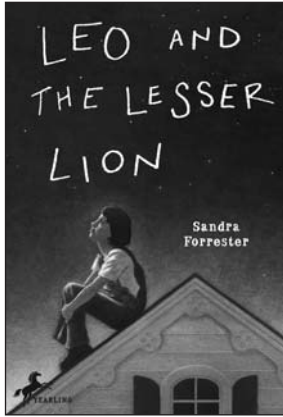


BOOKNOTES

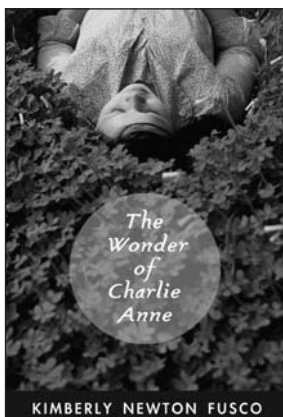
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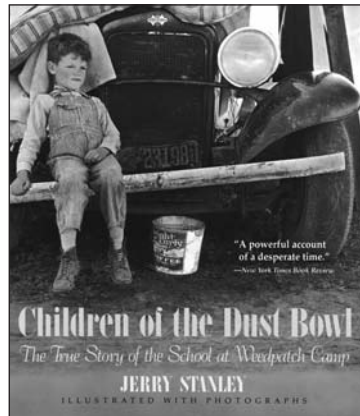
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STUDYING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Bread lines, foreclosures, bank closings. People from a certain generation would automatically equate such words and images with the Depression Era, one of the most difficult times in American history, yet a young person reading the same list might just as easily think of the country today and the very real effects of what has come to be known as the Great Recession. President Barack Obama has said, “I don’t think that any economist disputes that we’re in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression,” and indeed, many economists and historians have compared the country’s current woes to the events of the 1930s. For young people who live with luxury items such as Ipods, computers, and designer clothing, it can be hard to imagine an America where many parents struggled to feed and cloth their children, or a economic situation so dire that families were forced to separate in order to survive—unless that young person has a parent who is out of work, or has had to relocate due to the foreclosure on his family’s home. In this lesson, students will learn about the hardships that Americans faced during the Depression years by reading three novels and two works of nonfiction that put a human face on the struggles and sacrifices Americans endured during what President Franklin Delano Roosevelt called the nation’s “dark days.” By doing so, your student class will come to better understand this period in American history, and make connections and draw parallels to what many Americans are experiencing in the present day.

“Lots of folks go to bed hungry these days. I’ve heard of men fighting over scraps in garbage cans and about that lady who taught her kids to steal milk.”

—Turtle from *Turtle in Paradise*

ABOUT THE BOOKS

NOVELS:

LEO AND THE LESSER LION

Sandra Forrester

Everyone's been down on their luck since the Depression hit. When her parents break the news that they're going to be fostering two homeless little girls, Bayliss can't bear the thought of anyone taking her beloved older brother Leo's place. But opening her heart to these weary travelers might just be the key to rebuilding her grieving family.

TURTLE IN PARADISE

Jennifer L. Holm

Turtle is smart and tough and has seen enough of the world not to expect a Hollywood ending. After all, it's 1935, and jobs, money, and sometimes even dreams are scarce. So when Turtle's mama gets a job housekeeping for a lady who doesn't like kids, Turtle says goodbye without a tear and heads off to Key West, Florida, to stay with relatives she's never met. Florida's like nothing Turtle has ever seen, but she soon comes out of the shell she has spent her life building, and as she does, her world opens up in the most unexpected ways.

THE WONDER OF CHARLIE ANNE

Kimberly Newton Fusco

Charlie Anne is devastated when her father must go north to build roads after the Depression hits. Things turn around when Phoebe, a young African American girl who has also lost her

mother, arrives. Phoebe is smart and fun and the perfect antidote to Charlie Anne's lonely days. But when hatred turns their town ugly, it's almost more than they can bear. Now it's up to Charlie Anne and Phoebe to prove that our hearts are always able to expand.

NONFICTION:

CHILDREN OF THE DUST BOWL: The True Story of the School at Weedpatch Camp

Jerry Stanley

This true story took place at the emergency farm-labor camp immortalized in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Ostracized as "dumb Okies," the children of Dust Bowl migrant laborers went without school—until Superintendent Leo Hart and 50 Okie kids built their own school in a nearby field. Illustrated with photographs from the Dust Bowl era.

FDR'S ALPHABET SOUP: New Deal America 1932–1939

Tonya Bolden

FDR's New Deal, which followed the 1929 stock market crash, was a hugely influential moment in the history of the United States, encompassing everything from the arts to finance, labor to legislation, and some think it helped bring the country out of the Great Depression. Here, Tonya Bolden creates a portrait of a time that changed American history both then and now.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- Before reading the featured books, give students time to build and/or activate their background knowledge on the Great Depression. Students should do basic research into the cause and effects of the 1929 Wall Street crash that was the catalyst of the economic downturn, focusing on the plight of ordinary Americans. Give students time to share their research with the class. (See list of Internet Resources in this guide).
- The following excerpts come from the first inaugural speeches of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Barack Obama. Though the speeches are separated by 77 years, the content and tone of each are eerily similar. Write each on the board and read aloud. Spend time discussing the specifics of each excerpt.

"Values have shrunken to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen; government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone. More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence and an equally great number toil with little return. Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment."—President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, March 4, 1933

"Tonight, more Americans are out of work and more are working harder for less. More of you have lost your homes and even more are watching your home values plummet. More of you have cars you can't afford to drive, credit card bills you can't afford to pay, and tuition that's beyond your reach . . . One in ten Americans still cannot find work. Many businesses have shuttered. Home values have declined. Small towns and rural communities have been hit especially hard. For those who had already known poverty, life has become that much harder."—President Barack Obama, State of the Union Address, January 27, 2010

CONNECTING TO THE CURRICULUM

SOCIAL STUDIES

- In the three novels featured in this guide, each narrative includes a family that is forced to separate due to the financial hardships of the Depression. In *The Wonder of Charlie Anne*, Peter is forced to live with relatives in Boston. In *Turtle in Paradise*, Turtle must travel to the Florida Keys to live with her aunt and her family. And in *Leo and the Lesser Lion*, the Pettigrew family takes in two sisters whose family can no longer afford to feed them. Discuss this theme of families being separated due to economic hardship. Spend time during the reading of each book to discuss content that gives “a human face” to the effects of the Great Depression. After reading, students can choose a specific passage from one of the books on which to base a photo collage that presents an aspect of the era. For example, a student might choose the following passage from *Turtle in Paradise*: “Lots of folks go to bed hungry these days. I’ve heard of men fighting over scraps in garbage cans and about that lady who taught her kids to steal milk.” (p. 30) Using this passage, the photo collage would include images of hunger, such as bread lines and soup kitchens. Or, from *The Wonder of Charlie Anne*: “There are whole families sleeping under bridges in the city, that’s how bad things are.” (p. 14) In this case, the collage would include images of homelessness. Display the collages in a prominent location and give students the opportunity to present their work to the class.
- In the Author’s Note at the back of *Turtle in Paradise*, Jennifer L. Holm writes, “Then, as now, entertainment was a great distraction, and movies, radio shows, and the funny pages provided much amusement for children. Little Orphan Annie, Shirley Temple, and the Shadow were all superstars in their day.” Do an online search for examples of entertainment media from the Depression era. Set aside time while reading the book to share these pieces of our cultural history with your students. (See the Internet Resources listed in this guide for Web sites that offer legally downloadable content). As a writing extension, have each student write a “letter through time” to Turtle, describing their favorite media and personalities of the present day.
- In *Children of the Dust Bowl*, readers learn of the migration of families to California from the Pan Handle, a region of the country that would become known as the Dust Bowl. Look on pages 14 and 15 to familiarize students with this region, and the route migrants took on the long journey to California. Read aloud the passage beginning on page 16 and continuing to the middle of page 20, which describes typical experiences of the “Okies” seeking a better life in the Golden State. Ask students to describe what examples from the passage most shocked or surprised them. Place students into small groups of no more than four students. Each group will become an “Okie” family migrating to California and will keep an illustrated journal depicting life on the road. To

complete this project, students will need to spend time in the library researching the realities that faced families on their journey west. Give groups time to present their finished projects to the class.

LANGUAGE ARTS

- The main characters in the three novels featured in this guide (*The Wonder of Charlie Anne*, *Turtle in Paradise*, and *Leo and the Lesser Lion*) are all smart, feisty, determined young girls living during the Depression Era. These shared characters traits, as well as their strength and resilience, were necessary for them to cope both physically and emotionally with the personal and economic challenges of the times. Conduct a character study on each of the characters (either individually if only reading one book, or as a side-by-side comparison if reading two or all of the texts), focusing on each girl’s strengths and weaknesses, the problems they must overcome, and how they resolve that problem. If doing a comparison, have students chart how the characters are alike and different. As a culminating activity, have each student write a short essay on which character they most connected with and why. Give students an opportunity to read their work to the class.

THE ARTS

- Share the image of *The New Deal* (1934), found on page 66 of *FDR’s Alphabet Soup*. This mural by Conrad Ellison was one of hundreds of commissions given to artists under Roosevelt’s Federal Art Project (FAP). This mural, adorning the auditorium of New York City’s Leonardo da Vinci Art School, shows a monumental President Roosevelt clad in overalls, observing a variety of people at work. Discuss this image and what it symbolizes. Work with the art teacher to design a mural program in which students create a large scale painting that represents some of the public works projects that are being undertaken in their state or community as part of President Obama’s 2009 Recovery Act.
- Woody Guthrie, an Oklahoma native, is one of America’s most cherished folk singers. One of his most famous songs, *Do Re Mi*, describes the plight of Dust Bowl families migrating to California. After students have read chapters 1–4 of *Children of the Dust Bowl*, play the recording of Guthrie performing this iconic song which can be found at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=46mO7jx3JEw. Have students listen to the song two times, and then pass out copies of the lyrics (www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Do_Re_Mi.htm). Read the lyrics together and discuss situations Guthrie sings about that students discovered in the book. To extend this activity, give students time to research additional Dust Bowl ballads by Guthrie.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Great Depression vs. Great Recession

money.cnn.com/news/storysupplement/economy/recession_depression/

Modern American Poetry: The Great Depression

www.english.illinois.edu/maps/depression/depression.htm

The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie

memory.loc.gov/ammem/wwghhtml/wwgessay.html

YouTube: Shirley Temple

www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLLSqyYyPD8

Old Time Radio Shows: The Shadow

www.oldtimeradiofans.com/template.php?show_name=The%20Shadow

National Association of Comics Arts Educators: Little Orphan Annie

www.teachingcomics.org

See lesson called "Little Orphan Annie: Leapin' Through the Depression"

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C. Coco De Young

Grades 3-6

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-41529-9

Macaroni Boy

Katherine Ayres

Grades 3-7

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-41884-9



Tennyson

Lesley M.M. Blume


Grades 3-7

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-24061-7

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 = Listening Library audio available