



Nebraska and the Great Depression: Federal Writers' Project

Lesson Introduction

One of the many agencies developed under the New Deal administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt was the Works Progress Administration. The Director, Harry Hopkins, urged Congress to fund projects for unemployed writers, artists, photographers, and musicians. What eventually evolved was the Federal Writers' Project. In Nebraska, the project was under the directorship of Rudolph "Rudy" Umland.

Desired Results

Nebraska Twelfth Grade Social Studies STAR Standards

12.1.13: Students will develop skills for historical analysis.

Example indicators

- Analyze documents, records, and data, e.g., artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, and historical accounts.
- Formulate historical questions and defend findings based on inquiry and interpretations.

12.4.3: Students will compare and contrast the distribution, growth rates, and characteristics of human populations, e.g., settlement patterns and the location of natural and human resources.

Example indicators

- Analyze the social, economic, political, and environmental factors that influence cultural interaction.
- Analyze past and present trends in human migration and cultural interactions as they are influenced by social, political, and environmental factors.

Nebraska State Social Studies Standards

12.1.17: Students will analyze and explain the Great Depression.

Example indicators

- Describe the impact of the Depression on the American people
- Explain the impact of New Deal economic policies

GRADE LEVEL:

9-12

SUBJECT:

Social Studies

TIME:

50 Minutes



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Understandings

Students will understand that during the Great Depression many literary figures began to rediscover the diverse regional cultural aspects of American society. The Nebraska Federal Writers' Project played an important role in defining and promoting, "...a pluralistic nationalism, urging Americans to take an interest in their own ethnic and regional history, in folklore and local traditions."

http://www.lincolnlibraries.org/depts/hr/wpa/ne_fwp_9.html

Essential Questions

1. In what ways did the Nebraska Federal Writers' Project address the crises and suffering of people in the Great Depression of the 1930s?
2. Who was responsible for overseeing the Nebraska Federal Writers' Project and what was his background?
3. What were the particular tasks undertaken by Nebraska project?
4. How did the Writers' Project address the question of Nebraska identity as well as American identity?
5. Why is the Federal Writers' Project generally ignored by American history textbooks, thus marginalizing the cultural importance of what was accomplished?



Students Will Know

1. Students will know the reasons why the Federal Writers' Project was developed.
2. Students will know who was responsible for organizing the Nebraska Federal Writers' Project.
3. Students will know the various projects that were undertaken by the Nebraska Federal Writers' Project.
4. Students will develop an understanding of how paper products are preserved.

Students Will be able to

1. Students will be able to analyze and critically interpret primary documents and photographs.
2. Students will be able to locate Nebraska contributions to the Federal Writers' Project.
3. Students will be able to engage in critical dialogue with others about their findings.



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Assessment Evidence

Assessment of this lesson is entirely up to the individual instructor. It is recommended that a variety of assessment tools be used in order to allow students to demonstrate understanding. For example, using Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences approach; students could create their own documentary film about the Federal Writers' project. Or, students could use, as a model, the Nebraska Federal Writers' Project about ethnic diversity in the state and develop a more current perspective and then compare the two.

Learning Plan

1. Hand out the following article¹ to students. It is an article that appeared in the New York Times about the Works Progress Administration of the New Deal and specifically, the Federal Writer's Project.
¹ <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9905E7D7123EF931A3575BC0A9659C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=print>
2. There is also a documentary film² about the Federal Writer's project. This link will provide more information. Perhaps your media center could order it for you.
² <http://www.american-voices.net>
And, at this site³ from York, Nebraska, you can show students clips of authentic individual stories from the Depression.
³ http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/money_01.html
3. The instructor may wish to organize students into smaller groups and have them individually research the different aspects of the Nebraska section of the Federal Writers' project as well as parts of the federal program. (See: Nebraska: A Guide To The Cornhusker State : <http://www.archive.org/details/nebraskaaguideto027969mbp>) Do not forget to include "The Clenched Fist,"⁴ a publication by Nebraska Marxist-Leninists. This might make for some interesting research.
⁴ <http://www.memories.ne.gov/u/?hr,61>



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4. Each group needs to decide how they are going to present their findings. This is where the multiple intelligences approach has impact. It allows students the freedom to determine how to demonstrate their understanding of a topic. You might want to do some brainstorming with students to come up with ideas.
5. If you plan to use a rubric for assessment, allow the students to engage in developing how they are going to be evaluated.
6. For information on how to preserve books and paper, have students check out resources at "Saving Your Treasures: Paper": <http://www.netnebraska.org/extras/treasures/paper.htm>



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