

The Great Depression, 1929–1939

Student Worksheet

Historical Context

The term “**depression**” describes the mood of Americans between 1929 and 1939, as well as the state of the economy. Most **business cycles** run three to six years, first rising then moving downward. During this time, unemployment usually runs between three and five percent. What made the Great Depression so troubling was that it lasted over ten years and the national unemployment rate averaged over ten percent, rising to well over 25 percent in 1933–1934. This high rate of unemployment wreaked havoc on the economy as people who were out of work spent less money on items such as furniture, clothing, automobiles, recreation, medical care, and food. Because people were buying less, businesses couldn’t pay their workers and had to let more go, increasing unemployment. However, the greatest impact of the Great Depression lay in the human suffering and the discouragement felt by many Americans. Small business owners lost everything. Professionals with college educations and advanced degrees found themselves unemployed with little prospect of getting a job because so many like them were out of work. Students graduating from high school and college found no jobs available. The very poor, especially in **urban** areas, had no **safety net** like unemployment insurance or welfare to protect them. State and local governments and private charities tried to help, but were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of unemployed.

Vocabulary

depression
Great Depression
business cycle
urban
safety net

Map Activity

To do this activity, you will need a blank outline map and access to the map titled “The Great Depression, 1929–1939.” Make sure all layers are on except “More than 25%,” “18–24%,” and “Less than 18%.” Turn on the layers of the digital map as indicated and answer the following questions:

1. Based on your previous knowledge, answer the following questions:
 - a. Which states do you think would have had the lowest levels of unemployment? Why? Write a brief answer in the space below.

- b. Turn on the “Less than 18%” layer to show the states that had relatively low unemployment. Shade in or outline these states in one color.
 - c. Which states do you think would have had the highest levels of unemployment? Why? Write a brief answer in the space below.

 - d. Turn on the “More than 25%” layer for the states that had the highest levels of unemployment. Shade in or outline these states in another color.
 - e. Turn on the “18–24” layer. Use a third color for these states.
3. Shade in the general area of the Dust Bowl, as best you remember. How did the states affected by it fare in terms of unemployment? Why do you think these states experienced the levels of unemployment that they did? Write a brief answer in the space below.
4. How did the most populous states fare? The least populous? Can any conclusions be drawn from the map about whether population correlated with unemployment rates? Write a brief answer in the space below.

Assessment

The United States can be divided into five general regions: the Northeast, the South, the Midwest, the Great Plains, and the West. Which region seemed to experience the highest rates of unemployment? The lowest? Why do you think this was so? Give either an oral report, make a PowerPoint presentation, or write an essay answering these questions, as instructed by your teacher.