

## 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> Grade

“As I went walking I saw a sign there  
And on the sign it said ‘No Trespassing.’  
But on the other side it didn't say nothing,  
That side was made for you and me.”

-Woody Guthrie

### Objectives:

- Students will learn about the 1930's “Dust Bowl.”
- Students will begin to develop a deeper understanding of the humanitarian issues that arose from the displacement of thousands of people during the 1930s.
- Students will examine the meaning and symbolism of Woody Guthrie's “This Land is Your Land.”

### Educational Perspective:

The following lesson plan is based on the idea that learning should be relevant to the learner. In the subject of history, it is important to draw parallels with today's current events and to make historical lessons “real.” Through these parallels, students can better explore historical topics that might otherwise seem too abstract or difficult for a traditional classroom environment.

### Lesson Procedure:

Inform the class that, in the 1930s, thousands of farmers and families had to leave the Texas/Oklahoma panhandle region. These individuals had to pack up all their things and move.

- Ask each student to come up with a list of five reasons why someone today might be forced to move.
  - Encourage students to think about why *they* would be forced to move.
  - If students seem unable to develop five reasons, offer your own suggestions: weather, jobs, family, etc...
- Write these reasons on a visible space so that the entire class can view. Be sure to add your own!
- Ask the class where they would want to move to if they had to leave their home.
  - Notate these on the visible space

Inform the class that the 1930s farmers that were forced to leave the panhandle did so because of severe dust storms and drought. Their crops died and, because of the poor farming techniques used, the land was blown away by the wind – creating huge dust storms. Inform the class that this is why the panhandle region is sometimes called “The Dust Bowl.” Winds would pick up the soil and toss it around creating huge pillars of dust.

- Show the following photograph to your students.
- If Internet connection permits, watch the following videos (very short):  
[http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/movies/hoffman\\_water\\_02.html](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/movies/hoffman_water_02.html)  
[http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/movies/pickrel\\_water\\_02.html](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/movies/pickrel_water_02.html)



<http://wiki.white-wolf.com/camwiki/images/3/34/Dust-storm-Texas-1935.png>

- Pick a location from the student’s list of places they would move to.
- Tell students to pretend that the entire area has decided to move to this new location.
  - Everyone they know will take their entire families to this place.
- Challenge the students to theorize what it would be like if the entire area moved to the selected location.
  - How would they be welcomed to their new home by those who already lived there?
  - Remind the students that wherever they went, population would increase and so would challenges in finding work, housing, food, etc.
    - They would have to go to a new school, get a new house, etc.

- Ask the students what it would be like if the entire state of (California) moved to their state. Ask them to imagine hundreds of thousands of people coming to their area.
  - Where would they live? Where would they go to school? Where would they sit in class?

Inform the students that the people that left the Dust Bowl mainly went to California in hopes of finding jobs and better farming. By the thousands they moved to California and weren't always welcomed.

- Ask the students if they have ever heard of the song "This Land is Your Land" by Woody Guthrie.
  - Maybe sing a little of it?

Pass out copies (or post where visible to the entire class) to the lyrics to Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land"

[http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/This\\_Land.htm](http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/This_Land.htm)

- Have students take turns reading the lyrics out loud.
- After reading, have students examine the last four (4) verses – or paragraphs.
- Have the students examine the lyrics and to guess what Woody might have been writing about in those last four verses.

After students have examined the last four verses, inform the students that the farmers from the Dust Bowl weren't always welcomed to their new homes. In fact, many of them were harassed and told to go home. Sometimes there were violent altercations and the farmers were forced out of their new homes, too. Woody was born in Okemah, Oklahoma and saw this first-hand.

Conclude the lesson by informing the students that the drought lasted for nearly nine years – from 1930-1939. Due to the drought and dust storms during this time, thousands and thousands of people lost their homes and crops; because of this, they had to move. Nearly all of the land in the area was un-useable during this time and the effects were felt all the way until the 1990s. Artists and musicians from all over painted, photographed and wrote music about this tragic event. It remains one of the largest migrations of American citizens in a short amount of time.

- Encourage the students to go home and speak with their parents about the "Dust Bowl" and to report back to the class anything they discover.