

1934: A New Deal for Artists Guide for Educators

Smithsonian American Art Museum exhibition at the
Whatcom Museum
September 18, 2010–January 9, 2010



Ross Dickinson, *Valley Farms*, 1934, oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the U.S. Department of Labor

“Artists were encouraged to depict ‘the American Scene’; in doing so, they sounded themes that we think of as quintessentially American: the value of hard work, pride of place, and unrelenting optimism.”
-Howard Kaplan

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Washington State EALR's

The Arts

- 1.1 Understands and applies arts concepts and vocabulary.
- 1.2 Develops arts skills and techniques.
- 1.3 Understands and applies arts genres and styles from various artists, cultures and times.
- 2.3 Applies a responding process. *Engages* with works of art through group discussion. *Describes* visual works of art. *Analyzes* how works of art are composed. *Interprets* content of a work of art based on visual cues. *Evaluates* strength of a work utilizing appropriate vocabulary and visual evidence.
- 4.2 Demonstrates and analyzes the connections among the arts and other content areas.
- 4.3 Understands how the arts impact and reflect lifelong choices.
- 4.4 Understands how the arts influence and reflect cultures/civilization, place, and time.
- 4.5 Understands how arts knowledge and skills are used in the world of work, including careers in the arts.

Social Studies

Economics

- 2.3 Understands the government's role in the economy.
- 2.4 Understands the economic issues and problems that all societies face.

Geography

- 3.3 Understands the geographic context of global issues and events.

History

- 4.2 Understands and analyzes causal factors that have shaped major events in history.
- 4.3 Understands that there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events.
- 4.4 Uses history to understand the present and plan for the future.

Social Studies Skills

- 5.3 Deliberates public issues.

Writing

- 2.2 Writes for a variety of purposes.
- 2.3 Writes in a variety of forms/ genres.

Communication

- 1.1 Uses listening and observation skills and strategies to focus attention and interpret information.

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Exhibition Overview

References: *1934: A New Deal for Artists* by Ann Prentice Wagner in *Antiques & Fine Arts* online journal and *1934: A New Deal for Artists* exhibition catalog

1934 was a year of many difficulties. The United States was deep in the heart of the Great Depression, unemployment was at 25% and nearly 25% more of the population was working reduced hours, and farmers battled erosion and falling food prices. Workers in all trades were crying out for relief from the federal government and the question was raised about just who those workers were and if they included artists. When Federal Emergency Relief Administrator Harry L. Hopkins heard this question, he responded, "They've got to eat just like other people!" Through his support, and the coordination of Edward Bruce in the Treasury Department, programs were created that supported artists through federal funds.



Douglass Crockwell, *Paper Workers*, 1934, Oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the U.S. Department of Labor

The first project that broadly supported artists was the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). Despite its short duration— it spanned only 6 months from December 1933–June 1934 before morphing into the larger Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project— 15,663 works of art were created by the 3,749 artists funded by the PWAP. The exhibition *1934: A New Deal for Artists* displays 55 exemplary works created during the PWAP which are part of the Smithsonian American Art Museum collection.

PWAP artists received little instruction from program administrators; they only asked that the artists depict the "American Scene." They took to this task with enthusiasm. The paintings, prints, murals, sculptures, craft works and drawing were displayed in post offices, libraries, schools, museums, and government buildings across the nation. Artist Henry Biddle commented that, "Every artist... is so keyed up to the importance of the situation, amounting practically to a revolution for him, that he is without exception, putting every ounce of his energy and creative ability into his work as never before."

The artists often elected to depict their region, primarily because travel was difficult and incurred extra expenses. PWAP artists showed great pride in documenting the areas in which they lived, though these scenes varied greatly. The paintings in *1934: A New Deal for Artists* highlight urban landscapes and rural landscapes, scenes of industry and scenes of recreation, images of great productivity and images of financial decay. The artists came from all corners of the country and many were immigrants, though only 10 artists of the over 3,000 were African American. Each of the PWAP artists worked hard to live up to FDR's hope that, "One hundred years from now my administration will be known for its art, not for its relief."

Some of the works were displayed in federal buildings, 32 paintings were selected by first lady Eleanor Roosevelt to be displayed in the White House, but most were sent to the artists' home region in order to be displayed. These works helped fuel an optimism across the United States in the depths of the Depression and showed, in the words of sculptor Gutzon Borglum, that "Aid to the creative ones among us enliven[ed] the Nation's mind ...[and helped] coax the soul of America back to life."

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Glossary of Terms

Historical Terms and Important Figures

Farm Security Administration (FSA): The Farm Security Administration was a New Deal program designed to fight rural poverty during the Great Depression. In order to publicize their programs and to document the hardships of rural life in American, the FSA hired photographers to document the American people from 1935-1944.

The Great Depression: Period of economic decline from 1929 through the end of the 1930s. In the United States, unemployment reached 25% and another 25% worked reduced hours. The Great Depression impacted countries around the globe.

The New Deal: The New Deal encompassed a series of programs passed by the United States Congress during the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. These programs focused on relief, recovery, and reform. Programs such as the Social Security System and the Securities and Exchange Commission, as well as major public works projects such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Grand Coulee Dam, were part of the New Deal.

FDR: Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the 32nd president of the United States. He was in office from 1933-1945, during the Great Depression and World War II. He started the New Deal programs in order to provide relief to the many unemployed and underemployed people in the United States.

Public Works of Art Program (PWAP): The Public Works of Art Program was the first federal New Deal program designed to support artists. This program, started by Edward Bruce in the Treasury Department, ran for only six months in 1933-1934 but over 15,000 works of art were created by the artists supported through this program.

Works Progress Administration or Work Projects Administration (WPA): The WPA was the largest New Deal agency, funding public works projects, such as dams and bridges, and arts, drama, and literacy projects as well. Over eleven billion dollars was spent on WPA projects from 1933-1943.

Art Terms

American Scene Painting/ Regionalism: American Scene and Regionalist painters focused on scenes of rural life. These painters used a naturalistic style that romanticized life away from industrial settings. Some well-known artists of this movement are Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry.

Social Realism: Social realism focused on issues of social, racial, and economic injustice and hardship. Social realist artists highlighted scenes that turned the life of everyday men and women into heroic statue. These artists did not romanticize or glorify

situations of hardship, rather tried to depict it as it was, thereby making social and political statements through their art. Artists Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, Reginald Marsh, and Dorothea Lange were all part of the Social Realism movement.

Composition: The arrangement of elements in a work of art as determined by the artist. Composition creates organization in a work of art which tells the viewer the relative importance of the imagery and elements included.

Color: Color is created by light reflected off objects. Color has three main characteristics: hue (red, green, blue, etc.), value (how light or dark it is), and intensity (how bright or dull it is). Colors can be described as warm (red, yellow) or cool (blue, gray), depending on which end of the color spectrum they fall.

Line: Lines are a path created by a point moving in space. They can describe a shape, suggest movement, and organize an artwork into a structured whole. Lines are defined by their type (angular or curved), direction (horizontal or vertical) and their quality (thick or thin). Lines lead your eye around a composition and can communicate through their type and direction.

Mood: The feeling of a work of art, often created by the use of color, composition, and narrative. The mood of a work of art might be uplifting, sad, worried, or joyful.

Movement: Movement is created in a work of art by directing the viewer's eye to various areas of a composition with color, line, shape and other visual tools.

Narrative: Using visual tools, including color, shape, line, composition, content, and other tools, to tell a story in a work of art. Narrative works of art may be telling a specific story but may also tell an open-ended story that the viewer helps create.

Perspective: Perspective in a work of art is a way that artists depict approximations of three-dimensional objects and spaces on a flat surface. Artists most often use three techniques, making objects smaller that are farther away, having lines recede in the distance to one or several central points (called vanishing point), and foreshortening objects. The artists' choice of perspective reflects the point of view they want the viewer to take on what they are depicting.

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Classroom Extensions: Writing

Writing for the New Deal

The paintings included in *1934: A New Deal for Artists* provide excellent examples of visual narratives and an easy starting point for writing exercises. The following writing exercises help students enter into the scenes the artists have created and continue the visual narrative that is started in each painting.

I Am Poem...

Have each student select a work of art from the 1934 exhibition that contains a person. They should imagine that they are the person inside the painting and complete the following statements to create their "I Am" poem.

Suggested Works of Art:

Festival, Daniel Celentano
Somewhere in America, Robert Brackman
In the Barber Shop, Ilya Bolotowsky
The Farmer's Kitchen, Ivan Albright
Juan Duran, Kenneth M. Adams

I am (two special characteristics of the person)
I wonder (something the character is curious about)
I hear (a sound in the scene)
I see (a sight in the scene)
I want (what the character desires)
I am (the first line of the poem restated)

I pretend (something the character pretends to do)
I feel (a feeling about something in the painting)
I touch (something the character would touch)
I worry (something that really bothers the character)
I cry (something that makes the character very sad)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

I understand (something the character knows)
I say (something the character believes in)
I dream (something the character actually dreams about)
I try (something the character makes an effort to do)
I hope (something the character actually hopes for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

Format for "I Am..." poem taken from <http://ettcweb.lr.k12.nj.us/forms/iampoem.htm>
Poems can be completed online at this site.



Robert Brackman, *Somewhere in America*, 1934, Oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the U.S. Department of Labor

Consequence Poems

Originally a game played by Surrealist artists, using Consequence poems in the classroom provides an excellent way for students to use simple prompts to start building a poem. Students will form small groups and take turns answering the following prompts to create a collaborative poem. Consequence poems can be created while looking at a figurative work of art, so that the students are responding to the characters depicted in the works of art.

Suggested Works of Art

Homeward Bound, E. Martin Hennings

Subway, Lily Furedi

Employment of Negroes in Agriculture, Earle Richardson

In groups of 3-4 students, write down answers the following prompts to create your group Consequence poem.

1. What is the man's name?
2. What is the woman's name?
3. Where are the woman and man?
4. He said to her...
5. She said to him
6. The consequence was...
7. What was the outcome?

Consequence Poems modified from lesson found at <http://www.suite101.com/content/how-to-write-an-exquisite-corpse-poem-a231780>.



E. Martin Hennings, *Homeward Bound*, 1933-1934, Oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum Transfer from the U.S. Department of Labor

Telling the Tale

In this writing exercise, students will create a prose piece that helps them utilize these questions to create a compelling plot and develop dialogue for a work of art.

Suggested Works of Art:

Skating in Central Park, Agnes Tait

Baseball at Night, Morris Kantor

Snow Shovellers, Jacob Getlar Smith

Homeward Bound, E. Martin Hennings

Festival, Daniel Celentano

Tenement Flats, Millard Sheets

Use the following questions to start your prose piece about the work of art.

- What do you see in this painting?
- What is happening here?

- Where is this painting set? What time of day is it?
- Which person in the painting would you like to speak with most? What would you ask them? What would they tell you about what is going on around them?
- What just happened? Who in the painting can tell you the story of what just happened?
- What do you imagine the characters in this painting are saying to each other? What are they thinking? What are their names?
- What will happen next? How do you know? Who in the painting can tell you what will happen next?
- What will happen at the end of the day in this scene? Who will be the last person to speak in the scene? What will be left behind of all the objects you see?

Research Extensions:

1) Students can research the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), a New Deal program that supported writers. Writers were supported in creating drama, fiction, and collection of oral histories. Students can watch the documentary *Soul of a People: Writing America's Story*, watch *Unchained Melodies*, which tells about slave narratives collected through the FWP, read a play written by FWP writers, such as *Stevedore* by George Sklar and Paul Peter, or read fictional works created by FWP writers, such as *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* by Studs Terkel, or *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston.

2) Gather an oral history of someone who is affected by the current recession and compare them to oral histories of the Great Depression era. Follow the suggestions of Storycorps in gathering your oral history.

<http://storycorps.org/record-your-story/what-to-expect/>

<http://storycorps.org/record-your-story/question-generator/>



Lily Furedi, *Subway*, 1934, Oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service

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Classroom Extensions: Social Studies

The New Deal in Whatcom County

There are many familiar landmarks in Whatcom County that were possible because of New Deal funds and the workers that threw their energy into these projects. There are many projects that are currently being funded by federal relief projects. These projects provide an excellent point of comparison for the types of funding provided by the New Deal and funding provided by the federal Recovery Act.

Where in Whatcom County is the WPA?

Visit <http://www.whatcommuseum.org/history/community> to find a list of WPA sites that still exist in Whatcom County. Have students visit one of the sites, or, if possible, take a group field trip to visit one of the sites. Look for the plaque or information that tells people this was a WPA funded project. If the plaque can be reached safely, ask students to take a rubbing of the plaque. If not, take a digital photo.

Students can mark these sites on a map of Whatcom County. They should pinpoint the locations of the projects, the cost of the projects, and list the people who benefitted from these projects. Alternatively, have students use Google maps to create a specialized map marking these sites and information.

Where in Whatcom County is the Recovery Act?

Next, students should visit www.recovery.gov. Have them type in the zip codes for Whatcom County and compare the funding and types of projects that have been included in recent federal recovery and stimulus funding. How do the costs compare? What types of projects are being funded currently and how do those compare with the projects funded in the 1930s?

We in Whatcom County Decide

Students should choose a role of a Whatcom County citizen. Have students select at random the following roles:

- Mayor
- City Council member
- Local Business Owner
- Community Organizer
- Unemployed worker
- Laborer
- Teacher
- Artist
- Parent
- Student
- Elderly person



Bellingham High School from Cornwall Avenue

Each student should research their role and compare the projects that would have benefited them in the 1930s and the projects that benefit them now in the 2010s. Stage a public debate, mediated by the teacher, where the students have to argue which of the following projects should be funded:

- A new school north of Bellingham
- A new building for Mt. Baker Theater
- A series of murals in downtown Bellingham created by Whatcom County artists
- Housing development where the old Georgia Pacific buildings are located
- An expanded senior center
- New and paved roads near the campgrounds off of Mt. Baker Highway
- Two new parks at the south and north end of Bellingham
- Three new busses for Whatcom Transit Authority
- New shipyard and docks in south of Fairhaven
- Two new housing structures for homeless people

At the end of the debate, students should individually vote on the project they think is most worthy of receiving funding.

Research Extensions:

- 1) Have students research the various projects that are being funded by current recovery and stimulus acts, including the process for applying for funds. Interview an employee at a company or organization that has received funding and ask how it has affected their workplace.
- 2) Compare unemployment statistics from the 1930s and the 2010s in Whatcom County, Washington State, the United States, and in at least one other country.
- 3) Use the website <http://depts.washington.edu/depress/> to research projects that took place in Washington State during the Great Depression. Read one of the articles and report on it to the entire class.



Whatcom Falls Bridge, Photo by GJ Beide

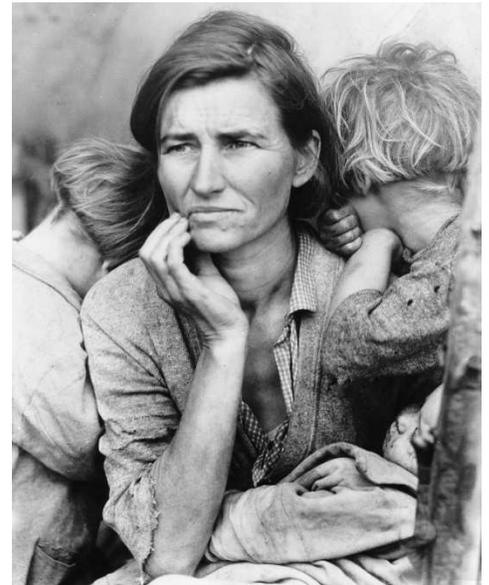
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Classroom Extensions: Visual Arts

All Eyes on the American Scene

Many of the images that we think of today as iconic of the Great Depression were taken by documentary photographers that were hired as part of the New Deal. Most of these photographers, including Dorothea Lange, Gordon Parks, and Walker Evans, were hired by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) to document the programs it was funding and the problems it was trying to solve. These photographers went far beyond this simple task, instead gathering images that would create a shared understanding of the desperate times and situations that many endured during the Great Depression.

In this classroom extension, students will be able to consider the huge task that photographers of the 1930s undertook, and utilize basic photography skills to share their own view of the recession of the early 21st century.



Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*,
Nipomo, California, 1936, Taken for the
FSA

Hard Times

The paintings included in the exhibition *1934: A New Deal for Artists* that depict the American Scene vary greatly, including scenes of hardship in the 1930s, but also including recreation, landscapes, and public work projects that offer hope to the American people. Have students look at these two websites and compare and contrast the images they see.

FSA Photography:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html>

American Scene painters:

<http://www.americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/1934/index.html>

Consider and discuss the following questions:

What themes did the painters and photographers choose?

What mood do you see in the photographs?

What mood do you see in the paintings?

How do the photographers share a story in their photos?

How do the painters tell a story in their paintings?

Do these images make you think life was hard in the 1930s? Why or why not?

Which painting or photograph explains how you think about the Great Depression?

Why?

Which painting or photograph explains how you think of the time we live in now? Why?

A Classroom American Scene

Challenge your students to create a shared American Scene in their classroom. After researching and viewing the work of FSA photographers, students can use digital cameras to head out into Whatcom County to capture their own images of the present-day American Scene.

Have them consider these questions before taking their photographs:

Who are Americans? What one person or group of people make you think of America? What are ideals that you think of as American? What one image represents these ideals?

What areas in Whatcom County show the history of America?

What buildings or businesses tell an American Story?

Print off the images and post on a wall in your classroom to create your own photo-collaged mural depicting the American Scene.

Research Extensions:

1) The Great Depression was not the only time that photographers were employed to document the American way of life. The federal government War Relocation Authority department hired photographers to document the lives of Americans who were moved to internment camps during World War II. Ansel Adams was one of these photographers, documenting life at Manzanar Camp in California where Japanese-Americans were interned. Students can research Ansel Adams' images of Manzanar camp and compare it to contemporary photographs by Masumi Hayashi of internment camps.

Ansel Adams Manzanar Photographs:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/anseladams/>

Masumi Hayashi Photographs:

<http://www.masumihayashi.com/html/gallery.html>



Ansel Adams, *Manzanar from Guard Tower, View west*, from Library of Congress, American Memory Archives



Dorothea Lange, *Toward Los Angeles, 1937*, Taken for the FSA

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Resource List

Resource Books

1934: A New Deal for Artists catalog, Ann Prentice Wagner and Roger G. Kennedy, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2009

The Great Depression & The New Deal: A Very Short Introduction, Eric Rauchway, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

The New Deal for Artists, Richard D. McKinzie, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973

Soul of a People: The WPA Writers' Project Uncovers Depression America, David Taylor, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2009

Children's Books (available at Bellingham Public Library)

A Multicultural Portrait of The Great Depression, Susan Rensberger, New York: Benchmark Books, 1996

Welcome to Kit's World: 1934, Growing Up During America's Great Depression, Harriet Brown, Pleasant Company Publications, 2002

The New Deal and The Great Depression in American History: Lisa A. Wroble, Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, Inc.

Kids Discover Magazine: *Great Depression*

The Dust Bowl: Through the Lens: How Photography Revealed and Helped Remedy a National Disaster, Martin W. Sandler, New York: Walker & Company, 2009

Websites

1934: A New Deal for Artists Online Resources

On-line exhibition of paintings from original Smithsonian exhibition

<http://www.americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/1934/index.html>

Picturing the Thirties interactive website from Smithsonian American Art Museum

http://www.americanart.si.edu/education/picturing_the_1930s/how_organized.html

Smithsonian American Art Museum 1934 exhibition page

<http://www.americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/archive/2009/1934/>

Smithsonian American Art Museum Teacher guides, including Great Depression Guide

<http://www.americanart.si.edu/education/resources/guides/>

http://www.americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/sal_great_depression_2.pdf

1934 Flickr Group

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/1934/>

Art of the WPA Era

Women Artists in the WPA

http://www.womenarts.org/wpa/wpa_background.htm

Hispanic Artists of the New Deal Era

<http://www.internationalfolkart.org/wpasinnombre/index.html>

Photography

Library of Congress American Memory B&W photographs from 1935-1945

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fahome.html>

Library of Congress American Memory Color photographs from 1935-1945

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fsowhome.html>

FSA Photographers (Includes interviews and film clips of the people photographed)

http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/water_14.html

Dorothea Lange

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/ft3f59n5wt/>

http://museumca.org/global/art/collections_dorothea_lange.html

Ansel Adams- Manzanar Internment Camp Photographs

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/anseladams/>

History Resources

The Great Depression in Washington State

<http://depts.washington.edu/depress/index.shtml>

A New Deal for the Arts Online Exhibit, The National Archives

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/new_deal_for_the_arts/

List of Whatcom County New Deal Sites

<http://www.whatcommuseum.org/history/community>

Federal Funding during 21st Century Recession

<http://www.recovery.gov/>