

Lesson Plan
(Letters to a President)

Teacher Name: Elizabeth Dunlap Grade level(s): 6th-8th grade
Course: American History/Government/Economics

Describe the classroom or homework activity to be performed (individual assignment, cooperative learning, cross curricular, technology based, using artifacts and/or primary sources, etc.)

- Students will study and analyze letters written to Franklin Delano Roosevelt during the Great Depressions while he was implementing the New Deal programming. The students will then reflect and compare the Great Depression to our current economic situation. Students will be assigned the task to create a letter they could send to our current President addressing their concerns about the economy and the decisions he is making to get the economy back on track.

Rationale (why are you doing this?)

- I want students to understand the role of a President in difficult situations. The students should gain a better understanding the difficult decisions President's face and how it impacts and our country.

Required time frame: at least 2, 90 minute block periods (should be used in conjunction with a unit on the Great Depression Era)

Where in the teacher conference did you get the idea for this activity or assignment (speaker, document, photograph, activity, audio recording, other)?

- I got this idea while listening to Michelle Brattain's lecture/discussion on "Shaping the New Deal: Labor and American Workers 1919-1939."

Lesson objectives - the student will:

- Identify the role of the President during a crisis situation.
- Analyze the primary source documents for information about life and struggles during the Great Depression
- Analyze President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's response to citizen

concerns during the Great Depression

- Compare similarities and differences between decisions made by Presidents and other leaders during the Great Depression and the current economic recession.
- Create a letter explain their concerns for the current economic situation and the decisions made by government leaders.

District, state, or national performance and knowledge standards/goals/skills met (be specific when referencing):

- Show-me performance standard Goals 1-4
- SS Content Standard 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7
- CA Content Standard 1, 3, and 4

Secondary materials (book, article, video documentary, etc.) needed - cite title and other detailed information:

- Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man by Robert McElvaine
- Eleanor Roosevelt national Historic Site, The Great Depression, <http://www.nps.gov/archive/elro/glossary/great-depression.htm>
- Thematic Pathfinders for All Ages (42 eXplore2) Economics of the Great Depression, 2002, <http://www.42explore2.com/depresn.htm>
- Best of History Websites, Best of Edtech Teacher, 2008, http://www.besthistorysites.net/USHistory_GreatDepression.shtml
- Civics Today, Glencoe 2007, Textbook Chapter on Executive Branch and section on Powers and Duties of the Presidency.

Primary sources (document, photograph, artifact, diary or letter, audio or visual recording, etc.) needed - cite detailed information:

- The New Deal Network, Document Library, Clergy Letters to FDR, 2003. <http://newdeal.feri.org/texts/browse.cfm?MainCatID=309>
- The Constitution, Article II, Section 2, Executive Branch

Fully describe the activity or assignment in detail. What will both you and the students do?

- The teacher will begin by reviewing the Great Depression era and the essence of the New Deal Programming that should have been previously taught. The teacher will begin by having the students reflect upon what they have learned to this point. If the students do not respond the teacher will ask questions to gauge comprehension.
- The teacher will then discuss with the students the roles the president fulfills as the president, outlined in the

Constitution and referring to information from a textbook on Powers and Duties of the Presidency. The teacher will ask the students to infer how a President's role will change in crisis situations and how that will impact his duties to the country.

- The teacher will explain:
 - During the Great Depression people received news and communication from letters, radio, newspapers and word of mouth.
 - Letter writing was one of the ways people expressed their opinions to the government and that many of these letters have been saved.
 - Franklin D. Roosevelt received many letters from citizens commenting on their experiences, needs, and opinions on the New Deal Programming. He received praise and complaints, but always tried to address the need of his countrymen during this tough time.
- Teacher will ask the students to respond to the following question: Do you think our current President or Presidents would be willing to make sure our needs and questions were addressed? Why or Why not? Have them think about that question and write a response then share with their partner or group after giving adequate time for reflection. Pass out the copy of President Roosevelt's request for assistance to the clergy to read with the students. Ask them their opinion of the President after reading the letter and what it says about the president's role or mind set during this crisis.
- Teacher will break the students into groups of 3 to 4 students and explain they are going to read a few of the letters sent to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Encourage them to write down their observations and a summary as a group after the read the letter(s) for the purposes of sharing it with the class. (I would suggest using two letters per group containing a varied opinion from The New Deal Network, Document Library, Clergy Letters to FDR, <http://newdeal.feri.org/texts/browse.cfm?MainCatID=309>). Give the students time to read and discuss the letters with their group (approximately 20 minutes)
- Have the students share with the entire class their opinions and summary of the letters read. When finished open up a discussion with the question: Considering the living conditions in America at this time, how would you respond to President Roosevelt yourself? Pass out the copy of President Roosevelt's response to the clergy to read with the students. Ask them their opinion of the President after reading the letter and what it says about the president's role or mind set during this crisis.
- Ask for the students responses to: What kind of responses would you

like to send to our current president concerning the current economic situation? How do you think he would receive your responses, would he take action or ignore your concerns? Have the students justify their thinking.

- Explain to the students they will write a formal letter to the current president expressing their concerns, needs, and praise or complaint about the current economic situation and how the current president is dealing with this crisis. (Note: The teacher may need to explain the difference between a depression and recession if it has not already been covered. As well as, the teacher may need to spend time explaining the current economic situation if not previously discussed. Understanding these concepts is key to successful and effective completion of this assignment.) This assignment maybe given as a homework assignment or completed in class depending upon the teacher's preference.

Assessment: fully explain your assessment method in detail or create and attach your scoring guide:

- Student assessment will be conducted informally throughout the lesson. The teacher will use questioning and discussion to judge the level of comprehension by the students before formally assessing the students with the letter assignment.
- Below you will find a rubric explaining the scoring criterion for the Letter to the President assignment.

Letter to the President Scoring Guide				
Criteria	4	3	2	1
Ideas	Ideas were expressed in a clear and organized fashion. It was easy to figure out what the letter was about.	Ideas were pretty clear manner, but the organization could have been better.	Ideas were somewhat organized, but were not very clear. It took more than one reading to figure out what the letter was about.	The letter seemed to be a collection of unrelated sentences. It was very difficult to figure out what the letter was about.
Content Accuracy	The letter contains at least 5 accurate facts or opinions about the topic.	The letter contains 3-4 accurate facts or opinions about the topic.	The letter contains 1-2 accurate facts or opinions about the topic.	The letter contains no accurate facts or opinions about the topic.
Length	The letter is 10	The letter is 8-9	The letter is 5-7	The letter is

	or more sentences.	sentences.	sentences.	less than 5 sentences.
Sentences & Paragraphs	Sentences and paragraphs are complete, well-constructed and of varied structure.	All sentences are complete and well-constructed (no fragments, no run-ons). Paragraphing is generally done well.	Most sentences are complete and well-constructed. Paragraphing needs some work.	Many sentence fragments or run-on sentences OR paragraphing needs lots of work.
Grammar & spelling (conventions)	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar and/or spelling.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar and/or spelling.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar and/or spelling.
Capitalization and Punctuation	Writer makes no errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in capitalization and punctuation.
Format	Complies with all the requirements for a friendly letter.	Complies with almost all the requirements for a friendly letter.	Complies with several of the requirements for a friendly letter.	Complies with less than 75% of the requirements for a friendly letter.

Adapted from <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>