# Hard Times, Unequal Burdens

Trace causes and compare the Depression's effects.

**USH.4.3** "Analyze the causes of the Great Depression and its social, cultural, political, and economic impacts on all Americans."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline causes of the Great Depression, circle its effects, and number two places where an effect led to another effect. Use your marks to explain how the crisis spread and why Americans experienced it differently.

### When Hard Times Spread

1. In 1929, a hardware store owner in an Iowa town could see full shelves but fewer customers. During the 1920s, factories and farms produced more goods than many families could afford. Wages had not kept pace with output for many workers, while wealth was concentrated at the top. Easy credit let some households buy goods now and pay later. Investors also bought stocks with borrowed money, hoping prices would keep rising. When stock prices collapsed in October 1929, the crash shook confidence, but it did not cause the Depression by itself. Falling spending left businesses with unsold goods, so they cut jobs and wages.

2. Job losses made bank troubles worse: frightened depositors demanded cash, and thousands of banks failed. Families who lost savings spent even less, pushing more businesses into trouble. By 1933, about one in four U.S. workers was unemployed. On the Great Plains, drought and poor land practices helped produce dust storms, which drove some farm families to migrate west. Black workers, already shut out of many jobs, often faced discrimination when seeking scarce work. Authorities also pressured many Mexican Americans, including U.S. citizens, to leave the country. Families doubled up in homes, shared food, and relied on relatives when wages vanished.

3. Hardship reshaped culture and politics as well as paychecks. Families listened to radio programs together for inexpensive entertainment, while photographers documented poverty and migration. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal funded jobs and bank reforms, changing what many Americans expected from the federal government. The Social Security Act of 1935 established old-age benefits and unemployment insurance, but its original coverage excluded many farmworkers and domestic workers, occupations held by many Black Americans. Some people praised federal aid; others argued that it cost too much or did not go far enough. Recovery was uneven, and the Depression's effects differed by race, occupation, and place.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could high production and limited buying power lead to job cuts?

2. Explain how bank failures could deepen the economic crisis.

3. How did the crisis affect Great Plains farm families and Black workers differently?

4. How did a cultural response and a New Deal measure meet different needs? Why did the measure not reach everyone equally?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75 to 100 word proposal to a town council in 1935 for one local response to hardship. Use two linked causes or effects from the passage, explain how your proposal would help two groups differently, and identify one problem it could not solve.

ANSWER KEY

# Hard Times, Unequal Burdens

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.4.3

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline causes of the Great Depression, circle its effects, and number two places where an effect led to another effect. Use your marks to explain how the crisis spread and why Americans experienced it differently. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How could high production and limited buying power lead to job cuts? | **Many families could not afford the goods being produced. When spending fell, businesses had unsold goods and cut jobs and wages.** |
| 2 | Explain how bank failures could deepen the economic crisis. | **Bank failures cost families their savings. Those families spent less, which pushed more businesses into trouble.** |
| 3 | How did the crisis affect Great Plains farm families and Black workers differently? | **Drought and poor land practices contributed to dust storms that drove some farm families west. Black workers often faced discrimination while seeking scarce jobs.** |
| 4 | How did a cultural response and a New Deal measure meet different needs? Why did the measure not reach everyone equally? | **Radio offered inexpensive entertainment, while Social Security provided old-age benefits and unemployment insurance. Its original coverage excluded many farmworkers and domestic workers.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I propose that our town open a food pantry supplied by local growers and staffed by paid workers. Families with lost wages could get meals, while farmers with unsold crops could find a buyer. Spending those wages at nearby shops might also help businesses keep employees. The pantry would not restore savings lost when banks failed, and it would not stop discrimination against Black job seekers or pressure on Mexican American families to leave. Council members should make access open to every resident and post clear rules against unequal treatment.

Accept other accurate cause-and-effect chains supported by the passage. For the proposal, look for a distinct local action, two linked passage-based details, different effects on two groups, and a realistic limit.