



## Understanding Ourselves from the Past

Curriculum Unit 15.02.05

by Susan Hansen

### Introduction

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On any typical day many school children can be found gazing and daydreaming out of classroom windows. They may be pondering of what the future may hold for them as they grow into adulthood. These daydreams can be given powerful wings when the dreamer has a deep understanding of the past and how no matter where they go in the future, the efforts and the struggles of fellow Americans of the past have a connection and impact on the future they will meet. As children learn and grow in elementary school the focus and goals are always related to the future. In addition, as teachers we are always preparing our students with the lessons they need in order to support their future learning endeavors. Oftentimes and unfortunately, history is viewed as facts to memorize and only to be discussed during special anniversaries or monthly themed commemorations. At the elementary level, social studies is an often neglected content area due to our focus on the development of literacy skills and math skills based on the needs to meet the objectives of standard driven curriculum goals in order to meet literacy and math goals. Social Studies is expected to be integrated into literacy lessons as opposed to using Social Studies to promote literacy skills through deep oral, written, and reading experiences. The unit I have created uses literacy as a springboard to bring about conversations, introduce activities, and most of all to stress the importance of looking back to the past history of our nation during the Great Depression of the 1930's. This unit is designed to promote curiosity, understanding, and reflection in how the impact of the 1930's and the Great Depression continues to have an impact in our lives today.

This unit was designed for third grade students. However, this unit can be easily modified for any classroom setting within the intermediate grade levels third through fifth. While this unit is designed for my predominantly Hispanic students who are designated as English Language Learners in my dual language school, it is also very appropriate for any classroom setting whether urban, suburban, or rural. Goals and objectives can be easily adjusted in order to meet grade specific Common Core State Standards. In this interdisciplinary unit students will learn through the integration of oral language, reading, writing, social studies, and technology. Most of my students come from Latin and Hispanic cultures from around the world and bring a rich background of diversity to the classroom; however, they lack the historical knowledge of the country in which they are now citizens. While my students are very curious, the opportunity to learn the history of the United States depends on the schools to provide this knowledge for them as their families have lived and experienced a different history in their native countries.

The overall goal of this unit will focus on students learning about life in the 1930's and how it relates to the lives they live today in their close knit Fair Haven inner city community. The chapter book, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo will serve as an entry point into the 1930's. While *The Miraculous Journey of Edward* is a required text for grade three students in my district, there are other comparable texts that could be easily adapted. Suggestions of texts which depict this time period are *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis, *Nothing to Fear* by Jackie French Koller, or *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor. Synopses of these texts can be found in the resources section of this unit. Lessons and activities will be planned and implemented in order to engage and support critical thinking as opposed to simply presenting material for the purpose of recall. Students will also develop content specific vocabulary which will enable them to have rich discussions and written responses. This unit will incorporate a hands-on and inquiry learning approach. This unit will be broken into three parts. Students will also need access to computers for part one and part two of the unit. The unit will take approximately six weeks to complete with 3-4 lessons a week in conjunction with the read aloud of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* or your text of choice.

## Background

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After the stock market crash of 1929, the once thriving American economy came to a halt. This period became to be known as the Great Depression which affected a very large part of the population from the Eastern to the Western United States for over a decade. While many homes were becoming modernized with electricity and appliances during the 1920's this period hit many homes with the electricity going out and kerosene lamps going up. Work was hard to find and at best, many families had to learn how to stretch a dollar. Banks failed, businesses closed, and the most basic needs became hard to meet. Families who lost their homes were forced to pack all their belongings and seek refuge in shanty towns, also known as Hoovervilles, which were made of scraps of metal, wood, cardboard, and whatever materials they could find to create shelter. Especially hard hit from the Great Depression were the farmers who suffered as they produced far more than they could sell and lost their farms to foreclosures. The farmers of the Great Plains also suffered notably as a result of a devastating drought which brought about withered crops and suffered high winds which came to be known as the Dust Bowl. The Dust Bowlers fled with all of their possessions and family members for California believing they would find work, only to discover scarce opportunities for low wage paying jobs and ridicule from resident Californians. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933 New Deal programs were put in to place in order to provide relief for the needy. The New Deal programs provided job opportunities for the unemployed along with social and economic aid. Many of the reforms and programs enacted during Roosevelt's presidency are still in place in order to prevent another economic disaster.

## Rationale

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As an English component teacher in an English-Spanish dual language school approximately half of my students are English Language Learners. Many students struggle to meet grade level literacy standards as it takes 5-7 years to fully acquire a language. While students are able to use their Basic Interpersonal

Communication Skills ( BICS) with ease, Content Area Language Proficiencies (CALP) provides a challenge for students as they learn. CALP refers to content area vocabulary and higher order thinking activities needed to succeed academically. In past readings of the much loved novel *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* I always felt that students couldn't deeply comprehend this wonderful novel beyond the surface level due to their lack of background knowledge of the time period and deficient content area vocabulary development in social studies. By the third grade students are expected to go beyond understanding the basic elements of story structure and be able to engage in deep higher order thinking in order to respond to texts both orally and written. In order to support my students I will use sheltered instruction which is scientifically researched based strategies for English Language Learners. For example, I will incorporate visuals such as realia, video clips and photos. I will also use strategies to build background knowledge by linking the unit's concepts to student's schema in order to build vocabulary and understanding of the time period. Lesson activities will also revolve around organizing students in cooperative groups and pairs to support language proficiency levels of my students. We will examine our present culture as it relates to the 1930's by comparing and contrasting in order to analyze who we are now as a result of who we were in the past. Students will also analyze patterns and changes over time as they relate to the lives they live today. It is my goal to expose students to the 1930's in order to engage student historical curiosity through discourse, reading and writing. Students will have opportunities through discussions in order to delve into the idea of what culture is and how it has affected them based on the past and the impact it has on their future. Students will benefit from meaningful and rich explorations of a variety of cultural perspectives within and outside of their lives while developing social studies based content vocabulary. This historical exploration will not only promote academic learning and growth in many content areas but also promote social and emotional growth as they develop a sense of how the past has an impact on their lives at present.

## Content Objectives

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The students will be able to understand how both the past and present are connected to who we are now and who we may become in the future.

The students will be able to describe the impact of the historical events of the Great Depression and engage in discussions using content specific vocabulary.

The students will compare and contrast the 1930's to the present using discourse and written response.

Students will develop and apply content specific language in order to write a descriptive narrative based on life during the Great Depression.

Students will engage in technology based research in order to create a themed power point about an aspect of life during the 1930's.

Students will apply critical thinking skills to modify an object of the past in order to make it relevant for today.

## Teaching Strategies

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Use of children’s literature in order to spur interest and as a springboard for rich discussions.

Use associated types of “realia” meaningful or familiar to students to affirm the appropriate context for using new language.

Use of hands-on learning activities in order to make learning more meaningful and relevant.

Use of graphic organizers in order to scaffold and support the needs of English Language Learners.

Use of heterogeneous small group interactions in order to support dominant and non-dominant language learners.

Use of structured student talk experiences in order to promote opportunities for students to focus on productive and academic verbal exchanges.

## Setting the Stage for Learning

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In order to create curiosity and interest a special area/ learning center should be set up in the room for students to explore and discover about the era of the Great Depression. Contents of the center could include but are not limited to a library of a variety of children’s books from the 1930’s, a photographic library of images from the 1930’s, and realia/props representing items used and popular during the 1930’s. Examples of possible books are *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper, *Mr. Popper’s Penguin* by Florence and Richard Atwater and *The Dick and Jane Series* by William S. Gray and Zerna Sharp. Realia included in the center could be the popular board game Monopoly, jacks, a china doll or two and any 1930’s replications of items such as a radio, lamp, telephone, etc. As we read and children begin researching the era they will also be encouraged to make additions of their discoveries in the center. This will not only support the English language Learners develop and build academic content vocabulary but will promote curiosity and ownership for all students in their learning.

## Section 1: The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane

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This unit will begin with the whole group read aloud of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo which is a required text as a part of our CORE curriculum in The Plugged into Reading Program. This short chapter book takes place in the 1930’s and chronicles the physical and emotional journey of Edward Tulane, a vain china rabbit as he learns to love and learns to be loved. During this period, America suffered economic downturns as a result of The Great Depression and drought of the Great Plains. In the storyline Edward becomes displaced from his beloved owner Abeline. Over the course of many years Edward experiences a variety of transformations as he meets and becomes owned by many people affected by the

economic decline of the Great Depression. Throughout the reading students will follow Edward on his heart wrenching journey while learning and discovering about a time period very different from a period they now live. The discovery center in the classroom along with class discussions will help support students understanding of life in the 1930's. For example, many students will not understand of the concept of a china doll and will need to be shown pictures or realia of china dolls.

### **Edward Tulane Lesson Sample**

This lesson can take place anytime after chapter 12 after Edward becomes displaced and separated from his beloved owner Abilene. Up until after chapter 7 in the text there is no evidence of economic decline.

Objectives:

Students will apply knowledge learned about the Great Depression in order to write a descriptive narrative of a photograph of The Migrant Mother.

Students will develop a narrative using story elements descriptively in clear event sequences.

Students will compare and contrast their narrative to the real narrative after listening to an interview of The Migrant Mother.

- To begin the lesson group students in small groups of 4-5 students and engage them in a brainstorming session in order to describe life during the 1930's. Model an example for the students to help them get started. Suggest and discuss possible categories such as toys, school, hobbies, families, etc. Provide students with large chart paper with a matrix as shown below so they can make comparisons throughout the reading of the book. The charts can be displayed in the classroom and be added to as we continue reading the book. The charts will also serve as a resource for future student discussions and writing experiences.

Life in the 1930's versus Now

Categories    1930's    Now

- Display Dorothea Lange's photograph of the "Migrant Mother". Define the term migrant as it pertains to people who are very poor and travel around the country to find work, especially as a farm laborer harvesting crops seasonally. As a way to build student connections discuss the term immigrant and how it is related to the term migrant. As a quick review we will discuss how many people during the 1930's experienced economic downturns as a result of the stock market crash and the drought of the Great Plains region of the United States. As students take several minutes to look at the overhead displayed photo of "Migrant Mother" play the popular song, "Brother Can You Spare a Dime" by Rudy Valle <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llhRGUYMcfU>.
- Briefly share any personal stories you may have about the Great Depression. For example, I will share my own family history of this time period of my impoverished grandparents travels from Missouri to California in order to find work when my mother was just a baby. When they arrived to California the work promised to my grandfather was gone and they had to camp out and find their way back to the Midwest. If you do not have personal stories of your own you can find personal stories with a quick internet search or use the websites listed in the Teacher Resources section of this unit. Also, invite students in an open discussion to share their own family histories which involve moving from one place

to another in order to find better opportunities.

- Assign students to work in pairs to write a brief narrative based on what they know about the period and the feeling they receive from the displayed photo of “Migrant Mother” to tell the story of the photo. Students will be provided a rubric to guide focus their writing.

### Migrant Mother Narrative Writing Rubric

	1	2	3	4
Fluency and Mechanics	Writing is unclear and contains many errors in spelling and grammar.	Writing is partially unclear and contains several errors in spelling and grammar.	Writing is mostly clear and contains only a few errors in spelling and grammar.	Writing is clear and contains proper spelling and grammar
Elaboration	Writing demonstrates little use of descriptive details and minimal use of content vocabulary words.	Writing demonstrates some use of descriptive details and adequate use of content vocabulary words.	Writing mostly demonstrates use of descriptive details and moderate use of content vocabulary words.	Writing clearly demonstrates use of descriptive details and high use of a variety of content vocabulary words.
Organization	Writing is sloppy and unorganized. Lacks use of story elements such as character(s), setting, problem, and solution to tell the story of the photo.	Somewhat sloppy and unorganized. Includes some elements of a narrative text such as character(s), setting, problem, and solution to tell the story of the photo.	Writing is somewhat neat and organized and includes most elements of a narrative text such as character(s), setting, problem, and solution to tell the story of the photo.	Writing is very neat and organized includes all elements of a narrative text such as character(s), setting, problem, and solution to tell the story of the photo.

- For closure students will listen to a brief interview of the woman in the “Migrant Mother”, Florence Owens Thompson from NBC’s Today Show  
<http://www.today.com/id/51067427/ns/today-books/#.VWERxk9Vikr>.

### Extensions

In a follow-up lesson allow students to work in small discussion groups in order to share their narratives and compare and contrast them to the events of Florence Owens Thompson’s that they learned about in the interview during the prior lesson.

Throughout the rest of the chapters give students a graphic organizer in order track events of Edward’s experiences as he takes on new names, genders, settings, and owners. The graphic organizer will help students organize thoughts and ideas for discussions and to compare and contrast the changes Edward makes from the beginning to the end of the book.

Create a writing center for students to respond to the book and what they learned about the Great Depression. A bulletin board could be used to display student responses. Prompts could include:

How are the struggles of the 1930’s alike and/or different from our lives today? Use details to explain your answer.

How are people alike and different in the 1930’s from today? Use details to explain your answer.

How do you think Edward's journey was similar to the people's journeys during the Great Depression? Use details to explain your answer.

Can you think of a motto to describe life during the 1930's? Do you think this motto could be used today to inspire your own life? Explain why and or how.

## **Section Two: Researched Power Point on Popular Trends of the 1930's**

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This section takes place once we have finished the read aloud of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*. By this time students have developed an understanding of the 1930's along with a curiosity to learn more about the era. The goal of this section is for students to become inquisitive historians as they explore and research via the internet popular trends and life styles of children in the 1930's. Students will be organized in small cooperative groups in order to research popular trends of the 1930's and be assigned to create a power point presentation. Students should be in groups of four to five and the role of a teacher will shift to a facilitator. Students will choose topics to explore and research via the internet one of the six themes: popular toys, popular pastimes or hobbies, popular celebrities and sports stars, popular books, clothing, and typical family life of the 1930's.

### **Sample Lesson/Activity**

Objectives:

Students will conduct a short, collaborative research project in order to create a power point presentation about a popular trend of the 1930's.

Students will learn how to collaborate with others in order to create a published work using technology skills.

1. Model and review how to use power point in order to create a presentation by choosing a famous person of the 1930's. For example, I will create a power point of Eleanor Roosevelt and show students how to navigate the internet to research and cut and paste photos.
2. Tell students that they will need to research their theme and narrow their topic by choosing one of the several options for their power point. Introduce the themes of popular toys, popular pastimes or hobbies, popular celebrities and sports stars, popular books, clothing, and typical family life of the 1930's. Also be open to other suggestions the children may have to add to possible theme topics.
3. Once students have been broken into heterogeneous groups, allow them to choose their theme and roles cooperatively among their groups. Students will be provided with a check list to guide them through this process. Next, students will use two to three 45 minute periods to complete their research and power point. Students' need for support will vary according to academic levels and technology skills.

### **Power Point Check List**

We created a power point using many photos and pictures of our theme.

We showed images and wrote about 4-5 examples of our theme.

We used a variety of content specific vocabulary words in our power point.



We organized our power point in a clear and sequential manner.

We used proper spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure in our presentation.

Extensions:

The next lesson/activity could be for student groups to share their power points with their classroom peers. In order to promote the concept of being historians each group will take part in question and answer sessions with the class.

Students could choose a theme presented and compare and contrast to our lives today using a Venn diagram.

As a class, research popular food and recipes made during the great depression. Choose 2-3 recipes to make and sample at the power point presentation.

## **Section Three: 1930's Product Redesign for Today**

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The third and final part of the unit will be an assigned performance task in which students will work in pairs in order to redesign a popular toy or game from the past that would appeal to a child today. Based on students' prior learning experiences in the first two sections and research about the 1930's they will apply critical thinking skills in order to take an old toy/game and make it relevant and appealing to a child today. Students will then create and act out a commercial or create a poster in order to promote their redesigned product. Students will write about their modifications and explain why the modifications they made were chosen and how they would appeal to today's child.

### **Sample Lesson/Activity**

Objectives:

Students will research a popular toy or game and modify it in order to appeal to children of today.

Students will create a poster or act out a commercial in order to promote their redesigned product.

1. Show examples of toys that have been commercially modified. For example, Bratz Dolls are a spinoff of Barbie Dolls or Big Bang Theory Clue is a spinoff of the Classic Clue Board Game. Engage students in a discussion of how and why the modern version is more relevant to children today.
2. Brainstorm a list of toys or games we have already learned about from the 1930's. List the toys or games on chart paper.
3. As a group, choose one product to modify. Guide the students through the process with their group suggestions and consensus. Post the written response to the assignment and a poster of the product as an anchor chart for students to use as an example.
4. Explain to students that they will work in pairs in order to choose a popular toy or game from the class list or a researched toy or game not listed and change it to interest today's child.
5. Write sentence starters for students to support their writing and help them maintain focus.

We chose this toy/game because....



The changes we made were.....

We made these changes because.....

This toy will appeal to children now because.....

1. Provide students with materials needed such as markers, poster board, etc to complete their project.
2. To culminate the projects invite family to come and view the posters and commercials.

Extensions:

Video tape each pair of students discussing their projects.

Have a thirties game day and toy party in which students invite a younger class to learn the games and play with toys from the era.

## Resources

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### Teacher

Buhle, Paul. *FDR and the New Deal for Beginners.Hanover*. New Hampshire: Steerforth Press, 2010. Provides historical background of the FDR administration and the New Deal.

Egan, Timothy. *The Worst Hard Time*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006. Follows the struggles and endurance of families who suffered and endured the Dust Bowl.

Knepper, Kathy. *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters to Eleanor Roosevelt through Depression and War*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2004. Collection of letters written the First Lady received from citizens of the United States during the Great Depression and wartime.

Terkel, Studs. *Hard Times: An oral History of the Great Depression*. United States: Pantheon Books, 1970. Hundreds of oral histories of people from a variety of backgrounds who lived through and survived the Great Depression

### Student

Atwater, Richard & Florence. *Mr. Poppers Penguins*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1938. This classic chapter book written during the depression tells the tale of Mr. Popper poor housepainter who never gives up on his dreams to reach the North Pole.

Burton, Virginia Lee. *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939. Another classic written during the depression era. Great message of hard work and perseverance and coming to age during challenging times.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Buddy, Not Buddy* . New York: Delacorte Press, 1999. Award winning book based during the Great Depression in Flint Michigan. This text depicts the journey Bud takes after fleeing his foster home to find his father.

DiCamillo, Kate. *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*. New York: Random House, 2006.

Foresman, Scott. *The Ultimate Dick and Jane Storybook Collection* . United States: Grosset and Dunlap, 1984. Sample of popular basal readers children learned how to read with beginning in the 1930's. Lack of diversity and stereotypical characters made them

fade out of classrooms by the 1980's.

Freeman, Russell. *Children of the Great Depression* . New York: Clarion Book Company, 2005. Excellent non-fiction text about the Great Depression with many personal narratives and depictive photographs.

Harper, Jo & Josephine. *Finding Daddy: A Story of the Great Depression*. New York: Turtle Books, 2005. Narrative text about a young girl who searches for her father when he leaves the family to find work during the Great Depression.

Hurst, Carol Otis. *Rocks in His Head*. Hong Kong: South China Printing Company, 1988. Narrative story about a gas station owner who is only left with his prized rock collection after the economic downturn of the Great Depression forces him to close his station. With his rocks and perseverance new dreams are met.

Koller, Jackie French. *Nothing to Fear*. San Diego: Harcourt Books, 1991. Set in the 1930's during the Great Depression depicts the challenges a young boy faces after his father leaves the family to find work. Danny perseveres to help his mother and sister survive the difficult times of the Great Depression.

Mitchell, Margaree King. *Uncle Jed's Barbershop*. New York: First Aladden Paperbacks, 1998. Narrative text based during the depression era which emphasizes hard work and faith pays off.

Moss, Marissa. *Rose's Journal: The Story of a Girl in the Great Depression* . United States: Harcourt Books, 2003. Fictional journal based on the researched events a girl of the Great Depression would feel and express.

Phelan, Matt. *The Storm in the Barn* . Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2009. Graphic novel depicting a young boy's experiences during the dust bowl. Excellent choice for ELL's and reluctant readers.

Piper, Watty, *The Little Engine that Could* . New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1976. Another classic tale from the 1930's which value hard work and optimism.

Stanley, Jerry. *Children of the Dust Bowl: The True Story of the school at Weedpatch Camp*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1992. Non-fiction text which tells the events challenges of the family victims of the Dust Bowl as they tried to resettle in California.

Stewart, Sarah. *The Gardener* . Canada: Douglas & McIntyre, Ltd, 1997. Set during the Great depression this story provides the message of perseverance and maintaining a positive attitude during difficult times.

Taylor, Mildred D. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. New York: Dial Books, 1976. San Diego: Harcourt Books, 1991. This Newbery Medal book depicts the African American experience in the Deep South during the Great Depression. Shows the struggle of the Logan family as they are faced with racism and injustice and how they endure with integrity and pride.

Turner, Ann. *Dust for Dinner* . United States: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc, 1995. An easy reader which tells the story of a family during the Dust Bowl.

## Appendix

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CC.3.R.L.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

CC.3.R.L.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

CC.3.R.I.3 Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.

CC.3.W.6 With guidance and support from adults, use technology to produce and publish writing (using keyboarding skills) as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

CC.3.W.7 Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.

CC.3.W.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences

CC.3.SL.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on Grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CC.3.SL.1.d Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

CC.3.SL.1.b Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion)

CC.3.SL.1.a Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied. Required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.

CC.3.SL.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.

CC.3.W.2.a Introduce a topic and group related information together; include illustrations when useful to aiding comprehension.

CC.3.W.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

HIST 3.2 Compare life in specific historical time periods to life today.

## Websites

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<http://www.history.com/topics/new-deal/videos/the-new-deal>

<http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s>

<http://www.today.com/id/51067427/ns/today-books/#.VWERxk9Vikr>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IlhRGUYMcfU>

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