



The Census and the Depression Lesson Plan

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OBJECTIVE: Compare a family's 1930 and 1940 census records to see how the depression affected their lives.

STANDARDS:

National Standards for United States History

- Standards in Historical Thinking
- Standard 4B: Obtain historical data
- Standard 4C: Interrogate historical data
 - Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)
- Standard 1B: Understand how American life changed during the 1930s.

LESSON:

Step 1: Introduction to the Census

As a class, look at the 1930 census and 1940 census templates. What is the same? What is different? What can the census tell us about a family's life? What fields will help determine how a family's life changed between 1930 and 1940.

Step 2: Assign a Family

Assign students a family from the 1930 census. This lesson can give an impression of the Great Depression on a community, state or national level depending on where the families chosen were residing. Options include:

- Families within your town or county
- Families around your state
- Families across the United States
- Or you can allow students to choose a family of one of their ancestors.

Have students find that family in the 1940 census on Ancestry.com.

Note: If the family cannot be found in the 1940 census, have the student choose another family in the 1930 census to use in their comparison.

Step 3: Compare and Contrast the Census Records

Using a Venn diagram, students will fill out what was the same and what was different about the family they are researching in 1930 and in 1940.

Students can also use a timeline to help explain what was happening to the family between 1930 and 1940. Facts to add to the timeline include:

- Residence in 1930, 1935 and 1940
- Births of children

Step 4: Determine Trends

As a class, compare and contrast how different families were affected by the Great Depression. How did the depression affect families within your community or state? Did every family experience the same problems?

Questions to help guide the discussion include:

- Did the family's income increase or decrease between census years?
- Did the family move? Across town or to another city or state?
- Did they own or rent their homes? Did the value of their homes or amount they paid in rent increase or decrease?
- Did the family expand? Did more children born to the family?
- Did extended family members come to live with them? Did they move in with their extended family?
- Did occupations within the household change?

Find more information about the family by researching other records created during this time frame, for example, city directories, newspapers and World War II draft records.