

Face to Face with the Great Depression
Who Makes History?: Distinguishing between those who live
through history and those who write about it.

Grade level: Middle school through high school

Estimated time: Two class periods

Specific topic: The Great Depression

Subtopics: Historical interpretation, research and inquiry, and Studs Terkel's work

Teacher background information

This lesson investigates how history is “made” and reported. It asks students to analyze original and edited transcripts from Studs Terkel's interviews for *Hard Times*. You can enhance this lesson by using the material on Studs Terkel's website, *Studs Terkel: Conversations with America*, at www.studsterkel.org. Although optional, it is also a good idea to have a copy of Terkel's *Hard Times* to use as a resource during the lesson. Students should have a general knowledge about the Great Depression era before beginning the lesson.

Key concepts

Historical understanding and interpretation evolves constantly as we view our past through the eyes of an ever-changing present. Historical interpretation is subjective, and uncovering history from artifacts and people requires historians to use skills of research, evaluation, and analysis. Historians, however, are not the only interpreters of the past. Each of us makes, records, and reports history.

Key questions

If the truth in history is subjective, what conclusions can be agreed upon and trusted? Can we trust primary sources and historical documents to tell the “truth”? Who are history's reporters? When and how do these reporters become part of the history they are reporting? Is there such a thing as an “objective” view of history? It is frequently said that we have to wait to see how history will judge a particular event or person. What does that mean?

Goal of this lesson

Students will develop an analytical perspective of how historians record, preserve, and interpret data.

Objectives

During this lesson, students will:

1. Develop analytical skills by reading and interpreting personal accounts of the Great Depression.
2. Identify perspective in primary sources and discuss how interpretation affects popular understanding of an event, time, or place.
3. Exercise and increase their critical thinking skills, learn to conduct research through teamwork, and develop their listening and note-taking skills.

Materials

Master copies of the “Biography of Studs Terkel” and applicable interview transcripts are provided.

1. Biography of Studs Terkel
2. Unedited and edited transcripts from Studs Terkel's interviews with Buddy Blankenship, Cesar Chavez, and Ed Paulsen.
3. A copy of *Hard Times* by Studs Terkel (optional)
4. Access to Studs Terkel's website at www.studsterkel.org (optional)
5. Paper and pens

Procedures

Day 1

1. Use the “Biography of Studs Terkel” to introduce students to Studs Terkel’s life and work. You can find additional information about Terkel on his website at www.studsterkel.org.
2. Divide students into groups of four or five. Distribute one set of transcripts (both unedited and edited) to each group. You may distribute the same set of transcripts to more than one group.
3. Allow students time to read both transcripts. After initially reading the transcripts, students should work together to answer the following questions:
 - a. What part of the interview was most revealing about the depression era?
 - b. Why were Terkel’s questions effective?
 - c. Are there questions you would have asked that he did not?
 - d. How did Terkel edit the interview?
 - e. Why do you think he made these changes?
 - f. Were the edits fair? Why, or why not?
 - g. What information was lost or gained in the process? How important was this information? Why?
 - h. How did the editing process help to focus or clarify the interview?

Day 2

1. Ask students to regroup so they can present the transcript information they collected on Day 1 to the class. Require that each group member present some information to the class. Instruct audience members to take notes to help them compare and contrast the transcripts.
2. Close with a class discussion. Compare and contrast the unedited and edited transcripts. Which version of the interviews do the students prefer and why? Which version can be considered a primary source? Discuss purpose and use. Are the unedited transcripts appropriate for a book? What information presented in the interviews should we assume is “true”? How do personal perspectives deepen our understanding of the past? Discuss the art of interviewing. What skills are necessary to be an effective oral historian? What other types of resources contribute to the keeping of history? Why is it necessary to draw on a variety of resources when studying the past?

Suggestions for student assessment

Groups should be evaluated on the thoroughness of their reports and their ability to respond responsibly to relevant follow-up questions from the teacher and class. Prior to delivering their reports, provide students with sample evaluation forms that include the following (rated one to five, with five being the highest):

1. Completeness of responses
2. Ability to respond to follow-up questions
3. General understanding of the assignment

Extension activities

1. Extend this activity by listening to interviews on www.studsterkel.org or reading the published versions in Terkel’s book *Hard Times*. Despite the fact that Terkel doesn’t claim to be a historian, how would you characterize this interview work? Does it help you to understand how people “at the bottom” responded to the depression? Cite specific examples.
2. Select a specific event, person, or issue that Terkel’s interviewee brings up in the transcripts studied by the groups. Read about this topic in another source. How does the second source treat this topic? Does the second source deepen our understanding of the topic? Why or why not?

3. Access “Dear Mrs. Roosevelt” (<http://newdeal.feri.org/eleanor/er3a.htm>) and read samples of letters that Eleanor Roosevelt received from children. Determine what affect these letters may have had on the government and nation of the time. What other courses of action did people take to spark change?

Additional resource

Students in Mooresville, Indiana, created a “Great Depression” website that contains oral histories, period photographs, and e-mailed contributions of viewers. Access the site at www.mcsc.k12.in.us/mhs/social/madedo.

This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

English Language Arts

State Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

Social Science

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

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These materials were written and researched by Ronald Solberg. Images used in this lesson are from the Chicago Historical Society’s collection. Heidi Moisan of the Chicago Historical Society coordinated the *History Lab* project. The Chicago Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the Chicago Park District’s generous support of all of the Historical Society’s activities.

BIOGRAPHY OF STUDS TERKEL



Studs Terkel. Photograph by Tom Maday.

Studs Terkel, radio broadcast personality and prize-winning author, was born Louis Terkel in New York, New York, on May 16, 1912. His father Samuel was a tailor and his mother Anna Finkel was a seamstress. He had three brothers. The family moved to Chicago in 1922 and opened a rooming house at Ashland Avenue and Flourney Street on the Near West Side.

From 1926 to 1936, the family ran the Wells-Grand Hotel, another rooming house at Wells Street and Grand Avenue. Terkel credits his knowledge of the world to the tenants who gathered in the lobby of the hotel and the people who congregated in nearby Bughouse Square, a meeting place for workers, labor organizers, dissidents, the unemployed, and religious fanatics of many persuasions. In 1939, he married Ida Goldberg, and they had one son.

After graduating from University of Chicago's law school in 1934, Terkel pursued acting and appeared on stage, on the radio, and in the movies. He has been a playwright, a radio news commentator, a sportscaster, a film narrator, a jazz columnist, a disc jockey, and a music festival host. In 1944, he began hosting a radio show. Radio allowed him to express his own personality and to play the music he enjoyed, including folk, opera, jazz, and blues. In 1945, he debuted

his own television series, called "Stud's Place," in which he began asking people the types of questions that would mark his interview style in later years.

On "The Studs Terkel Program," which was heard on Chicago's fine arts radio station WFMT from 1952 to 1997, Terkel interviewed national and international figures who helped shape the past century. The program included guests who were politicians, writers, activists, labor organizers, performing artists, and architects. Terkel's depth of personal knowledge of the diverse subjects he explored on his program is remarkable, as is his ability to get others to do what they do best—talk about themselves. Many of the interviews he conducted for his books and for his radio program are featured on his website at www.studsterkel.org.

Terkel's first book of oral history interviews was *Division Street: America*, published in 1966. In subsequent years, he wrote many oral history books covering topics such as the Great Depression, World War II, race relations, working, and aging. Terkel continues to write, interview people, work on his books, and speak in public. He is currently Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence at the Chicago Historical Society.

BUDDY BLANKENSHIP

You don't have to worry about interruptions, because I change anyway when I'm talking. Sitting at the Blankenship apartment here in Chicago. It's ok cause this will be transcribed later. And talking to Buddy Blankenship and Mrs Blankenship now about, and one of the children, a grand child and I'm saying to you how long have you lived in Chicago

BB It's been about a year, about a year and a half.

ST Originally came here to Chicago from...

BB West Virginia

ST West Virginia, we can keep this, it will be question and answer ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the way we were talking in the car. This will be very informal, if I were to say to you, the Great American Depression what thoughts come to your mind?

BB Well, that would be in about 1932. The depression that's about when it started '31, '32. And that was about the worst depression we ever been through. Of course we been a depression all of our lives. We been in a depression ever since. Still, it's better and worse. In '32 and 30'32, I went to work in the mines. I was about 15-16 years old and I had about 14 miles to go to school. I had to walk it. and children won't work very far, they're funny, you know they're just, I won't say lazy, but they're just funny about walking to school. They think well if they have to ~~walk~~ walk that far they'll just, well it's not worth it. It was worth it though. It was worth it though if ~~he~~ had realized his manhood while he'd have been a whole lot better if he had walked 20 miles.

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And, I told my dad I ain't going to school anymore. Well he said if you dont want to go to school, why you just come on and go to work with me. I went in the mines and I went to work. From 30 to about 31, the last of 32 and then I took a, the depression got so bad we just had to quit and we went into a farm, and we went to farming, raising our own stuff. And, uh, he got a little check from the army. He was a world ~~xxxxx~~ war veteran and got a little check from the army. It done us pretty good, we made it all through it, but it was a terrible one.

ST Well as you remember it now, and looking back at it now, you were about.

BB 15

ST This was 1930 now, how many ~~of xxxx~~ were there in your family?

BB 2 me and a girl, just two children. Just ~~xxxxxxx~~ me and my sister is all. He raised four of us but two of em was dead. One of em lived about three months and the other was born dead.

ST Your father worked in the mines?

BB Yeah, he worked in the mines 51 years. He worked in the mines 51 years. and he was 63 when he got killed.

~~xx~~

S⁺ Killed in the Mines?

BB No, he was, a boy shot him.

ST Let's go back to the mine, you were 15 now. Uh, how far was the mine from where you lived?

BB 8 miles. 8 miles and we had to ride it horse back. We rode horseback all the way. Many times I' have to git off hind _____

(I think he ~~saw~~ hanimal) I was riding behind my dad and hammer his feet out of the stirrups, they'd be froze in the stirrups.

ST Tell me, how is this now, tell me about it. This was a cold day

BB Yeah, it was cold you know and we'd be riding and when you come out of the mines your feet would be wet of sweat and wet where your walking on the bottom and get up on those steel stirrups while your riding by 7 miles, your feet u'd be froze and you couldn't git em out of the stirrups. And I'd have to hammer em out of the stirrups.

ST Coming back home from the mines cause it was cold.

BB Yeah

ST And your fathers feet would ~~freeze~~ freeze. Did that hurt?

BB No he says his feet were too cold, cause they were numb and they wouldn't hurt till they started to get warm and then they would get to hurtin. And, I rode hoses ~~across~~ across the river when the ice would be thicke enough to just ride across the river with hourses. Just ride em across there, and all the way up the creek, it was just a small creek and it would be froze over. And we never from the time ~~in~~ we left the mines to the time to get down off the hardtoproad on to the dirt road.

ST How would describe working in the mines. What time of the day would you get up?

BB Well, we got up at 5 in the morning, had to be at the time at 5 in the morning, start at six. And we got out at ten that night.

ST So you worked about 16 hours a day

BB About 16 hours a day, 17 hours. The boss said you had to clean it up. The boss said we had to clean it up. We didn't clean it

16 Ton

Buddy Blankenship

A West Virginia emigre, living in Chicago. Illness has kept him jobless. Children, ranging wide in age from late adolescence to babyhood, step-children, son-in-law, grandchild and a weary wife are seated or wandering about the apartment: trying to keep cool on this hot, muggy summer afternoon. Hand-me-down furniture is in evidence in all the rooms.

I've been in a depression ever since I've been in the world. Still, it's better and worse. '31, '32, that's about the worst we ever been through. Hoover said every man would have two horses in the barn and two milk cows and two cars in every garage. After he got elected, he got up and spoke: a blue shirt and a pair of overalls was good enough for anybody. And there wasn't nobody who had a car that didn't go out and work for it. (Shakes his head) You couldn't find no work after he got in. There wasn't but one or two days a week going. He just took off an' he played golf or somethin'. No, he went fishin'. Ike's the one that went to golfin'.

— INSERT 1A —

I was about fifteen years old and I had about fourteen miles to walk to school. Children are funny about walkin' to school. They think it's not worth it. It was worth it though if he'd ~~realized~~ realized his manhood would've been a whole lot better if he had walked twenty miles.

XXXX

-INSERT 1A-

All my people, why they was fer Hoover. Hoover brung the panic on, but they didn't blame Hoover. They said that Hoover never brung the panic on. It wasn't in his administration. They wouldn't believe you, 'cause they liked him. ^{When} ~~When~~ Roosevelt got in, they didn't know what to think. Everything changed. 'At's when my dad changed. 'Cause things got to bustin' out and there came a man askin' how much his disability was -- my dad was a World War One veteran -- and he told 'em how much he was gettin' and the man said that ain't enough. And then come a big check, six hundred and some odd dollars. It done us pretty good. It changed dad over right there. 'At was the most time I ever seen dad that tickled.

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I told my dad I wasn't going to school any more. He said: Why, you just come on~~x~~ and go work with me. I went in the mines and I went to work. From '30 to about the last of '32. The Depression got so bad, we went to farming, raising our own stuff. He worked in the mines fifty one years. He was sixty three when he got killed. A boy shot him.

We lived eight miles from the mine and we had to ride it horse-back. I was riding behind my dad. Many times I'd have to git off and hammer his feet out of the stirrups. They'd be froze in the stirrups. It was cold you know. When you come out of the mines, your feet would be wet of sweat and wet where you're walking on the bottom. And get up on those steel stirrups, while you're riding by eight miles, your feet'd be froze and you couldn't git 'em out of the stirrups. I'd have to hammer 'em out. His feet were numb and they wouldn't hurt till they started to get warm and then they would get to hurtin'.

We got up at five in the mornin', start at six. We got out at ten that night. We'd work about sixteen hours a day, seventeen hours. The boss said we had to clean up. We didn 't clean it up, the next morning there'd be another man in the mine to clean it up. The motor man would say: How many cars you got? Five more. Well, hurry up, we want^d get out of here.

CESAR CHAVEZ - Page 1.

ST When I talk to Cesar Chavez I realize the word "depression" is a whimsical word, because depression has been with the farm workers before and after 1929. When I say to right now, the Great American Depression -- officially it began with the stock market crash, 1929 ... you were a small boy then.

CC I was two years old then.

ST What do you remember? What about those periods of the '30's, you were a small boy, do you have any memories of the '30's.

CC Some memories of the early '30's, some very vivid, others hazy but -- it's funny but those that are more vivid are those that were most hard on us and most of 'em were -- oh I remember such things as having to move out of ~~xx~~ our house, and my father had brought in a team of horses and wagon. And we had always lived in that house and we couldn't understand why we were moving out. And I tried to ask him why and he told me well, we're moving to another house. To me that wasn't enough of an explanation, because why should we ~~xxxxx~~ be moving to another house? I remember that very vividly. Mostly because when we got to the other house it was a worst house, it was a poor house.

ST Where was this, do you recall?

CC Yes, this was in Yuma, Arizona. It's known as the North Hila Valley, about 50 miles north of Yuma. And well, as it turned out later, my dad was being turned out of his small plot of land that he had inherited from his father who previous to that had homesteaded it. And then I remember ..

ST You were being thrown off this land and his father had homesteaded it?

CC Yes.

ST This is when roughly?

I think this must have been around 134, I guess. I was about six years old or so.

ST So your grandfather homesteaded this land.

Yes. Then I also saw my other two three other uncles who ~~xx~~ had propertie near my father also moving out. And the other one was several months later we also had to move out of the other place that we went to and also for the same reason.

ST What was the reason?

CC The bank had foreclosed on the loan. But really the reason was that the ... I don't remember rightly the legislation, but there was some legislation enacted to save the -- it was under the Reconstruction Act. And the ~~ix~~ local bank had approved the loan the government would, I guess, guarantee the loan and small farmers like my father would get this loan and continue in business. Well, it so happened that the president of the bank was the guy who most wanted our land, because he sort of -- we were surrounded by him, he owned land all around us. And so that became very valuable, although a small piece of land, very valuable. And he, of course, wouldn't pass the loan.

ST What did your father raise?

CC Mostly cotton, and hay, alfalfa.

ST Was he making a living?

CC Scratching a living, I guess. You know, it was a very small plot. Then I remember one morning ...

ST Were you born on that land?

CC Yes. Well, as it turned out we were moving from that piece of land to the other half -- understand, the land was divided into two different parts and they were taking the first part. Then some months later after we moved to the other place, one morning a giant tractor came in, like we had never seen before. Cause my daddy used to do all of his work with horses. And so this huge tractor came in and ~~g~~ began to knock down this corrale, this small corral where my father kept his horses. And we didn't understand why

the big tractor was ... in a matter of about a week, the whole thing was changed. The whole face of the land was changed, ditches were dug and it was different. I didn't like it as much. And then, so I recollect we all of us climbed into an old Chevy that my dad had. And then the next recollection we were in California and migratory workers. Somewhere during that period, I remember a man coming ~~xxxxxxx~~ with my dad to school and we were asked to leave the room, to go outside. And we went outside under the tree and he began to interview my dad and all of us. And we were barefooted, going to school without shoes and I remember it was during the winter and it was cold ... and it was such an event, it was something different. Anyway, he gave my father some forms and then we went to Yuma about 15 (50?) miles away, he took this paper to one of the stores we went to, and x we got shoes and sweaters. _____ WPA, but I didn't know then that my father had worked a couple of weeks and we were getting payment. And this was in North Jila Valley. And the other recollection was a lot of people began to arrive ... our community was mostly Mexican and Negro and a few Anglos. And there was three-way segregation. We didn't like the idea of having to go so far to our school when the Anglos went to school closer, but we had to. But there was a big meeting k and all of the -- most of the Mexican fathers and the Negro fathers were there and they were mad about something. And as a kid I remember going to the meeting and they wouldn't let us in. But it was a broken-down shack and we peeked through the separations in the boards, and we'd hear people getting up and ...well, as it turned out as I understood many years later, that the whole argument that evening was whether we were going to be integrated. And they were carrying the fight as best as they could. And as it turned out, they were, they were put altogether in one school. There were many, many fights before we got used to working with one another

The Anglos and the Mexicans.

ST You said three-way segregation.

CC What I meant was Negroes in one school, Mexicans in another, and Anglos in another one.

ST So the Negroes and Mexicans also were separated from one another.

CC Yes. And then ... I was always curious about this particular incident, so many years later when I knew better, I went and interviewed a man who was at that time the chairman of the school board, and he recalled that very vividly. Well, he told me that the reason they did it was because it was getting too expensive and they couldn't pay for the separate school

ST The reason they integrated, you mean?

CC (laughs) Yes. And he said it just matter-of-factly. Those are some of the things that stand out. Oh, I suppose other things stand out, you know very

ST So you said then that you piled into ~~the~~ the Chevy? How many were there in your family?

CC Well, there were five kids, a small family by those standards. We went to California ... it must have been around '36', I was about 8, but I remember very well some of those things. And well, it was strange life. Cause we had been poor, we knew every night that there was a bed there and that this was our room. There was a kitchen, and well, it was sort of a settled life, you know, and we had chickens and hogs, eggs and all these things in North Jila Valley. But that all of a sudden changed and, well, when you're small, you can't figure these things out. But you know that something's not right and you don't like it, but you don't question it and you don't let that get you down. You sort of just continue to move. But I remember that this must have had quite an impact on, especially on my father. Because he had been used to owning the land and ~~at~~ all of a sudden

Edited [HT 20]

Cesar Chavez

Like so many who have worked from early childhood, particularly in the open country, he appears older than his forty one years. His manner is diffident, his voice soft.

He is President of the United Farm Workers of America (UFWA). It is, unlike craft and industrial unions, a quite new labor fraternity. In contrast to these others, agricultural workers - those who "follow the crops" - had been excluded from any of the benefits that came along with the New Deal.

~~Memories of the early Thirties? It's funny, the most vivid~~
~~are those that were most hard on us.~~ Oh, I remember having to move out of our house. My father had brought in a team of horses and wagon. We had always lived in that house and we couldn't understand why we were moving out. When we got to the other house, it was a worse house, a poor house. That must have been around 1934. I was about six years old.

It's known as the North Gila Valley, about fifty miles north of Yuma. My dad was being turned out of his small plot of land. He had inherited this from his father, who had homesteaded it. I saw my two, three other uncles also moving out. ~~Several months later, we had to move out of the other place we went to.~~ And for the same reason.

~~The bank had foreclosed on the loan.~~

~~What was the reason?~~

(~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~bank~~ ~~had~~ ~~foreclosed~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~ ~~loan~~ ~~.~~ - ~~followed~~)

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~~The bank had foreclosed on the loan. Really the reason was~~
~~....I don't rightly remember the legislation, but it was~~
~~enacted to save the -- it was under the Reconstruction Act.~~

Q If the local bank approved, the government would guarantee the loan and small farmers like my father would continue in business. It so happened the president of the bank was the guy who most wanted our land. We were surrounded by him, he owned all the land around us. ~~So that became very valuable, although a small piece of land.~~ Of course, he wouldn't pass the loan.

~~Were you born on that land?~~

~~Yes.~~

~~What did your father raise?~~

~~Mostly cotton and hay, alfalfa. Scratching a living, I~~
~~guess.~~ Our community was mostly Mexican and Negro and a few Anglos. There was three-way segregation. We didn't like the idea of having to go so far to school when the Anglos went to a school closer. ~~But we had to.~~ There was a big meeting and most of the Mexican fathers and Negro fathers were there and they were mad about something. As

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a kid I remember going to the meeting and they wouldn't let us in. But it was a broken down shack and we peeked through the separation in the boards.

The whole argument that evening was whether we were going to be integrated. As it turned out, they were all put together into one school. There were many, many fights before we got used to working with one another. Many years later, I ~~interviewed~~ interviewed the man who was at that time chairman of the school board, ~~and he recalled that very vividly.~~ He told me the reason ~~MAXIN~~ they did it was because it was getting too expensive and they couldn't pay for separate schools. He said it just matter-of-factly. ~~Those are some of the things that stand out.~~

~~I remember a man coming with my dad to school and we were asked to leave the room, to go outside. We went under a tree and he began to interview my dad and all of us. We were barefooted, going to school without shoes and I remember it was during the winter and it was cold. He gave my father some forms and then we went to Yuma. He took this paper to one of the stores and we got shoes and sweaters. It was WPA. I didn't know my father had worked~~

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a couple of weeks ~~and~~ we were getting payment.)

A One morning a giant tractor came in, like we had never seen before. My daddy used to do all his work with horses. So this huge tractor came in and began to knock down this corral, this small corral where my father kept his horses. We didn't understand why. In the matter of a week, the whole face of the land was changed. Ditches were dug and it was different. I didn't like it as much.

We all of us climbed into ^{an old} ~~a~~ Chevy that my dad had. And then we were in California, and migratory workers. There were five kids, a small family by those standards. It must have been around '36. I was about eight. Well, it was a strange life. We had been poor, but we knew every night there was a bed there and that this was our room. There was a kitchen. It was sort of a settled life and we had chickens and hogs, eggs and all ~~these~~ things. But that all of a sudden changed. When you're small you can't figure these things out. You know something's not ~~tight~~ and you don't like it, but you don't question it and you don't let that get you down. You sort of just continue to move.

Caribon

[H 28]

ED PAULSEN

Ed Paulsen

ST I'm talking to Ed Paulsen, who's director of UNICEF. And, Ed, if I were to say to you -- you're about what? You're my contemporary, I know.

EP 56. Born in 1912.

ST So if I were to say to you, the great American depression ... what thought comes to your mind.

EP Oh boy,

ST We think of the crash of 1929.

EP I don't feel it that way. We didn't get it that way. I was a country kid, small town kid in the west. ^{My father} /I was what you would call, contemporary now, an itinerant preacher. I never had any money, and therefore it kind of sneaked up on us. I just finished high school in 1930 and I walked out into this thing. And it wasn't a great absence of money, it was just things I'd been doin' since I was 14 ... job-hunting, looking for a chance to earn a little money and buy some clothes. Because we had to be pretty self-supporting from 14 on, you bought your clothes. And all of a sudden it got tougher and tougher to do. And when I started to work at 14, I was good for \$4 a day. By 1931 you were working for a dollar a day, and in 1933 I was working for \$10 a month as a cow puncher.

ST Where is this?

EP South Dakota. Yeah. When the depression hit, we were on the west coast, in the state of Washington. Then when I graduated from high school I ~~drifted~~ drifted down to California. And that was tough. I mean, you can't imagine, there just wasn't anything to do.

ST How old were you when you drifted down to California?

EP I 17 ... let's see, 1930, I would be 18 that Fall. Left my family and drifted down there, and first went to San Francisco. I tried to get a job on the docks, you know. I thought I was a big husky athlete, played football and basketball in high school. I thought, you know, this was a good place to look for work. I didn't have a college degree and already by that time if you were looking for a job at a Standard Oil Service Station you had to have a degree, you know, it was that kind of a market. But I thought I was big and strong and I'd get a job. But there just wasn't any work. I drifted on down to LA and I got a variety of jobs selling ice cream, hustling sheets on Hollywood Blvd., just working in a cafeteria. I remember Equity was on strike so we got a job, we'd work in a cafeteria for your board. You got a dollar thirty cents worth of food for hustling in the cafeteria. Then ... so it was too tough, and I headed back east, where I had a brother working on a railroad, a bridge gang. This is still 1930. And I drifted back and I got a job on a gravel crew, road gang. And then drifted up to another part of South Dakota and got a job in harvest. And then my brother and I decided we'd go east, and as we went east it got tougher. We didn't understand the depression, nobody understood it.

ST It got tougher the further east.

EP It was different to us. We were westerners and we didn't know how to make out in the city and I know we went to Minneapolis, went to Chicago, went as far east as Pittsburgh. And by this time it was terrifying. Because there were great queues of guys in soup lines. We didn't know how to join a soup line. We couldn't believe we had to, in the first place you know, we didn't see ourselves that way. We were ... we had middle class

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ideas (laughs) without middle class income. And so we decided this is too tough and we started back. And I remember we came back to Minnesota, back up through the Dakotas, and back up to Washington state and that fall I picked apples. And this is interesting, Van Camp's came out there at the time and started growing peas and beans in mountain altitudes because they found they do better about 3000 feet. And then we went into the winter and there was no money up around the small towns and so we headed for California again. California/^{was}~~ix~~ always a mecca for us guys in Washington, Oregon.

ST You said "us guys" ... did you travel in a group?

EP Well, I had three or four brothers, and we were all doing the same kind of thing. Sometimes there was one and sometimes there was three of us. That winter three of us ended up in San Francisco again, and by this time -- this is 1931 -- there's no relief programs, but just thousands of men out. I lived up on Haight Street, right near Kezar Stadium up there, Beulah Street, that was the name of the street, just off Haight. That was before the days of the hippies. It was just a street, you know, in that part of town. And I'd get up at five o'clock in the morning ... and street car fare was a nickel in those days. And I'd head for the waterfront looking for work. And you'd go down to Third and Twenty Third down to Spreckles Sugar Refinery and American Can Company and all, and there would be outside the gates there would be a thousand men. And you know dang well when you go there there's only ~~22~~ 3 or 4 jobs. The guy would come out with two little Pinkerton cops there, in uniforms, to the gate, and he'd say I need two guys for the bull gang, two guys to go in the hole, what have you, you know? A thousand men would fight like a pack of Alaskan dogs to get through there. A great surge would

Edited [HT 28]

~~Ed Paulsen~~ (Ed Paulsen)
in book

"My father was an itinerant preacher. Dang poor, a family with a cash income of \$400 a year. He was of the Populist strain. He had supported LaFollette and once had Debs speak at his church in Fargo, North Dakota. He had been a lawyer back home in Indiana and beat Wendell Willkie's father twice for prosecuting attorney. At forty four, he got the faith, went into the ministry, and never stayed put."

From 1926 on, when he was fourteen, he, himself, knocked around and about the states -- "I rode the freights" ~~the Northwest, Northern and Southern California~~ across the land, as far east as Pittsburgh. "I always went back to my home in South Dakota. My sister and her husband had a little farm. It was a retreat. But I was never satisfied to stay there. I was always taking a pop at L.A. or San Francisco. I played semi-pro baseball up there at one time. You know who I faced? Satchell Paige. He was pitching for Bismarck. I worked punching cattle, \$10 a month. I was never satisfied to stay there. I was always taking a pop at L.A. or San Francisco."

"Everybody talks of the Crash of '29. In small towns out west, we didn't know there was a Crash. What did the stock market mean to us? Not a dang thing. If you were in Cut Bank, Montana, who owned stock? *the farmer was a ping-pong ball in a very tough game*"

"There were little surges in agriculture, but you were always trapped by it. When my brothers and I were ranching later, we took on a bunch of cattle. We paid about \$60 a head to get started, all mortgage money. The next year, the same cattle were starving to death because of the drought. Cattle dropped to \$20 a head. The farmer was a ping pong ball in a very tough game."

"I finished high school in 1930 and I walked out into this thing...." He picked apples in Washington, ~~sold ice cream~~ and "hustled sheets" in Los Angeles, worked in a ~~cafeteria~~, on road gangs. "It got tougher. We didn't know how to make out in the city. It was terrifying. There were great queues of guys in soup lines. We didn't know how to join a soup line. We -- my two brothers and I -- didn't see ourselves that way."

all along the coast. INSERT: My brothers and I got a hold of a young guy we tried to make into a prize fighter, up in our town. He had a great body, but a weak jaw (laughs)

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We had middle class ideas without a middle class income."
(Laughs)

"We ended up in San Francisco in 1931. I tried to get a job on the docks. I was a big husky athlete, but there just wasn't any work. Already by that time, if you were looking for a job at a Standard Oil Service Station, you had to have a college degree. It was that kind of market...."

I'd get up at five in the morning and head for the waterfront. Outside ~~the gates of~~ the Spreckles Sugar Refinery, outside the gates, there would be a thousand men. You know ~~hang~~ well there's only three or four jobs. The guy would come out with two little Pinkerton cops: "I need two guys for the bull gang. Two guys to go into the hole." A thousand men would fight like a pack of Alaskan dogs to get through there. Only four of us would get through. I was too young a punk.

So you'd drift up to Skid Row. There'd be thousands of men there. Guys on baskets, making ~~wired~~ ^{weird} speeches, phoney theories on economics. About 11:30, the real leaders would take over. They'd say: Okay, we're going to City Hall. The Mayor was Angelo Rossi, a dapper little guy. He wore expensive boots and a tight vest. We'd shout around the steps. Finally, he'd come out and tell us nothing.

HISTORY LAB | FEEDBACK FORM

Please take a few minutes to give us your History Lab feedback!

After reviewing and using this History Lab lesson, please send us your feedback. Your ideas and honest assessment will ensure that these lessons keep improving and provide us with useful insight for future teacher fellows.

First name: _____ Last name: _____

School: _____

Grade you teach: _____ E-mail: _____

Are you a CHS member? (circle one): yes no

Name of unit you are evaluating (check one):

☐ America's Documents of Freedom

☐ Chicago's World's Fairs

☐ African American Life in the Nineteenth Century

☐ Face to Face with the Great Depression

☐ The Civil War: Up Close and Personal

☐ America and Protest

Name of lesson you are evaluating: _____

Evaluation questions:

1. On a scale of one to five (with five being the best) rate this lesson in terms of the quality of the student learning experience it provides (circle one):

5

4

3

2

1

2. What were the strengths of this lesson? _____

3. What aspects of this lesson needed additional fine-tuning? _____

4. Would you use this lesson, or some variation of it, again? Why or why not? _____

5. What advice, tips, or suggestions would you give to future users of this lesson? _____

6. Where does this lesson fit in your course of study (scope, sequence, unit)? _____

7. If applicable, how did the use of primary sources impact student learning? _____

8. Additional comments? (Use other side if necessary.) _____



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