

Teacher Resource

Teaching U.S. Immigration Series:
Immigration and the Great Depression





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Lesson One: The Deportation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Words Matter	2
Lesson Plan	3
Supporting Materials	4
Lesson Two: Dust Bowl Migration	22
Lesson Plan	23
Supporting Materials	24
Handout: Print-Friendly Guide to Resources	36

Cover image: A 1937 photograph by Dorothea Lange of three Oklahoma Dust Bowl “refugee” families, taken near Lordsburg, New Mexico. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

<https://loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8b31923/>

Introduction

Humans have been migrating throughout every place and time in our history, so in this series we give you the tools to explore immigration through the lens of the history and social studies curriculum already being taught. Although the period of severe economic upheaval known as the Great Depression was a time when the United States focused inward, this crisis had implications for immigrants and immigration that are worth exploring, especially as a means to make the past century's history more relevant for students today.

Though few Americans remained unharmed by the Great Depression, Mexican Americans faced distinct challenges. After being drawn to the United States by employers, Mexicans were the first to be laid off and the last to be rehired. Additionally, many Mexicans and Mexican Americans were sent, voluntarily or involuntarily, back to Mexico in a series of official and unofficial events known either as “deportations” or “repatriations.” In “The Deportation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Words Matter,” students will examine primary and secondary sources and consider the language used to discuss these events and the ways in which language affects perception of history or current affairs.

The lesson plan “Dust Bowl Migration” considers one of the largest internal migrations in American history. This lesson plan assumes students already have background knowledge of the Dust Bowl Migration and uses this major historical event to draw connections between Dust Bowl migrants and modern refugees. Students will use media literacy skills to evaluate internet sources in deciding whether the Dust Bowl migrants would be considered refugees by today's standards and will consider how learning about the experience of the Dust Bowl migrants could help Americans understand difficulties faced by migrants and refugees worldwide. This lesson plan includes two extension options. One is an internet research project on displaced people worldwide. The second is a persuasive letter to the United Nations or a persuasive essay regarding the legal definition of refugees. Either extension could be used, or they could be offered as options, to extend students' knowledge and skills.

Each of the two lesson plans, “The Deportation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Words Matter” and “Dust Bowl Migration,” is designed to be flexible and adaptable based on the needs of your class, including by offering options such as multiple leveled texts and by supporting both in-person and online class activities. Each lesson can stand alone in one or two class periods, or they could be used together as fits into the existing scope and sequence of the course.

Lesson One

The Deportation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Words Matter

Educator Notes

For this lesson, students must have prior knowledge of the Great Depression and how it affected the United States as a whole. Through the materials examined, they will learn more about how the Depression affected Mexican immigrants and families specifically.

From the Library of Congress:

“The Great Depression of the 1930s hit Mexican immigrants especially hard. Along with the job crisis and food shortages that affected all U.S. workers, Mexicans and Mexican Americans had to face an additional threat: deportation. As unemployment swept the U.S., hostility to immigrant workers grew, and the government began a program of repatriating immigrants to Mexico. Immigrants were offered free train rides to Mexico, and some went voluntarily, but many were either tricked or coerced into repatriation, and some U.S. citizens were deported simply on suspicion of being Mexican. All in all, hundreds of thousands of Mexican immigrants, especially farmworkers, were sent out of the country during the 1930s.”

As with any lesson handling challenging historical topics, it is important to know your students and prepare ahead of time by checking in with students, families or other staff members. Students of Mexican or Hispanic descent can be particularly affected by this content, and educators must take measures to protect their sense of belonging and safety when discussing forced removals.

This lesson can be adapted to the needs of your class in several ways. An introductory primary source activity can be handled as a jigsaw, group work or independent work. The core secondary texts are each offered as three different excerpts of different lengths, all of which can be used effectively for the exercise. Throughout, varying levels of support from teachers or classmates (i.e. a pair-share or read-aloud versus independent work) can help adjust the level of challenge based on the class or individual students.

Lesson Plan:

The Deportation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Words Matter

Objectives

- Students will closely examine primary and secondary sources for language used in discussing Mexican repatriation during the Great Depression.
- Students will compare and contrast two secondary sources in their treatment of Mexican repatriation.
- Students will consider how language choices change perception of historical events.

Guiding Questions

- Why did Mexican immigrants leave the United States during the Great Depression?
- How does language matter in the way history is told?

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6

Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10

Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Materials

- [Immigrants from Mexico in Arizona, California, New Mexico & Texas, 1910-1960](#) graph
- Primary source worksheets. One set of worksheets per student or per group
 - ▶ [Mexican Families Being Deported at County's Expense](#)
(*Boulder Daily Camera*, The Boulder County Latino History Project)
 - ▶ [Mexican deportation in the 1930s](#), by Emma Gomez Martinez
(The Boulder County Latino History Project)
 - ▶ [Casaday Sees 1,500 Mexicans Loaded on Trains](#)
(*Boulder Daily Camera*, The Boulder County Latino History Project)
 - ▶ [300 Weld County Mexicans on Way to Native Land](#)
(*Longmont Times*, The Boulder County Latino History Project)
- Class technology for viewing the YouTube video [Repatriation of Mexicans in the 1930s](#)
- [Does Language Matter? Repatriation vs. Deportation](#) worksheet
- [Excerpt Analysis](#) worksheet
- [Short](#), [medium](#) or [long excerpt](#) of INS Records for 1930s Mexican Repatriations (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services). One excerpt per student
- [Short](#), [medium](#) or [long excerpt](#) of Apology Act for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program (State of California). One excerpt per student

Activities

Opening:

Have students examine the graph [Immigrants from Mexico in Arizona, California, New Mexico & Texas, 1910-1960](#) and describe what they see. Ask “What do you notice about the pattern of Mexican immigrants living in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas over the time period of 1910-1960?”

Building Background Knowledge: Primary Sources

This examination of [primary sources](#) can be conducted in any way that works for the class. For example:

- A jigsaw activity, in which each “home” group of four students is given one copy of each article. Each student then moves to an “expert” group containing all the students from each group with the same article to work together and discuss before returning to the home group to share out what they’ve learned.
- Group work, in which students in the group divide up the four articles and share what they’ve learned with each other.
- Independent or pair work, in which each student or pair works on one article and then the whole class comes together to share out and compare across all four.

However the activity is conducted, debrief as a class. Students should have established that in the early 1930s, Mexican immigrants and Americans of Mexican descent living in the United States were sent to Mexico. Note that although these particular primary sources are from Colorado, this happened in several states including California, Texas, Michigan, Illinois, Ohio and New York. Ask students what reasons or other details were shared in the short articles. What questions do students have now?

Building Background Knowledge: Expert Video

View with students the video [Repatriation of Mexicans in the 1930s](#). As it is about three minutes, consider playing it more than once. Ask students to listen for reasons why Mexican immigrants left the United States.

After watching the video one to three times, check in with students. What are their reactions? How are they feeling? What are their questions? Clarify any factual points for students (i.e. the fact that many of those forced out were U.S. citizens). Validate students’ feelings. Let students know that many Americans don’t know about this history, and when they do hear about it, the language used is an important factor in how they perceive it. In the next part of the lesson, they’ll be reading two modern-day sources discussing these events and comparing the language they use.

(Continued on next page)

Activities (continued)

Does Language Matter?

Distribute copies of the worksheet [Does Language Matter? Repatriation vs. Deportation](#). Ask students to read through the quotation at the top one or two times independently, in pairs or via teacher read-aloud. Let them know that this quotation is from the same scholar from the video, in a different interview.

Have students turn-and-talk for each of the two definitions and share out some ideas based on the quotation and any other background knowledge they have. Ask students to write down the following definitions on their paper:

Deportation: the forced removal of someone from a country (Britannica Kids).

Repatriation: the act or process of restoring or returning someone or something to the country of origin, allegiance or citizenship (Merriam-Webster).

Ask students “What’s the difference here? How could the term used for this historical event affect how people perceive it?”

Let students know that they’ll be reading excerpts of two accounts of this history from the present day. One is text from a government (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) website, responding to researchers requesting records of Mexican repatriations and explaining that these were not official federal-sponsored deportation programs. The other is an official apology from the state of California in 2006 taking responsibility for the harm caused by the repatriation programs. Ask students to pay close attention to the language used by each source and to prepare to write a short response comparing and contrasting the two texts in their telling of this history.

Distribute one copy of the [U.S. government text](#), one copy of the [California text](#) and the [Excerpt Analysis worksheet](#) to each student. This resource contains a short, medium and long version of each text. Choose the version best suited to your students’ comfort level with lengthy and complex texts.

Closing:

As a closing discussion, think-pair-share or written response. Ask students “Does it matter what words are used when retelling history? Why?”

More Resources

Other resources for teaching and learning



[1929-1935 Expulsions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans](#)

Article with media and discussion questions for classroom use by Re-imagining Migration



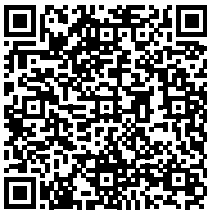
[Historical Context: Mexican Americans and the Great Depression](#)

Article from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History



[Deportations on Trial: Mexican Americans During the Great Depression](#)

Teaching activity from the Zinn Education Project



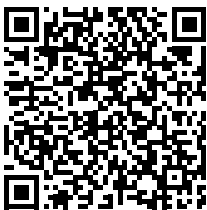
[Repatriation or Deportation – Creating a Secondary Resource](#)

Lesson Plan from Boulder County Latino History



[Mexican Immigrants in the United States](#)

Article from Migration Policy Institute



[Mexican Repatriation During the Great Depression, Explained](#)

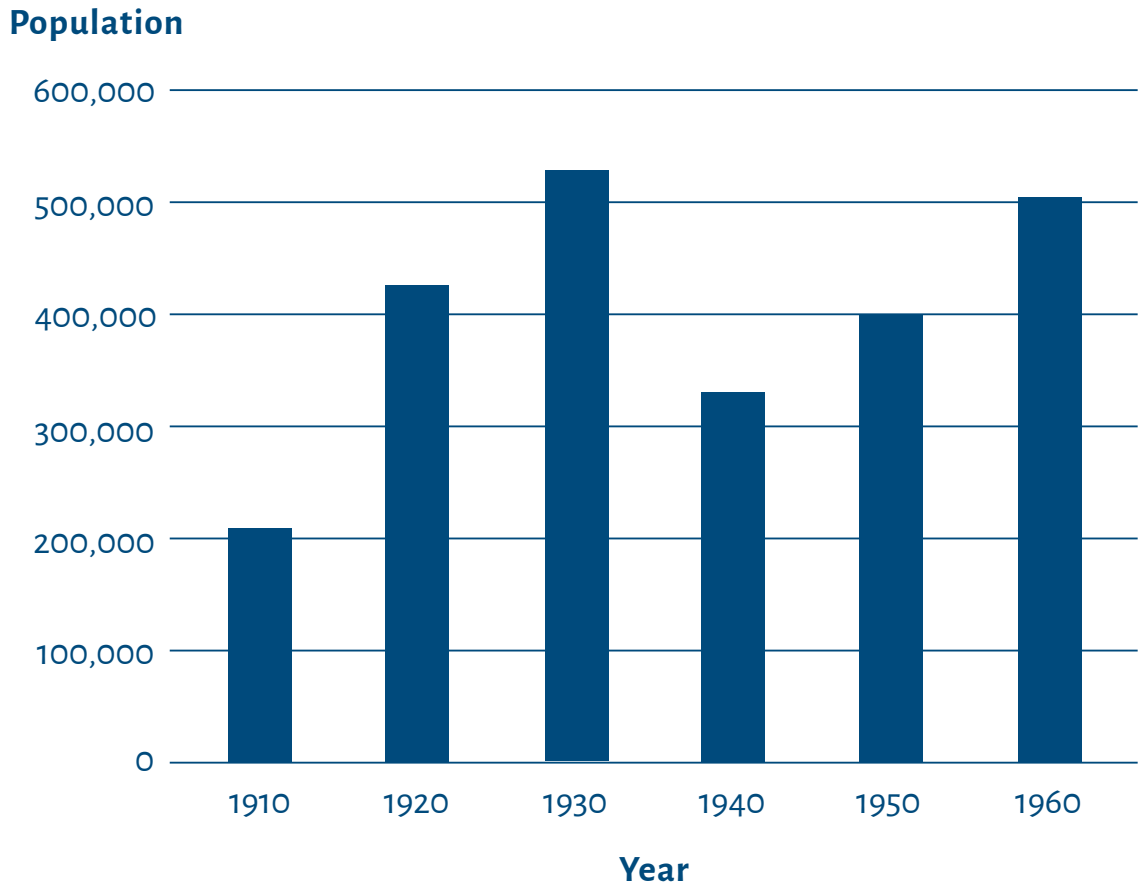
Article from *Teen Vogue*



[America's Forgotten History of Illegal Deportation](#)

Article from *The Atlantic*

Mexican-Born Population in Arizona, California, New Mexico & Texas 1910-1960



Source: Graph created by The Immigrant Learning Center using Census figures from IPUMS USA.

Boulder Daily Camera, 1932

Mexican Families Being Deported At County's Expense

Another group of Mexican families will be provided transportation out of Boulder county, and will depart Saturday, Mrs. Florence Burton, county welfare worker, said today. The county is paying their traveling expenses as far as El Paso. Yesterday, four families were given transportation.

The Mexicans came to this county in hope of getting work as beet field laborers, it was said.

Title: Mexican Families Being Deported at County's Expense

Text: Another group of Mexican families will be provided transportation out of Boulder County, and will depart Saturday, Mrs. Florence Burton, county welfare worker, said today. The county is paying their traveling expenses as far as El Paso. Yesterday, four families were given transportation. The Mexicans came to this county in hope of getting work as beet field laborers, it was said.

1. Circle or underline any words that stick out to you in the article.
2. What event is the article reporting on? What happened?
3. What questions do you have?

Recollection, Emma Gomez Martinez

MEXICAN DEPORTATION IN THE 1930's



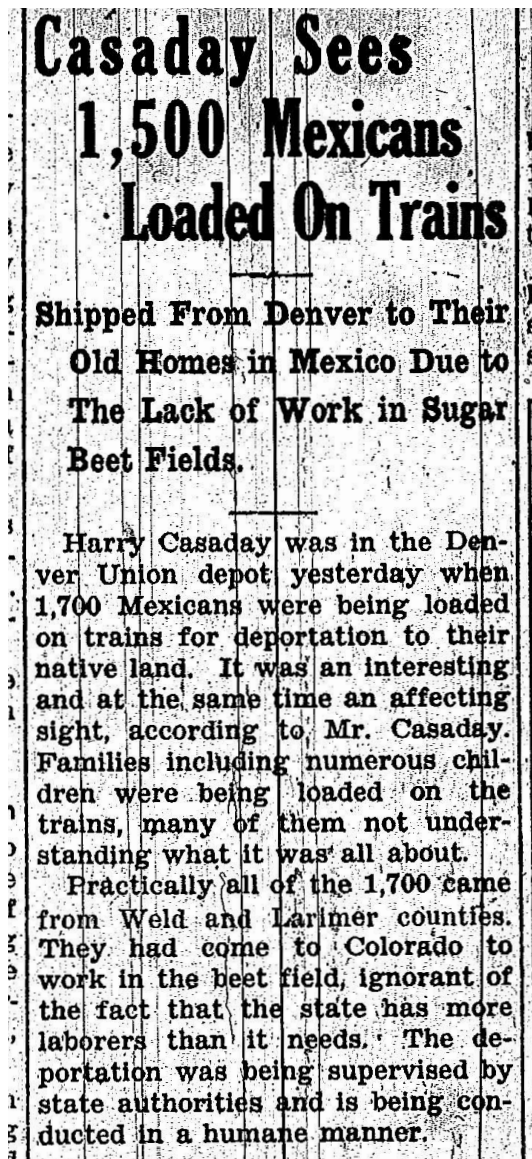
Emma Gomez
at age 14

My family lived in Erie and my father had taken me along to shop in Longmont. I think I was about 7 or 8 so it was about 1935 or 36. I witnessed police escorting Mexican families out of Longmont in a caravan. The police would stop occasionally and grab any Mexican looking individual and throw them onto one of the trucks if they lacked identification. Later in life when I recalled that incident, I realized the police weren't distinguishing between citizen and non-citizen. If you were a Mexican, you were gone.

Source: The Boulder County Latino History Project

1. Circle or underline any words that stick out to you in the article.
2. What event is the article reporting on? What happened?
3. What questions do you have?

Boulder Daily Camera, 1932



1. Circle or underline any words that stick out to you in the article.
2. What event is the article reporting on? What happened?
3. What questions do you have?

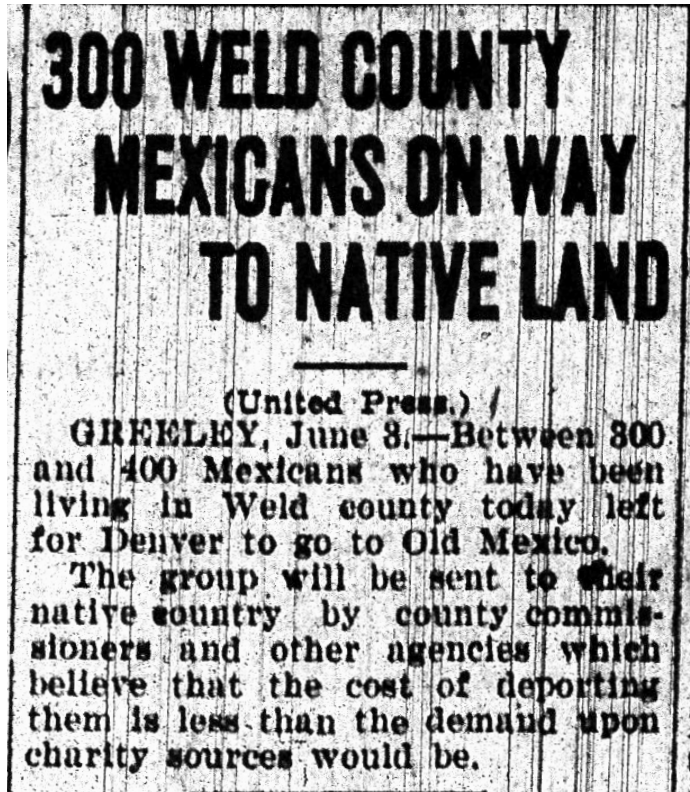
Title: Casaday Sees 1,500 Mexicans Loaded On Trains

Subtitle: Shipped From Denver to Their Old Homes in Mexico Due to The Lack of Work in Sugar Beet Fields

Text: Harry Casaday was in the Denver Union depot yesterday when 1,700 Mexicans were being loaded on trains for deportation to their native land. It was an interesting sight and at the same time an affecting sight, according to Mr. Casaday. Families including numerous children were being loaded on the trains, many of them not understanding what it was all about.

Practically all of the 1,700 came from Weld and Larimer counties. They had come to Colorado to work in the beet field, ignorant of the fact that the state has more laborers than it needs. The deportation was being supervised by state authorities and is being conducted in a humane manner.

Longmont Times, 1932



1. Circle or underline any words that stick out to you in the article.

2. What event is the article reporting on? What happened?

3. What questions do you have?

Title: 300 Weld County Mexicans on Way to Native Land

Text: GREELEY, June 8. Between 300 and 400 Mexicans who have been living in Weld county today left for Denver to go to Old Mexico.

The group will be sent to their native country by county commissioners and other agencies which believe that the cost of deporting them is less than the demand upon charity sources would be.

Does Language Matter? Repatriation vs. Deportation

“Now, there was the development of a deportation desk from LA County relief agencies going out and recruiting Mexicans to go to Mexico. And they called it the deportation desk. Now, LA legal counsel says you can't do that. That's the responsibility, that's the duty of the federal government. So they backed up and said, well, we're not going to call it deportation. We're going to call it repatriation. And repatriation carries connotations that it's voluntary, that people are making their own decision without pressure to return to the country of their nationality. But most obviously, how voluntary is it if you have deportation raids by the federal government during the Hoover administration and people are disappearing on the streets? How voluntary is it if you have county agents knocking on people's doors telling people oh, you would be better off in Mexico and here are your train tickets? You should be ready to go in two weeks.”

Francisco Balderrama in an interview on *NPR's Fresh Air*

Definitions

Deportation:

Repatriation:

Materials

INS Records for 1930s Mexican Repatriations (Short Excerpt)

The majority returned to Mexico by their own decision or through officially voluntary – though often coercive – repatriation programs directed by state and local governments and charitable aid agencies.

Some migrants who chose to return to Mexico received aid from Mexican consuls in the U.S. or ticket money from various aid organizations. Many other Mexicans made their own way to the southern border. In some cases, the threat of federally mandated deportation – often made by local law enforcement agencies – played a role in immigrants' decision to leave the U.S., though the INS never actually instituted removal proceedings.

While many Mexicans left on their own accord, others were aided or pressured by state and local repatriation programs. By the early 1930s, local governments began to organize repatriation programs designed to remove Mexicans from their relief rolls. The largest and most well-known of these efforts took place in Los Angeles, but several states and localities launched similar efforts.

Materials

INS Records for 1930s Mexican Repatriations (Medium Excerpt)

Mexican-American family historians and other interested researchers occasionally contact the History Office in search of “Mexican Repatriation” records for individuals who left the U.S. during the Great Depression (1929-1939). In most cases, however, no federal record exists for these departures. This is because, while an estimated 400,000 to one million Mexicans and Mexican-Americans left the U.S. for Mexico during the Depression, relatively few of them were expelled under formal INS-directed removal proceedings. The majority returned to Mexico by their own decision or through officially voluntary – though often coercive – repatriation programs directed by state and local governments and charitable aid agencies.

In 1930, as the extent of the Depression became more clear, some Americans accused Mexicans, as well as other aliens, of holding jobs needed by U.S. citizens. At the same time, local relief agencies began to feel the strain of using decreasing resources to serve an increasingly needy populace. Many agencies felt pressure to exclude foreign-born applicants from receiving aid. Some agencies and local governments began requiring applicants to show proof of legal residence. Others used the threat of federal immigration law, which held that immigrants who became “public charges” could be deported, to discourage them from requesting aid. These conditions likely caused many Mexicans to consider returning to their native country.

Some migrants who chose to return to Mexico received aid from Mexican consuls in the U.S. or ticket money from various aid organizations. Many other Mexicans made their own way to the southern border. In some cases, the threat of federally mandated deportation – often made by local law enforcement agencies – played a role in immigrants’ decision to leave the U.S., though the INS never actually instituted removal proceedings.

While many Mexicans left on their own accord, others were aided or pressured by state and local repatriation programs. By the early 1930s, local governments began to organize repatriation programs designed to remove Mexicans from their relief rolls. The largest and most well-known of these efforts took place in Los Angeles, but several states and localities launched similar efforts.

Materials

INS Records for 1930s Mexican Repatriations (Long Excerpt)

Mexican-American family historians and other interested researchers occasionally contact the History Office in search of “Mexican Repatriation” records for individuals who left the U.S. during the Great Depression (1929-1939). In most cases, however, no federal record exists for these departures. This is because, while an estimated 400,000 to one million Mexicans and Mexican-Americans left the U.S. for Mexico during the Depression, relatively few of them were expelled under formal INS-directed removal proceedings. The majority returned to Mexico by their own decision or through officially voluntary – though often coercive – repatriation programs directed by state and local governments and charitable aid agencies.

In 1930, as the extent of the Depression became more clear, some Americans accused Mexicans, as well as other aliens, of holding jobs needed by U.S. citizens. At the same time, local relief agencies began to feel the strain of using decreasing resources to serve an increasingly needy populace. Many agencies felt pressure to exclude foreign-born applicants from receiving aid. Some agencies and local governments began requiring applicants to show proof of legal residence. Others used the threat of federal immigration law, which held that immigrants who became “public charges” could be deported, to discourage them from requesting aid. These conditions likely caused many Mexicans to consider returning to their native country.

Some migrants who chose to return to Mexico received aid from Mexican consuls in the U.S. or ticket money from various aid organizations. Many other Mexicans made their own way to the southern border. In some cases, the threat of federally mandated deportation – often made by local law enforcement agencies – played a role in immigrants’ decision to leave the U.S., though the INS never actually instituted removal proceedings.

While many Mexicans left on their own accord, others were aided or pressured by state and local repatriation programs. By the early 1930s, local governments began to organize repatriation programs designed to remove Mexicans from their relief rolls. The largest and most well-known of these efforts took place in Los Angeles, but several states and localities launched similar efforts.

In some cases, INS aided local repatriation programs. For the most part, however, the agency instituted federal removal proceedings in only a relatively small number of cases. In Los Angeles County, for example, INS sent federal immigration agents to conduct raids and hold removal hearings. In a number of high-profile raids in 1931, the agency arrested 389 deportable aliens, 269 of whom were Mexican.

A more important result of those raids, however, was that the threat of increased federal deportations likely hastened the departure of thousands of Mexicans. In the months following the raids, LA County hired trains and transported thousands of Mexicans to the Mexican border. The vast majority of migrants who left on LA County’s trains likely have no INS deportation record.

Likewise, in 1933 the INS reported that the State of Michigan “sent” 1,500 Mexicans to the border accompanied by an Immigration Service escort. Because these migrants were removed under a state-sponsored program it is unlikely that INS deportation files exist for them.

Materials

“Apology Act for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program.” (Short Excerpt)

Added by Stats. 2005, Ch. 663, Sec. 1. Effective January 1, 2006.

State of California

The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) Beginning in 1929, government authorities and certain private sector entities in California and throughout the United States undertook an aggressive program to forcibly remove persons of Mexican ancestry from the United States.

(b) In California alone, approximately 400,000 American citizens and legal residents of Mexican ancestry were forced to go to Mexico.

(c) In total, it is estimated that two million people of Mexican ancestry were forcibly relocated to Mexico, approximately 1.2 million of whom had been born in the United States, including the State of California.

The State of California apologizes to those individuals described in Section 8721 for the fundamental violations of their basic civil liberties and constitutional rights committed during the period of illegal deportation and coerced emigration. The State of California regrets the suffering and hardship those individuals and their families endured as a direct result of the government sponsored Repatriation Program of the 1930s.

Materials

“Apology Act for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program.” (Medium Excerpt)

Added by Stats. 2005, Ch. 663, Sec. 1. Effective January 1, 2006.

State of California

The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) Beginning in 1929, government authorities and certain private sector entities in California and throughout the United States undertook an aggressive program to forcibly remove persons of Mexican ancestry from the United States.

(b) In California alone, approximately 400,000 American citizens and legal residents of Mexican ancestry were forced to go to Mexico.

(c) In total, it is estimated that two million people of Mexican ancestry were forcibly relocated to Mexico, approximately 1.2 million of whom had been born in the United States, including the State of California.

(d) Throughout California, massive raids were conducted on Mexican-American communities, resulting in the clandestine removal of thousands of people, many of whom were never able to return to the United States, their country of birth.

(e) These raids also had the effect of coercing thousands of people to leave the country in the face of threats and acts of violence.

(f) These raids targeted persons of Mexican ancestry, with authorities and others indiscriminately characterizing these persons as “illegal aliens” even when they were United States citizens or permanent legal residents.

The State of California apologizes to those individuals described in Section 8721 for the fundamental violations of their basic civil liberties and constitutional rights committed during the period of illegal deportation and coerced emigration. The State of California regrets the suffering and hardship those individuals and their families endured as a direct result of the government sponsored Repatriation Program of the 1930s.

A plaque commemorating the individuals described in Section 8721 shall be installed and maintained by the Department of Parks and Recreation at an appropriate public place in Los Angeles. If the plaque is not located on state property, the department shall consult with the appropriate local jurisdiction to determine a site owned by the City or County of Los Angeles for location of the plaque.

Materials

“Apology Act for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program.” (Long Excerpt)

Added by Stats. 2005, Ch. 663, Sec. 1. Effective January 1, 2006.

State of California

The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) Beginning in 1929, government authorities and certain private sector entities in California and throughout the United States undertook an aggressive program to forcibly remove persons of Mexican ancestry from the United States.

(b) In California alone, approximately 400,000 American citizens and legal residents of Mexican ancestry were forced to go to Mexico.

(c) In total, it is estimated that two million people of Mexican ancestry were forcibly relocated to Mexico, approximately 1.2 million of whom had been born in the United States, including the State of California.

(d) Throughout California, massive raids were conducted on Mexican-American communities, resulting in the clandestine removal of thousands of people, many of whom were never able to return to the United States, their country of birth.

(e) These raids also had the effect of coercing thousands of people to leave the country in the face of threats and acts of violence.

(f) These raids targeted persons of Mexican ancestry, with authorities and others indiscriminately characterizing these persons as “illegal aliens” even when they were United States citizens or permanent legal residents.

(g) Authorities in California and other states instituted programs to wrongfully remove persons of Mexican ancestry and secure transportation arrangements with railroads, automobiles, ships, and airlines to effectuate the wholesale removal of persons out of the United States to Mexico.

(h) As a result of these illegal activities, families were forced to abandon, or were defrauded of, personal and real property, which often was sold by local authorities as “payment” for the transportation expenses incurred in their removal from the United States to Mexico.

(Continued on next page)

Materials (continued)

“Apology Act for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program.” (continued)

(i) As a further result of these illegal activities, United States citizens and legal residents were separated from their families and country and were deprived of their livelihood and United States constitutional rights.

(j) As a further result of these illegal activities, United States citizens were deprived of the right to participate in the political process guaranteed to all citizens, thereby resulting in the tragic denial of due process and equal protection of the laws.

The State of California apologizes to those individuals described in Section 8721 for the fundamental violations of their basic civil liberties and constitutional rights committed during the period of illegal deportation and coerced emigration. The State of California regrets the suffering and hardship those individuals and their families endured as a direct result of the government sponsored Repatriation Program of the 1930s.

A plaque commemorating the individuals described in Section 8721 shall be installed and maintained by the Department of Parks and Recreation at an appropriate public place in Los Angeles. If the plaque is not located on state property, the department shall consult with the appropriate local jurisdiction to determine a site owned by the City or County of Los Angeles for location of the plaque.

Lesson Two

Dust Bowl Migration

Educator Notes

This lesson plan assumes students already have knowledge of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl migration. To determine if students have enough background knowledge for this lesson, read through the four questions included as a refresher in the Activating Background Knowledge opening activity. If you're not sure students can answer these questions, consider using one of the several excellent lesson plans suggested in the resources section before starting this lesson.

A key skill of this lesson is assessing the validity of online information sources. To this end, an internet-connected device for each student (or perhaps pair of students) is necessary.

The core text used is the *National Geographic* article *The Plight of Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and IDPs Around the Globe* via Newsela. Registering for a free account with Newsela is required in order to access the article. This article can then be leveled to five different Lexia levels to suit the needs of your class or individual students or groups. It also comes with optional quiz questions.

As with any lesson covering global migration, it is important to be sensitive to students whose families may have experienced migration under difficult circumstances. Use school resources and student or family check-ins as needed to ensure students' emotional safety before starting this topic.

Two ideas for extension projects are included at the end of the lesson. Teachers can choose one for the class or offer both options to all students. Sharing of the final products is encouraged for students to learn from each other's research.

Lesson Plan:

Dust Bowl Migration

Objectives

- Students will be able to define “refugee.”
- Students will be able to assess the validity of an online information source.
- Students will draw connections between the Dust Bowl migration and modern migrations.

Guiding Questions

- Who is considered a refugee?
- How can learning about the experience of the Dust Bowl migrants help Americans understand the difficulties faced by migrants and refugees worldwide?

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10

Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

Materials

- Copies of or access to the worksheet [Dust Bowl Migration Refresher](#)
- Class technology for viewing the YouTube video [Dust Bowl Refugee-Woody Guthrie](#)
- Internet-connected devices for each student (or pair of students)
- Copies of or access to [Explainer: What is Migration?](#) (Facing History)
- Copies of or access to the article [The Plight of Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and IDPs Around the Globe](#) (by National Geographic Society, adapted by Newsela) This article can be leveled.
- Copies of or access to the worksheet [Article Analysis: The Plight of Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and IDPs Around the Globe](#)
- Copies of or access to the worksheet [Migration: The Dust Bowl and Beyond](#)
- [Extension] Copies of or access to the worksheet [Research: Displaced People Worldwide](#)
- [Extension] Copies of or access to [Environmental Refugees](#) worksheets

Activities

Opening: Activating Background Knowledge

At the start of class, give students a few minutes to answer the following questions on their own, using the [Refresher: Dust Bowl Migration](#) worksheet included in this resource.

The migration known as the Dust Bowl migration was one of the largest migrations in American history, taking place in the 1930s during the Great Depression. Answer the following questions to recall what you've learned about the Dust Bowl migration.

1. Where was the migration to and from?
2. Why did people leave their homes?
3. What were their journeys like?
4. How were they received when they arrived?

Before having students share their answers, play [the video of Woody Guthrie's song *Dust Bowl Refugee*](#). Let students know that this song was released in 1940 on an album called *Dust Bowl Ballads*, and that the musician was part of the Dust Bowl migration in the 1930s.

Once students have listened to the song and viewed the images, ask them to share their answers to the questions, building on each others' answers to collectively recall a full picture of the Dust Bowl migration.

Evaluating Sources: *Dust Bowl Refugees?*

Ask students: “Were the Dust Bowl migrants, in fact, refugees?”

Give students a few minutes to react and discuss their answers. Let students know that you’ll figure this out together with a quick internet search.

Display on the board a simple three-column table, like this one:

Definition	Source	Validity of source

Give students a few minutes to use their internet-connected devices, or any other resources, to try and answer this question by narrowing down the definition of a refugee. For each definition offered by a student, identify the source (for example, www.unrefugees.org) and make a judgment as a class about the validity of the source in order to select the best sources. For example: Is the URL a .org (a nonprofit), a .com (a commercial business) or a .gov (a government website)? From the home page, can we tell what connections the website has to refugee issues?

Once the class has decided on a trustworthy definition of refugee (some variation of “someone who has fled their country because of war, violence, conflict or persecution”), come back to the question “Were the Dust Bowl migrants refugees, by modern standards?”

Ask students to take a moment and write their answer down, with evidence. (The Dust Bowl migrants would not be considered refugees by today’s standards because they did not flee their country and were not leaving war, violence or persecution but left for economic and climate reasons.)

Share with students the [Explainer: What is Migration?](#) from Facing History and ask them to use it in pairs or small groups to find out if their answer is correct.

Article Reading Analysis

Distribute copies of or access to the *National Geographic* article "[The Plight of Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and IDPs Around the Globe](#)," via Newsela. Ask students to read through the article, independently or in pairs, and complete the [worksheet about the topic](#):

- Three facts that stood out to you
- Two connections between this article and what you know about the Dust Bowl migration
- One topic from the article you want to learn more about

Written Response

Ask students to use what they've learned today and in previous lessons to respond in writing to the following question:

- How can considering the experience of the Dust Bowl migrants help Americans understand difficulties faced by migrants and refugees worldwide?

Extension: Displaced People Worldwide

Assign each student (or pair of students) one country from the following list of countries that are the sources of the largest populations of displaced people:

- Afghanistan
- Colombia
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Myanmar
- South Sudan
- Syria
- Venezuela
- Yemen

Students will research the current situations in these countries and complete the handout [Research: Displaced People Worldwide](#) to learn:

- Why are people leaving their homes in this country?
- Where are displaced people going or ending up?
- Based on the definitions set by the United Nations, what is the legal status of the displaced people (e.g., refugees, IDPs, etc.)? Why?

Students must use at least two online sources, and they must list and provide justification for the validity of the sources they used.

Environmental Refugees

One of the reasons that the Dust Bowl migrants would not be considered refugees was because the definition of a refugee, set by the United Nations, is someone fleeing violence, war or persecution, not a climate event like the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, which devastated the economy of the plains states and endangered the physical health of those who remained. To explore this issue further, have students complete one of the following activities:

1. Write a short essay on whether or not you believe the legal definition of refugee should include people fleeing unlivable conditions due to climate change or weather events. Use facts and historical or modern examples to support your opinion.
(See handout: [Environmental Refugees Essay](#))
2. Write a letter to the United Nations urging them to expand the legal definition of refugee to include what are now called “environmental migrants,” or people fleeing unlivable conditions due to climate change or weather events at their homes. Use facts and historical or modern examples from your research.
(See handout: [Environmental Refugees Letter](#))

Resources:



[Environmental Refugee](#)
(National Geographic)



[Migration, Immigration, and Climate Change](#)
(Re-imagining Migration)



[How a Warming Planet Drives Human Migration](#)
(The New York Times, behind a paywall)



[When You Can't Go Home: The Gulf Coast 10 Years After Katrina](#)
(Center for American Progress)



[The Climate Crisis, Migration, and Refugees](#)
(Brookings Institution)

More Resources

Teaching about the Dust Bowl migration



[Dust Bowl Days](#)

Lesson plan for grades 6-12 from EDSITEment (National Endowment for the Humanities)



[Going to the Promised Land \(Dust Bowl Migration\)](#)

Lesson plan for grades 6-12 from the J. Paul Getty Museum



PBS has a [collection of resources](#) related to the Ken Burns film *The Dust Bowl*, including:

- ▶ [Dust Bowl Migrants](#) (lesson plan for grades 6-12)



- ▶ [The Okies](#) (lesson plan for grades 6-12)



- ▶ [Mass Exodus from the Plains](#) (article)



More Resources (continued)



[Dust Bowl Migration](#)

Primary resources from the Library of Congress

Teaching about Migration and Refugees



Facing History has a [collection of resources](#) on Global Migration & Immigration, including:

- ▶ [Teaching about the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis](#) (Lesson plan for grades 6-12)



- ▶ [The Refugee Crisis and Human Responsibility](#) (Lesson plan for grades 6-12)



[Talking and Teaching about the Fall 2018 Migrant Caravan](#)

Classroom resource from Re-imagining Migration



[Special Learning Journey: Stories of Human Migration](#)

Curriculum from Out of Eden Learn exploring human migration and students' own relationship to the topic

Research: Displaced People Worldwide

Country being researched:	
Why are people leaving their homes in this country?	
Where are displaced people going or ending up?	
Based on the definitions set by the United Nations, what is the legal status of the people displaced from this country? (e.g., refugees, IDPs, etc.) Why?	
Source used	Validity of source

Handout

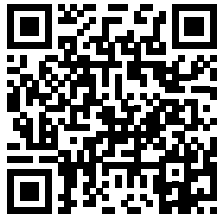
Print-Friendly Guide to Resources

Lesson One: Lesson Plan – Materials (page 4) and Building Background Knowledge: Expert Video (page 5)

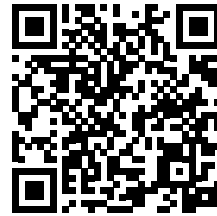


[Repatriation of Mexicans
in the 1930s](#)

Lesson Two: Lesson Plan – Materials (page 24)



[Dust Bowl Refugee-Woody Guthrie](#)



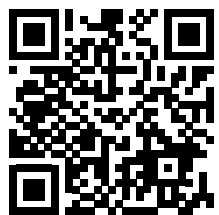
[Explainer: What is Migration?](#)



[The Plight of Refugees,
Asylum-Seekers and
IDPs Around the Globe](#)

Lesson Two: Lesson Plan – Activities (page 24-26)

Find QR codes above for “the video of Woody Guthrie’s song *Dust Bowl Refugee*” (page 24), “Explainer: What is Migration” (page 25), and “*The Plight of Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and IDPs Around the Globe*” (page 26) under “Lesson Two: Lesson Plan – Materials”.



www.unrefugees.org



The Immigrant Learning Center

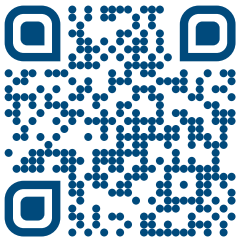
About The Immigrant Learning Center

The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. of Malden, MA, is a not-for-profit organization that gives immigrants a voice in three ways. The English Language Program provides free, year-round ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes to help immigrant and refugee adults in Greater Boston become successful workers, parents and community members. The Public Education Institute informs Americans about immigrants and immigration in the United States, and the Institute for Immigration Research, a joint venture with George Mason University, produces valid, reliable and objective multidisciplinary research on immigrants and immigration to the United States. For more information, visit the website <http://www.ilctr.org>.

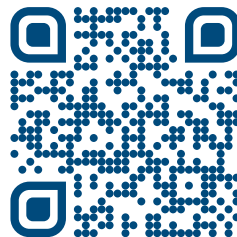
About the Writer Meghan Rosenberg

Meghan Rosenberg wrote and provided guidance for this resource. She is an instructional coach, curriculum developer and educational consultant. Her teaching experience includes being the founding middle school humanities teacher at a Boston K-12 charter school. Meghan holds a Bachelor of Arts in education and linguistics from Brown University and a Master's in teaching secondary English from Tufts University.

Stay Informed



Sign up for our newsletter for more resources like this
(<https://qr.go.page.link/cuNNz>)



Sign up to receive information about the next educator webinar
(<https://qr.go.page.link/CSu7f>)

