

## INTRODUCTION

This unit focuses on the lived experiences of Americans during the Great Depression and the New Deal. Countering the common myth that the stock market crash of 1929 caused the Depression, this unit examines critical social and economic conditions in place prior to the crash. It explores how life during the Great Depression put enormous strains on traditional values and beliefs, which in turn gave rise to shifting and competing conceptions of the federal government's most appropriate role in people's lives. The activities within this unit ask participants to interpret this period: Using primary documents, participants will discover multiple perspectives of people who lived during the Great Depression.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this session, teachers will

- analyze and consider the historical significance of particular primary documents from the Great Depression that reveal how individual Americans experienced the Depression and the New Deal;
- discuss a number of examples of how a shift in popular attitudes questioned the rise of American individualism and a purely market-based economy, creating a community atmosphere best reflected in popular culture;
- consider the ways in which the New Deal—and later World War II—fundamentally changed the relationship between the American people and the federal government.

## Before You Begin

Before the day of the workshop session, familiarize yourself with the reading materials assigned to the participating teachers. Review this facilitator's guide. Be sure to prepare the correct number of overheads and handouts needed for each activity. Each participant should read the text materials for the unit before attending the workshop (estimated reading time: two hours), and should bring these materials with them to the workshop session. Activities during the session will draw heavily on the content in the text materials, as well as the video.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- This *America's History in the Making* facilitator's guide
- Text Materials for Unit 18: *By the People, For the People*
- VHS tape and VCR, DVD and DVD player, or access to streaming video of *America's History in the Making* video for Unit 18: *By the People, For the People* available at [www.learner.org](http://www.learner.org)

- Overhead projector
- Multiple copies of handouts (in the Appendix of this guide)
- Pens and paper for participating teachers and facilitator
- Chalkboard, blank transparencies, or overhead for reporting out

## OVERHEAD AND HANDOUT INSTRUCTIONS

1. Using Appendix A, “Themes for *By the People, For the People*,” create an overhead transparency.
2. Using Appendix B, “Dorothea Lange Photographs,” create handouts of each photograph – enough for each participant to receive one from the assortment.
3. Using Appendix C, “Photo Analysis Worksheet” create one handout for each participant.
4. Using Appendix D, “Photo Fact Sheet,” create an overhead transparency.
5. Using Appendix E, “Letters to the Roosevelts Packet,” create one copy for each participant.
6. Using Appendix F, “Depression Quotes and Discussion Questions,” create one handout for each group of four or five participants.
7. Using Appendix G, “Virtual War Games Questions,” create an overhead transparency.
8. Using Appendix H, “Content Knowledge Assessment Scoring Guide,” create an overhead transparency.

**Facilitator’s Note:** You may want to prepare overheads of the reflection questions for teachers to reference during the workshop activities.

## LEADING THE SESSION

As participating teachers arrive, have an overhead set up that lists the main themes of the unit for teachers to review (Appendix A).

After you have completed any housekeeping announcements, ask one of the teachers to read the themes aloud. Explain that they will expand their understanding of these three themes through activities and video segments that build on the reading they did prior to the workshop session.

## Warm-up and Activity 1 (40 minutes)

This activity serves as an icebreaker for the group and explores the value of using photographs to inform our understanding of history. To complete this activity, participants will examine a photograph that has come to symbolize the U.S. Depression of the 1930s and the series of shots that led to this masterwork.

### Part 1 (10 minutes)

As a group, brainstorm all of the ways in which your lives are directly impacted by the federal government. Then as a group, discuss the following questions:

- How have these changed, if at all, over the course of your lifetime?
- When did the federal government first begin directly impacting individuals' lives in this way?

### Part 2 (10 minutes)

Have participants work individually at first. Randomly disperse the photographs from Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* companion series to participants (Appendix B), and have them fill out the Photo Analysis Worksheet (Appendix C) in response to the individual photo each receives.

### Part 3 (10 minutes)

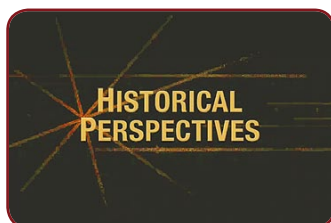
Have participants get into groups of three (each participant with a different photo selection from the series) and share their responses to the questions on the worksheet, contrasting how the photos differ based on the various compositions.

### Part 4 (10 minutes)

Place the photo fact sheet (Appendix D) on the overhead, and have a participant read it out loud. Then, have participants discuss the following reflection questions as a whole group.

### Reflection Questions

1. Does the fact that companion photographs comprise a series leading, ultimately, to *Migrant Mother* impact how we react to that single image? Why? How?
2. Do posed photographs have the same historical value as photographs that are not posed? Why or why not?
3. Would we react to the images the same way if they were in color?
4. What makes *Migrant Mother* such an enduring symbol of the Depression? Why do you think the image is commonly perceived as a candid, unposed photo?



**Watch Video Segment 1:**  
**Historical Perspectives** (approximately 10 minutes)

## Activity 2 (30 minutes)

In this activity, participants will read and analyze letters that citizens wrote to the Roosevelts during the Depression.

### Part 1 (20 minutes)

Hand out a copy of the “Letters to the Roosevelts Packet” (Appendix E) to each participant. Have the participants read the letters. As they read, they should consider the nature of the federal government’s impact on how people experienced the Depression. Then, have participants divide into pairs to generate responses to the questions on the final page of the packet (also listed below for facilitator reference).

- What do these letters reveal about the political, economic, and social factors in the communities where their writers lived?
- What evidence from these letters suggests that structural problems in society, beyond the stock market crash, created and maintained the Depression?
- Why did people write letters like this to the president and first lady? What do these letters reveal about the relationship between the Roosevelts and the American people?

### Part 2 (10 minutes)

Have the participants individually develop ideas for how they might use these letters in their classrooms to teach students about the Depression. As time permits, have participants share their ideas as a whole group.



**Watch Video Segment 2:**  
**Faces of America** (approximately 10 minutes)

## Activity 3 (15 minutes)

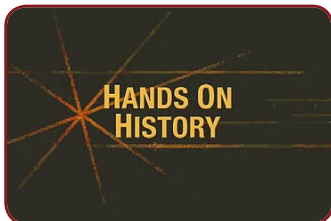
In small groups, participants will discuss the beliefs of Ann Marie Lowe, Will Rogers, and Henry Ford, and understand how their beliefs were challenged during the Depression.

Have participants divide into groups of four or five. Distribute one copy of Appendix F, “Depression Quotes and Discussion Questions,” to each group. Read the first sentence (italicized below) out loud. Then, have one participant in each group read the first bulleted passage on the handout aloud, another person read the second bulleted passage aloud, and a third person read the third bulleted passage aloud. Have the small groups consider the discussion questions together.

*Ann Marie Lowe, Will Rogers, and Henry Ford each faced moments when they had serious reservations about the changes the country was experiencing during the Depression.*

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did each of these three individuals have such reservations about the changes the country was experiencing?
2. In what ways were their beliefs about how the federal government should respond to the Depression similar, and in what ways were they different?
3. In what ways does the life of each illuminate larger societal beliefs held during and since the Depression?



### Watch Video Segment 3: Hands on History

*(approximately 5 minutes to the end of the tape)*

## **Activity 4** (20 minutes)

In this activity, participants will consider the relevance and impact of virtual war games on the teaching of history.

Place the following questions on the overhead (Appendix G). As a whole group, discuss these questions in relation to the video:

1. Do virtual war games necessarily glorify war? In what ways are virtual war games similar to and different from movies that might be used in the classroom?
2. How is “ensuring historical accuracy” different from teaching history?
3. What are the merits and limitations of using such technology in teaching history?

## Activity 5 (15 minutes)

This unit began with an in-depth look at a series of photographs that led to the publication of *Migrant Mother*. This allowed for participants to consider together the effect of images on our understanding of history (in this case, American history during the Great Depression and the New Deal legislation). Following the Historical Perspectives video, participants read and analyzed letters written to the Roosevelts from citizens who were suffering during the Depression. Participants further understood the human plight during this time by discussing the reservations that Ann Marie Lowe, Will Rogers, and Henry Ford each about the changes the country was experiencing during the Depression.

This final activity serves as a conclusion to this session of the workshop. It provides participants an opportunity to reflect on what they have learned from the text and the workshop activities. This activity also reviews the Scoring Guide, which participants will use to assess their understanding of the content and historical thinking skills learned in this unit.

In previous activities, participants worked either in small groups or with the full group to complete the activities. For this activity, participants should work alone to reflect on what they've learned and then write their answers on paper (or type them on a computer). This final activity also models the type of assessment that the participants will be required to take to receive credit for the course.

Direct them with the following statements:

1. Select one of the letters to the Roosevelts in Appendix E. Analyze and put in writing how this letter helps you explore the theme: "The New Deal and World War II fundamentally changed the relationship between the people and the federal government."
2. On the same page, describe what historical thinking skills you used in your analysis. What specific aspects of the artifact helped you understand the theme better?

As a whole group, look at the criteria for full credit on the Content Knowledge Assessment Scoring Guide (Appendix H). Ask participants to review what they wrote and share the types of answers that they believe will result in a score of 3 or 4.

## APPENDICES – *By the People, For the People*

- A: “Themes for *By the People, For the People*”  
overhead transparency
- B: “Dorothea Lange Photographs”  
enough handouts of the photographs for each participant  
to receive one from the assortment
- C: “Photo Analysis Worksheet”  
one handout for each participant
- D: “Photo Fact Sheet”  
overhead transparency
- E: “Letters to the Roosevelts Packet”  
one copy for each participant
- F: “Depression Quotes and Discussion Questions”  
one handout for each group of four or five participants
- G: “Virtual War Games Questions”  
overhead transparency
- H: “Content Knowledge Assessment Scoring Guide”  
overhead transparency

## Appendix A: Themes for *By the People, For the People*

### **THEME 1**

Coming out of an unprecedented period of prosperity, the Great Depression revealed structural problems with the economy—pointing to the need for government regulation, and calling into question the viability of democracy and capitalism.

### **THEME 2**

A shift in popular attitudes questioned the rise of American individualism and a purely market-based economy, creating a community atmosphere that was reflected in popular culture.

### **THEME 3**

The New Deal and World War II fundamentally changed the relationship between the people and the federal government.

## Appendix B: Dorothea Lange Photographs



### Photograph 1

Item 6814  
Dorothea Lange, ALTERNATE MIGRANT MOTHER (1935).  
Commissioned by the Farm Security Administration.  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

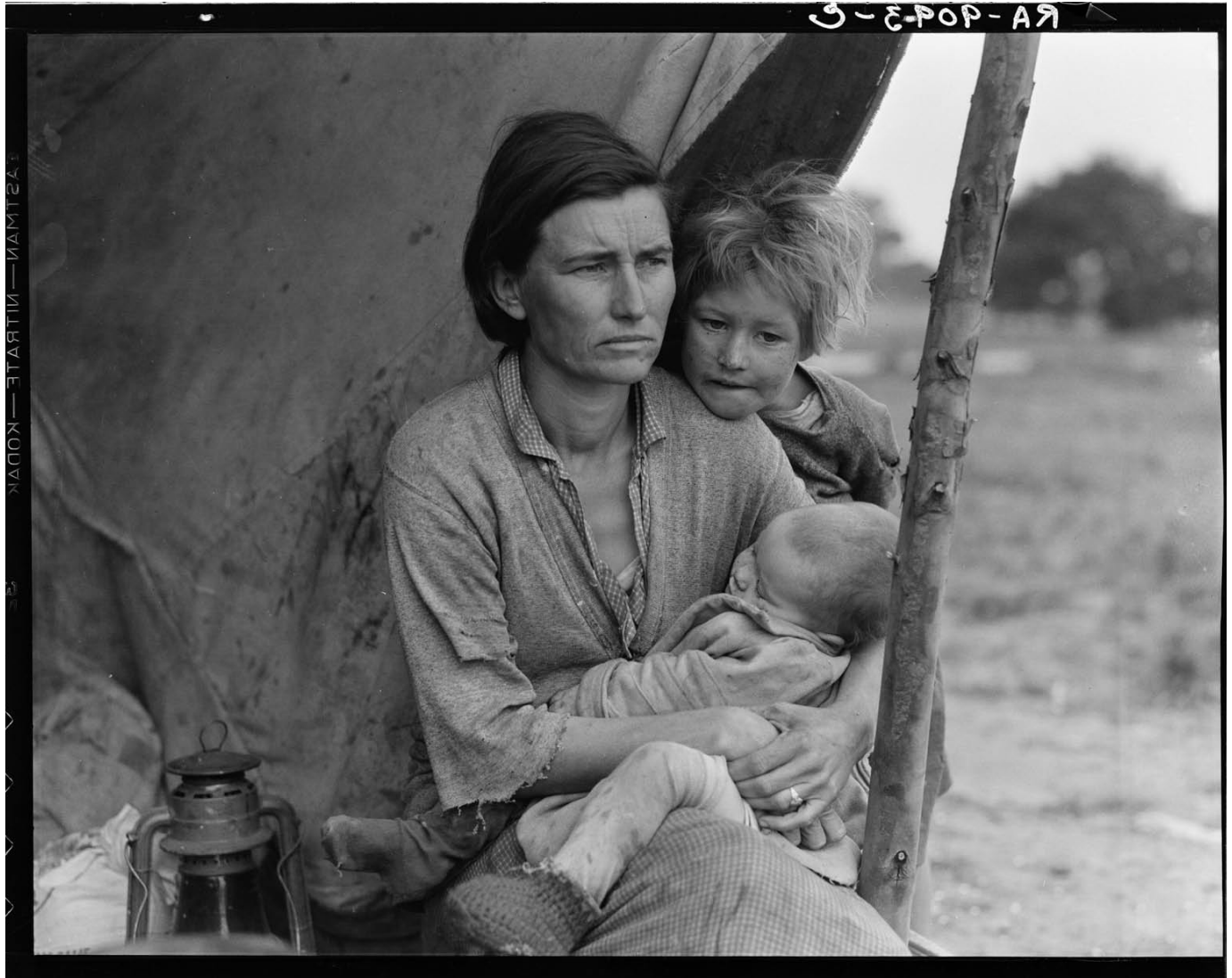
## Appendix B: Dorothea Lange Photographs



### Photograph 2

Item 6813  
Dorothea Lange, ALTERNATE MIGRANT MOTHER (1935).  
Commissioned by the Farm Security Administration.  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

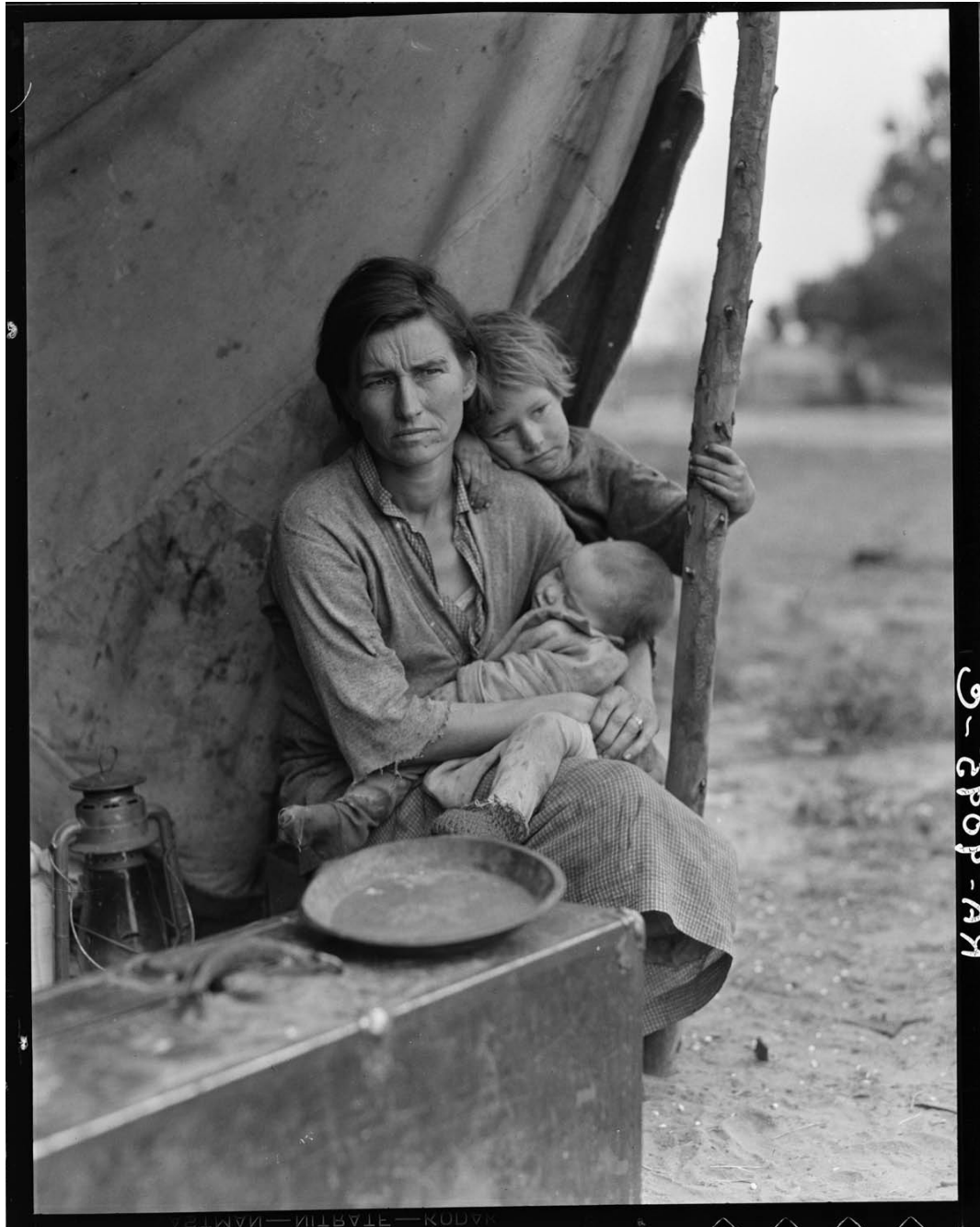
## Appendix B: Dorothea Lange Photographs



### Photograph 3

Item 6815  
Dorothea Lange, ALTERNATE MIGRANT MOTHER (1935).  
Commissioned by the Farm Security Administration.  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

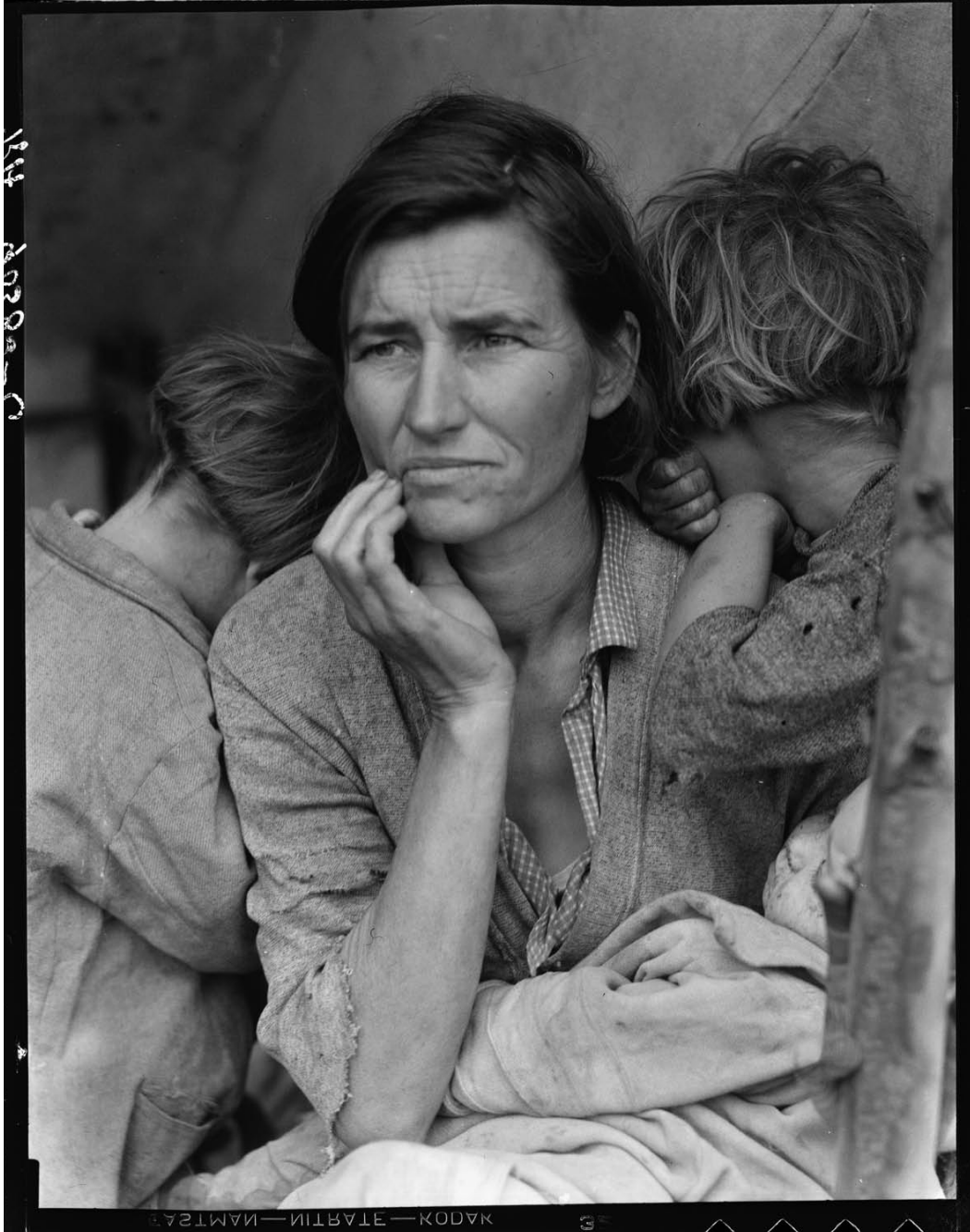
## Appendix B: Dorothea Lange Photographs



### Photograph 4

Item 5229  
Dorothea Lange, ALTERNATE MIGRANT MOTHER (1935).  
Commissioned by the Farm Security Administration.  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

## Appendix B: Dorothea Lange Photographs



### Photograph 5

Item 6657  
Dorothea Lange, MIGRANT MOTHER (1935).  
Commissioned by the Farm Security Administration.  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

## Appendix C: Photo Analysis Worksheet

1. Study the photograph to form an overall impression, and then examine the individual details of the image. Divide the photograph into quadrants and re-examine each section to see if new details become visible.
2. In the chart below, list the people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

People	Objects	Activities

3. Based on your observations above, list three inferences you might make from the photograph.

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4. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?

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5. Where could you go to find the answers to your questions?

## Appendix D: Photo Fact Sheet

When Dorothea Lange wrote an article on the photo *Migrant Mother* in 1960, even her own memory of events had been fogged by the intervening 26 years. She recalled having spent ten minutes on a series of five photographs, each taken progressively closer to the subject. Actually, six photos comprise the series—five companion photos and the final photo which became *Migrant Mother*—several of which appear to involve significant staging.

Lange’s considerable experience as a studio photographer enabled her to make judgments in composition and blocking that ultimately evoked more emotion from her subject than the earlier, more candid pictures in the series. The teenage daughter is removed from the composition, one of seven children of the initially anonymous 32-year-old Florence Thompson, for fear that Lange’s audience, largely middle class, would be less than sympathetic to the subject’s lack of family planning during difficult times.

One of the two youngest children is brought back into the frame after an unsatisfactory snap of the mother and infant nursing. The empty pie tin and trunk attest to the neediness and transitory nature of the family’s condition. Compositionally speaking, this fifth photo may be the strongest of the series.

To get more emotion from the primary subject, Lange moved even closer and had the two younger children turn their faces away from the camera. Lange had Thompson put her hand to her face—an old photographer’s trick—to call attention to her emotions. By the time Lange exhibited *Migrant Mother* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941, a darkroom assistant had removed the distracting thumb on the tent post which Thompson had used to steady herself.

Dorothea Lange’s masterwork from the pea fields of Nipomo, California in February of 1936 has become arguably the most enduring photograph of the Depression from among the 160,000 pictures taken by Farm Security Administration photographers. Government regulations required FSA photographers to turn in all photographs from an assignment. In what ways do lesser-known companion images add to the historical record? Do they lessen the achievement of the photographer?

# Appendix E: Letters to the Roosevelts Packet

## Letter 1

Reidsville, GA Oct 19,1935

Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt  
President of US  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President,

Would you please direct the people in charge of the releaf work in Georgia to issue the provisions + other supplies to our suffering colored people. I am sorry to worrie you with this Mr. President but hard as it is to believe the releaf officials here are using up most every thing that you send for them self + their friends they give out the releaf supplies here on Wednesday of this week and give us black folks, each one, nothing but a few cans of pickle meet and to white folks they give blankets, bolts of cloth and things like that. I dont want to take to mutch of your time Mr. President but will give you just one example of how the releaf is work down here the witto Nancy Hendrics owns land, stock holder in the Bank in this town and she is being supplied with Blankets and cloth and gets a supply of cans goods regular this is only one case but I could tell you many.

Please help us mr President because we cant help our self and we know you is the president and a good Christian man we is praying for you. Yours truly cant sign my name Mr President they will beat me up and run me away from here and this is my home

[Anonymous]

Robert S. McElvaine, ed. *Down & Out In The Great Depression: Letters From The Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 83.

# Appendix E: Letters to the Roosevelts Packet

## Letter 2

[Port Henry, N.Y.]

March 18, 1935

[Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:]

I have been reading the papers about what is going on at Washington. It is a pity those Senators do not seem to understand how serious the condition of this Country is and why does President Roosevelt want all this Money to give to people who have plenty by not giving the working people a living wage. You know the depression has lasted to long. And the people in charge of the Relief want it to last at least for two years more. The Relief is the worst scandal in the history of this country. I can not see why President Roosevelt can not see it is only food for the 1936 campaign for all in charge of the relief are republicans and they will not do what is right, by starving the people they think they can make them vote the way they want them to vote. The poor people are not getting this money...

Mrs. C. C.  
Port Henry, N.Y.

Robert S. McElvaine, ed. *Down & Out In The Great Depression: Letters From The Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 178.

## Appendix E: Letters to the Roosevelts Packet

### Letter 3

Dear President,

I have written to you before, It is worse than it was before I can not get a job and my mothers shop is not doing well pretty soon she will be laid off

Dear President we had to borrow money of my mother's policy the amount was \$75 off of Hancock our insurance to pay taxes

Dear President Winter is coming and we have no coal I haven't got a suit of clothes, to where to church I hope you will give me a good answer and may God Bless you and Family You see I am the only boy and I am worried bot my mother I don't want to loser her I hope you won't forget me.

Good Bye

My address is Jefferson Street, Troy, NY

Robert S. McElvaine, ed. *Down & Out In The Great Depression: Letters From The Forgotten Man*  
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 164.

## Appendix E: Letters to the Roosevelts Packet

### Letter 4

Philadelphia Pa.

Feb'y 19, 1935.

Dear Mrs Roosevelt:

After Seeing So many of your pictures in Magazines and papers, and seeing that you always look so well dressed, a thought came to me that you may have a few old discarded dresses among the ones that you have tired of that you would like to get rid of, and do some one good at the same time. I have waited and waited for work until every thing I had is about finished. I can sew and would only be too glad to take two old things and put them to gether and make a new one. I don't care what it is, any thing from an old bunch of stockings to an old Sport Suit or an old afternoon dress, in fact. Any-thing a lady 40 years of age can wear. I will await an eager reply.

Thanking you in advance.

Mrs. E. T.  
Phila. Pa.

Robert S. McElvaine, ed. *Down & Out In The Great Depression: Letters From The Forgotten Man*  
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 164.

## Appendix E: Letters to the Roosevelts Packet

### Letter 5

Savannah, Ga.  
April 16, 1936

Dear Mr Roosevelt,

The number of women Cut of got no husbun and no way to get any money and got a house Full of children. Some wich got husbun sick down in bed and got no why to get bread or money to Feed their husbun and Children and when the Women get pay we have to wate three week before we get it. and they dont pay But \$13.50 and they dont give any wich the cloth. and they Cut all the Woman who got Children to Look after. and let the young women work who got no expense to Look at. and if you could only no the number of women who got Cut off and got nore where to go get bread and no money and the big fish Just eat up the little Fish down hear and we all know you was given us bread since you was a president. And no way to get Bread to feed our Children and S. Georgia is Just no on noning for all the Color People who was Cut off. the one who need do not get no help but the one who got get help. if you Come a [illegible] Later dick a [illegible] number Cut off 250 Pleas help

The people who was Cut Off

Thank you

Robert S. McElvaine, ed. *Down & Out In The Great Depression: Letters From The Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 165.

### Letters to the Roosevelts Questions

- What do these letters reveal about the political, economic, and social factors in the communities where their writers lived?
- What evidence from these letters suggests that structural problems in society, beyond the stock market crash, created and maintained the Depression?
- Why did people write letters like this to the president and first lady? What do these letters reveal about the relationship between the Roosevelts and the American people?

## Appendix F: Depression Quotes & Discussion Questions

*Ann Marie Lowe, Will Rogers, and Henry Ford each faced moments when they had serious reservations about the changes the country was experiencing during the Depression.*

- Ann Marie Lowe said: “I don’t love this country the way I used to. It’s not as beautiful to me anymore since the changes that the government made.”
- Will Rogers was very interested in socialism and events in the Soviet Union: “Ten men in our country could buy the world, and ten million can’t buy enough to eat. So the salvation of all might come out of these Cuckoo Russians...So we ain’t going to get nowhere cussing ’em. We better watch ’em, and they got anything good, why cop onto it, and maybe we can feed everybody.”
- Henry Ford was staunchly opposed to unions. He argued: “Labor unions are the worst thing that ever struck the earth because they take away a man’s independence.” When the United Auto Workers finally organized Ford employees in 1941, Ford considered shutting down rather than signing the union contract.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Why did each of these three individuals have such reservations about the changes the country was experiencing?
2. In what ways were their beliefs about how the federal government should respond to the Depression similar, and in what ways were they different?
3. In what ways does the life of each illuminate larger societal beliefs held during and since the Depression?

## Appendix G: Virtual War Games Questions

1. Do virtual war games necessarily glorify war? In what ways are virtual war games similar to and different from movies that might be used in the classroom?
2. How is “ensuring historical accuracy” different from teaching history?
4. What are the merits and limitations of using such technology in teaching history?

## Appendix H: Content Knowledge Assessment Scoring Guide

Points	Description
4	<p><b>Exceeded Expectations</b>—The answer met all of the expectations (see the description “Fully Met Expectations” below) and exceeded those expectations by demonstrating advanced understanding in <b>any</b> of the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides rich and detailed historical knowledge</li> <li>• Questions, critiques, or extends the theme</li> <li>• Uses the exhibit to provide an in-depth analysis of the era</li> <li>• Refers to one or more additional and relevant primary sources</li> </ul>
3	<p><b>Fully Met Expectations</b>—The answer responds to the prompt in <b>all</b> of the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates how the exhibit supports the theme</li> <li>• Draws on relevant historical knowledge to connect the exhibit to the theme</li> <li>• Demonstrates an understanding of the theme</li> <li>• Provides relevant historical knowledge of the era</li> <li>• Provides an analysis of the exhibit</li> </ul>
2	<p><b>Partially Met Expectations</b>—The answer did not meet all of the expectations (see the description “Fully Met Expectations” above) but did demonstrate understanding in all of the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates understanding of the theme, though understanding may be incomplete</li> <li>• Provides relevant historical knowledge of the era</li> <li>• Provides analysis of the exhibit that may be limited</li> </ul>
1	<p><b>Did Not Meet Expectations</b>—The answer did not meet expectation because of one or more of the following statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did not address the theme</li> <li>• Did not demonstrate historical knowledge of the era</li> <li>• Did not discuss or misinterpreted the exhibit</li> </ul>
0	<p><b>Did Not Answer</b>—The answer did not address the prompt.</p>



# NOTES

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