most likely make personal connections to their own experiences today compared to the people in the 1930s, as many of their parents are out of work or can only share housing with family and friends due to the loss of income.

Socratic Seminar

I will use the Socratic Seminar in my unit in order to have my students think more critically about different types of text using open-ended questions. They will follow a certain structure in which the leader poses certain questions to the group and the students thoughtfully respond. Building on the ideas of others, students are able delve deeply into themes and issues which present itself in the stories in a respectful and meaningful way.

Classroom Activities

Activity 1: Students will receive background into the Great Depression by watching a Discovery Education video entitled “American History: America’s Economy: Sorrow and Hope. Here, we will discuss the causes and effects of the Depression.¹⁴ The entire unit should run approximately 6 weeks.

Activity 2: The teacher will read the picture book, *A Gift of Gracias*. The students will discuss the life of Hispanic people on the farms and the presence of *bandidos* who were the poor affected by the bad harvests. In turn, people would rob and sometimes kill the rich land owners for money. We will also discuss the strong belief systems they had in a higher power, mainly of the Catholic religion, which comprised of various saints that were worshipped. We will also address the caste system which existed on the rancheros, usually the rich Spanish land owners, and the Indian or Mexican *campesinos*, or farm workers who tilled the land.

Activity 3: The class will read the novel, *Esperanza Rising*. We will begin by doing a vocabulary activity of challenging words which will be found throughout the book. Then, we will analyze the chapter titles and the symbolism which exists throughout the book. During the reading, we will discuss issues such as the conditions in the camps, organization of unions, deportations of Mexicans and American citizens, and Valley Fever. As a culminating activity, the class will participate in a Socratic Seminar with the novel.

Activity 4: The teacher will read the picture book, *Lucky Beans*. The students will review the effects of the Great Depression and the added layer of racism and segregation which affected African Americans.

¹⁴ “American History: America’s Economy: Sorrow and Hope” From Discovery Education, Full Video, 2005. <http://www.discoveryeducation.com/> (accessed 25 November 2013).

Activity 5: The class will read the novel, *The Mighty Miss Malone*. We will begin by doing a vocabulary activity of challenging words which will be found throughout the book. Within the reading, we will discuss how families were separated due to lack of employment, unequal treatment of Black students in the public schools, and the presences and conditions of “Hooverilles” which were shanties located on the outskirts of various American cities. As a culminating activity, the class will participate in a Socratic Seminar with the novel.

Activity 6: The students will write a short essay comparing the main characters Deza and Esperanza as well as the settings and events in the two books. They will find the similarities between their experiences that were common of the Great Depression era as well as the differences that exist between their cultures, family circumstances, and the settings of their stories.

Activity 7: The students will randomly choose a name of a noted African American or a Latino/Hispanic American that are not known to most children. Some possible Latino/Hispanic Americans are: Cesar Chavez (union leader for farm workers), Ellen Ochoa (female astronaut), Tito Puente (musician/percussionist), Roberto Clemente (baseball player), and Severo Ochoa (Nobel Prize winner in medicine), and Celia Cruz (singer and performer.) Some possible African Americans are: Charlie Parker (musician), Nat Turner (organized slave rebellion), Jacob Lawrence (artist), Nina Simone (singer/songwriter), Zora Neale Hurston (writer), and Paul Robeson (athlete and actor.) They will conduct research on their famous person and will complete a graphic organizer with the information they find. They will take this researched information and create a biographical report which includes illustrations, famous quotes, and important contributions of their people.

Activity 8: The students will write a biographical “I Am” poem about their famous person. They will share this at a class publishing party and poetry jam.

Teacher Resources

Alvarez, Luis. *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

“*American History: America's Economy: Sorrow and Hope*” From Discovery Education, Full Video, 2005. <http://www.discoveryeducation.com/> (accessed 25 November 2013).

“*City-Data Gary: History*”, Accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-Midwest/Gary-History.html>

Cowhey, Mary. *Black Ants and Buddhists: Thinking Critically and Teaching Differently in the Primary Grades*. Portland, Me.: Stenhouse Publishers, 2006.

Hughes, Langston. *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Vintage classics ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

“Library of Congress, *Hooverilles-Photograph Collage*”, Accessed September 25, 2013, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/depwwii/depress/hoovers.html>

Lindquist, Tarry. *Ways That Work: Putting Social Studies Standards into Practice*. Chicago: Heinemann, 1997. Using the National Social Studies standards, this resource gives classroom teachers exciting and creative ways to address each standard, while integrating numerous strategies and subjects as well.

Marshall, Paule. *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1981.

Oklahoma Historical Society’s Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, “Okie Migrations”, Accessed September 25, 2013, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/o/ok008.html>

Peterson, Claire and Susana Diaz, “Exploring the United Farmworkers History”, <http://13d.cs.colorado.edu/systems/agentsheets/New-Vista/grape-boycott/History.html>, Accessed September 25, 2013.

“*Remembering the Flint Sit-Down Strike 1936-1937*”, Accessed November 25, 2013, <http://flint.matrix.msu.edu/>

Rhynes, Martha E.. *I, Too, Sing America: The Story of Langston Hughes*. Greensboro,

N.C.: Morgan Reynolds, 2002.

Staff, Delgado, “Delgado Bill remembering those who were deported during the Great Depression signed into law, Illinois Senate Democrats, August 25, 2009, Accessed September 25, 2013, <http://www.illinoissenatedemocrats.com/index.php/sen-delgado-home/377-delgado-bill-remembering-hie> those-who-were-deported-during-the-great-depression-signed-into-law

Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Viking Press, 1939.

St. John, Paige, “Valley fever treatment trials announced by federal officials”, *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 2013, accessed September 25, 2013, <http://www.latimes.com/local/political/la-me-ff-federal-health-officials-announce-valley-fever-trials-20130923,0,445050.story>

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. New York, NY: Random House, 2010.

Children’s Literature Resources of the Great Depression for Students

Alvarez, Julia, and Beatriz Vidal. *A Gift of Gracias: The Legend of Altagracia*. New York: Knopf :, 2005.

In the picture book, *A Gift of Gracias*, Alvarez weaves a tale of a family whose olive farm is suffering and may have to move to the city. Maria, the main character is saddened by this possibility since she loves living on the farm. A saint comes to her in her dreams, Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia, Our Lady of Thanks in English. She shows Maria that she should plant the orange seeds her father brought from his travels to the city. Magic takes of over their land and orange trees swiftly grow and flourish from the once barren land. This story shows that the simple saying “thank you” can mean so much more.

Birtha, Becky, and Nicole Taddell. *Lucky Beans*. Chicago, Ill.: Albert Whitman & Co., 2010.

In the picture book *Lucky Beans*, Marshall Loman was tired of eating beans each night. Yet with his dad unemployed due to the Great Depression, the family had little choice. They ate what they had beans were always cheap and plentiful. One day while walking is a contest being held for the people of the town. Whoever can guess the amount of beans in the giant jar, wins a brand new sewing machine. Marshall knows that this sewing machine could make the difference in his family’s situation, since his mom is seamstress.

However, as he looks through the window and plans to enter the contest, a young white girl notifies him that this contest is for whites only. Upset, Marshall goes into the store and finds out from the owner of the store that the contest is for all Americans. He runs home and begins the process with his mom's help, of estimating the number of beans in the jar. This is a great story about being resourceful and persevering in order reach goals in life.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *The Mighty Miss Malone*. New York: Wendy Lamb Books, 2012.

Christopher Paul Curtis has created another classic with *The Mighty Miss Malone*. This is a historical fiction novel set in the time of the Great Depression. This depicts the hardships that African American families endured during this time period. Yet, the love which exists in this particular family is so heartwarming and poignant. Deza Malone, our protagonist, is an extremely bright young lady who dreams of being a school teacher one day in order to return the favor of the teachers who have prepared her so well for her future career path. Her older but shorter brother Jimmie has the voice of an angel, but lacks a desire for schooling like his younger sister. During this difficult time, it proves to be even more difficult for African-Americans and in turn, Deza's father loses his job. He leaves their Gary, Indiana home in hopes to find work elsewhere in his hometown of Flint, Michigan. Deza's mother leaves Gary in hopes to catch up to her husband and keep their family together. This story is sure to pull at anyone's heart strings as the characters make you laugh and cry throughout their journey to be reunited.

Lied, Kate, and Lisa Campbell Ernst. *Potato: A Tale from the Great Depression*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 1997.

Potato: A Tale of the Great Depression is another true account of an eight-year-old author's retelling of a story her great aunt remembered when they lived through the Depression. It shares how the father lost his job and home and the family traveled cross country to collect potatoes for a farmer in Idaho. Collecting the leftover potatoes, the family sold and traded them back home, which enabled them to survive the harsh conditions of this time period until the father was able to secure another job.

Peck, Richard. *A Long Way from Chicago: A Novel in Stories*. Puffin Modern Classics ed. New York: Puffin Books, 2004.

In Peck's novel, *A Long Way from Chicago*, siblings Mary Alice and Joey must travel to a rural part of Illinois to "visit" their rambunctious Grandma Dowdel in order to ease the financial burdens their family is feeling due to the Great Depression. During their summer there, Grandma Dowdel drags them on many zany adventures from seeing a real dead body, to setting traps with a Winchester double-barreled shotgun for thieving

neighbors. They learn to adjust to their grandmother's frugal yet unconventional ways and realize that they underestimated the excitement and constant hullabaloo which would take place a long way from their urban Chicago home.

Polacco, Patricia. *An Orange for Frankie*. New York: Philomel Books, 2004.

In *An Orange for Frankie*, Patricia Polacco weaves a true tale about her Michigan family. During the Great Depression, Polacco's family feeds the train-hopping hobos a hot meal and drink as they pass through the town for a brief time. With the weather so treacherous, young great-uncle Frankie gave away his Christmas sweater his older sister made him last Christmas to one of the kind hobos who did not have a shirt to wear in the freezing temperatures. Afraid to tell what he did, he hid his secret hoping that no one would find out as the family waited for their dad to take the yearly trip to the train which comes from Florida every year to deliver their special shipment of Christmas oranges to the people in the area. Father is severely delayed by the weather, but makes it home in time to share this wonderful time of year with his family. In turn, Frankie's kindness and generosity is rewarded and everyone is grateful for their dear Frankie and his big heart at Christmastime.

Ryan, Pam Muñoz. *Esperanza Rising*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2000.

Pam Muñoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising* is sure to have you experience every emotion while reading this book. It begins with Esperanza, the daughter of a wealthy ranchero in Mexico, who is soon to have her annual birthday party. The ranch bustles with excitement as the preparations for the harvest and Esperanza's party are underway. Then a tragedy happens to her father and Esperanza and her mother and best servants are forced to sneak out of Mexico and become migrant workers in California. This transformation takes a toll on her, as she is used to being a pampered and privileged young lady. Yet, Esperanza learns to be brave and she does what it takes to keep her family together, never losing hope for a better life.

Stewart, Sarah, and David Small. *The Gardener*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997.

In *The Gardener*, a young girl is sent to live in the city with her Uncle Jim until things improve at home. Set in the time period of the Great Depression, her father lost his job and her mother no longer has seamstress work. The main character, Lydia Grace, corresponds through letters in the book. With beautiful illustrations, the story shows how Lydia Grace changes the neighborhood and wins over her old grumpy uncle Jim who never smiles, while working in his bakery and growing a flourishing garden in the middle of the city.

Tripp, Valerie, Walter Rane, and Susan McAliley. *Changes for Kit: A Winter Story, 1934*. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Co. Publications, 2001.

In the final volume of the Kit series, *Changes for Kit*, she sees firsthand the destitution of Americans not in the news, but before her eyes. She notices how poor the families who visit the soup kitchens are, especially the children. Kit is determined to use her words in order to make a change. She writes the newspaper and takes pictures of the children and their threadbare clothes and ragged shoes. Kit does this in hopes to stir the sympathies of local people in Cincinnati to donate their old clothes for the children who truly need it. Her mean old Uncle Hendrick does not agree with Kit and feels that too many people ask for handouts they don't deserve. His philosophy is that hard work is the only way to be successful and that these homeless and hungry are just lazy people who don't want to work hard, but get free aid for no effort. Kit works hard to prove her uncle wrong.

Tripp, Valerie, Walter Rane, and Susan McAliley. *Happy Birthday, Kit!: A Springtime Story, 1934*. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Co. Publications, 2001.

In *Happy Birthday Kit*, the fourth book in the series, Kit dreams of a Robin Hood party she knew she could have, due to their poor finances during the Great Depression. However, Kit always finds a way to have an adventure and she enjoys spending time with her dad's Aunt Millie, who is visiting from Kentucky. She learns the many frugal ways of Aunt Millie and compiles all of her money saving tips in an almanac dedicated to her. However, Kit's mother is not very pleased with all of Aunt Millie's tricks and became resentful of her taking over her rightful place as "woman of the house."

Tripp, Valerie, Walter Rane, and Susan McAliley. *Kit Learns a Lesson: A School Story, 1934*. Middleton, Wi.: Pleasant Co. Publications, 2000.

In book two of the *American Girls* series, called *Kit Learns a Lesson*, Kit is on another adventure in which her enduring spirit shines through. Kit and her family are still adjusting to the life style changes that the Great Depression has forced upon her family, such as taking in boarders now that her father is unemployed. She has to deal with the humiliation of other classmates who know Kit's family's situation and tries to stay prideful through these difficult times in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Tripp, Valerie, Walter Rane, and Susan McAliley. *Kit Saves the Day: A Summer Story, 1934*. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Co. Publications, 2001.

In *Kit Saves the Day*, a young hobo named Will gets acquainted with the Kittredge family and the boarders of the house. Kit learns about the life of a hobo and the secret codes they used to determine if a house is friendly or not. Kit also learned about those who rode the rails, looking for jobs across the country. She even visited a “jungle” or camp of homeless families and she quickly realized how her fantasies of adventures were far off from the realities of true suffering. This is book five in the Kit series.

Tripp, Valerie, Walter Rane, and Susan McAliley. *Kit's Surprise: A Christmas Story, 1934*. Middleton, WI.: Pleasant Co., 2000.

In the third book in the Kit series entitled *Kit's Surprise*, she is forced to make more sacrifices in order for her family to make it. She works for her mother's rich but ornery uncle and earns money which she plans to donate to the electric bill for the Christmas holiday. Kit learns that sometimes we have to endure the most miserable experiences in order to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Tripp, Valerie, Walter Rane, and Susan McAliley. *Meet Kit, an American Girl, 1934*. Middleton, Wi.: Pleasant Co. Publications, 2000.

The first of the American Girl Kit adventures entitled *Meet Kit*, Kit is a nine year old girl who loves to write news stories on her old typewriter. She lives in Cincinnati, Ohio with her parents and older brother, Charlie. Her dad owns a car dealership and her family is as middle class America as they come. Soon the effects of the Great Depression are felt very close to Kit's own home, and her father has to close his business, and one of her mother's Garden Club friends, Mrs. Howard and her sickly son Sterling, move into their house. Kit uses her ingenuity to find ways to make their dire situation better.

Winter, Jonah, and Kimberly Bulcken Root. *Born and Bred in the Great Depression*. New York: Schwartz & Wade Books, 2011.

Born and Bred in the Great Depression is a true story about the author's dad growing up in East Texas during the Great Depression era. The story spoke of how his grandfather searched for work daily in order to provide for his eight children, sometimes having to race other men to the available work there may have been each day. He also shared how they ate the vegetables they grew in their garden and how they were even generous to hobos who wandered in from other towns. It captures a picture of a regular American family trying hard to endure the trying times after the Stock Market crashed and many Americans were left destitute.

Implementing Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

We will have the students think deeply about the character and the events in the story by making inferences and drawing conclusions during the reading. We will learn that authors don't always spell out every event and nuance which takes place during the novel. As good readers, we must draw these conclusions and read between the lines as we delve deeply into each novel. With each statement or conclusion that the students draw, they will support their statements by quoting their proof directly from the novel.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

We will implement this standard during this unit after we read the two novels. Then, we will compare the two characters, Deza and Esperanza, by looking at how similar and how different their experiences were during the Great Depression. We will analyze their motivations, personalities, and decisions as characters. We will also determine how these characters interact with others in the novels. The students will also compare the settings and events which take place in both stories.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

Students will use their context clues to determine the meanings of unknown words. We will also discuss the symbolism which exists in *Esperanza Rising*.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.9 Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

This standard will be addressed after both novels are read by the class. We will look at both the genre of historical fiction and how they beautifully weave in the history which supports the story. We will also discuss the commonalities of the era of the Great Depression and how no matter the culture, all people suffered during this time.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.7 Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

This standard will be addressed during the second part of my unit when my students will research a famous African American or Latino/Hispanic American and write a biographical report on their lives. They will independently conduct research on their famous person, gather these facts, and create a report. They will then write a bio-poem on their person, which will expose them to a different genre of writing.