



Election of 1932: The Great Depression TEACHER GUIDE

Lesson Overview

This lesson uses primary source analysis and exploration to examine the ways in which differing responses to the unfolding economic crisis of the Great Depression shaped the outcome of an election that greatly expanded the role of the federal government in the lives of ordinary American citizens. It is designed for students currently studying U.S. history or government in the classroom and scaled to the 11th grade TEKS. Lessons can also be used with younger students with some modifications.

The lesson is designed to be completed in a single 45- to 60-minute class period.



Essential Question

How did the Great Depression shape the election of 1932, and how did the election foreshadow an expanded role for the federal government in U.S. society?

Objectives

- Students will engage with primary sources to understand the differences between the policies of the New Deal and its opponents' approaches to responding to the effects of the Great Depression.
- Students will use multimodal engagement strategies to develop their historical thinking skills.
- Students will analyze, organize, and use information from a variety of primary sources and communicate that analysis through writing and discussion.

Key Vocabulary

Students will need to have an understanding of the following terms to effectively complete the lesson:

- New Deal
- Individualism



TEKS

113.41.16.B–D

Lesson Procedure

Warm-Up

There are two possible components for the lesson warm-up: an election snapshot and a primary source document for the class to analyze together. Depending on your classroom needs, you may choose to complete one or both components. The content for both the snapshot and the warm-up document analysis are available as PDF documents and a teacher slide deck.

1. Using the election snapshot, briefly review the main ideas, issues, and players of the election of 1932.
 - a. Be sure to remind students that while the election was important for many reasons, the main thing that you'll be focusing on today is how the election was shaped by the ongoing economic crisis caused by the Great Depression.
2. Using the sample primary source, review with your students how to thoroughly analyze and explore primary sources.
 - a. This lesson uses a simplified version of the [National Archives and Records Administration's Document Analysis](#) strategies.
 - b. As a group, use the warm-up exercise to review the song "Brother Can You Spare a Dime?" Remind students that it is important to use close reading skills and apply historical context that they have already learned.
 - c. After analyzing the source as a whole, answer the "Checking for Understanding" questions to ensure student comprehension.

Exploring Primary Sources

The purpose of this section is to have students explore primary sources that describe the extent to which the election of 1932 represented the increasing political divide about the federal government's role in regulating social and economic aspects of American life.

There are many ways that you can choose to engage with the primary sources with your students. Depending on interest, student level, and classroom goals, you may choose to engage with any or all of the provided primary sources.

Three possible engagement models are suggested here:

Write

Using the worksheets provided, have your students work individually to read and examine the documents and then write their answers to the comprehension questions.

The most important takeaway for this engagement model is determining WHO is writing/speaking and WHAT each primary source is about.

Speak

Divide students into groups and provide one primary source to each group. After reading the source on their own, students should consider the author of the source and their perspective.

The most important takeaway for this engagement model is determining HOW the author is communicating and WHY they are saying what they are saying.

Draw

Have students, working individually or in pairs, design a creative, visual representation of the main argument of one primary source. They may choose to create a Venn diagram, a flow chart, or an identity map.

The most important takeaway for this engagement model is determining WHO is writing/speaking and HOW they are getting their point across.

Discussing Primary Sources

In this section, students will discuss their observations, analysis, and conclusions gleaned from analyzing primary sources about the central issues of the election of 1932.

Lead a discussion of the issues at hand. Students will use the key ideas learned during the warm-up and their analyses of primary sources to answer questions.

1. What economic problems did U.S. society face during the Great Depression?
2. During the presidential campaign of 1932, what solution(s) did Hoover offer for these problems?
3. What solution(s) did Roosevelt propose?
4. Given the candidates' different approaches to addressing the Great Depression, why might people have voted for Roosevelt even if they did not typically vote for the Democratic Party?
5. What policies and programs that Roosevelt references are still around today?

Closure

If desired, use the final few minutes of the lesson to write or discuss, or assign as homework, the following prompt, which encourages students to compare the issues in the election of 1932 to contemporary election cycles:

Roosevelt won in a landslide victory and quickly began implementing bold new policies. Do you think this type of overwhelming victory is necessary for the victor in an election to make dramatic changes?



Election of 1932: The Great Depression Election Snapshot

Essential Question

How did the Great Depression shape the election of 1932, and how did the election foreshadow an expanded role for the federal government in U.S. society?

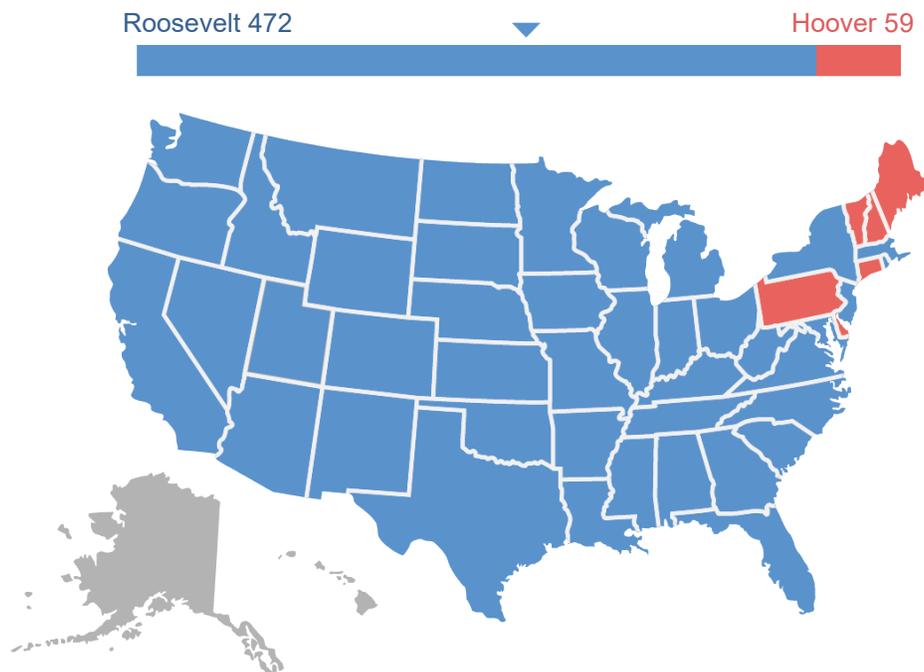
Key Ideas

- The election of 1932 occurred amidst the greatest economic crisis in United States history. After the stock market crash, factories slashed production, employers drastically cut wages, and unemployment soared to record highs, leading to home foreclosures, bankruptcies, and dire conditions for many Americans.
- The presidential candidates representing the two major political parties presented vastly different views on how government should respond to this economic and social crisis.
 - Roosevelt, the Democratic candidate, advocated an active government role.
 - Hoover, the Republican candidate, favored individual self-reliance.
- Faced with the choice between these differing views, the American public overwhelmingly chose Franklin Roosevelt and his promise of a “new deal.”
- Roosevelt’s election realigned the party system, bringing the working class and racial minorities into the Democratic party.
- Roosevelt did not provide specific details of his “new deal,” but it was clear he envisioned a much different (and more active) role for government than Hoover did.

Candidates and Outcome

Franklin Delano Roosevelt
(Democrat)

Herbert Hoover
(Republican)





Election of 1932: The Great Depression Primary Sources and Questions

Warm-Up

“Brother Can You Spare a Dime?” [warm up] [audio source] 1932

Lyricist: Yip Harburg Composer: Jay Gorney

[Listen to Bing Crosby sing](#)

[Lyrics and “story behind the song”, Kennedy Center](#)

Primary Sources

“Principles and Ideals of the United States Government” [excerpt], 1928

Herbert Hoover

Herbert Hoover gave this speech in 1928, prior to the outbreak of the Great Depression. He championed voluntary initiatives and private incentives, and his approach to government intervention followed these beliefs.

[Teaching American History](#)

Breadline on Sixth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, NY [visual source], 1932

Photographer unidentified

Prior to the New Deal, most support for those affected by the Great Depression came from private funds. This photograph of a breadline on Sixth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, shows free food being distributed to large numbers of unemployed citizens.

[The Pare Lorentz Center at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.](#)

“Commonwealth Club Address” [excerpt], 1932

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Roosevelt made this speech at the Commonwealth Club, an organization that promotes public affairs forums, just over a month before the election.

[Teaching American History](#)

“Old Doc G.O.P. Talking” [visual source], 1932

George E. Phair

This cartoon, published just six days before the election, criticized the Hoover administration for its many failures and missteps since the Great Depression began. Hoover repeatedly minimized the severity of the Depression in his speeches and was unconvincing in his explanation of the causes of the crisis.

[Cornell College](#)

First Inaugural Address [excerpts] [audio source] [video source], 1933

Franklin D. Roosevelt

During the campaign, Roosevelt was vague about specific actions he would take to end the Depression. With his inaugural address, he began to provide more details.

[Watch portions of FDR's inauguration speech.](#) [Listen to the speech in its entirety.](#) [Read the transcript of the speech.](#)



Warm-Up: Brother Can You Spare a Dime?
Lyricist: Yip Harburg, Composer: Jay Gorney
1932

. . . They used to tell me I was building a dream
And so I followed the mob
When there was earth to plow or guns to bear
I was always there right on the job

. . . They used to tell me I was building a dream
With peace and glory ahead
Why should I be standing in line
Just waiting for bread?

. . . Once I built a railroad, I made it run
Made it race against time
Once I built a railroad, now it's done
Brother, can you spare a dime?

. . . Once I built a tower up to the sun
Brick and rivet and lime
Once I built a tower, now it's done
Brother, can you spare a dime?

. . . Once in khaki suits, gee we looked swell
Full of that yankee doodly dum
Half a million boots went sloggin' through hell
And I was the kid with the drum

. . . Say, don't you remember, they called me Al
It was Al all the time
Why don't you remember, I'm your pal
Say buddy, can you spare a dime?

. . . Once in khaki suits, ah gee we looked swell
Full of that yankee doodly dum
Half a million boots went sloggin' through hell
And I was the kid with the drum

. . . Oh, say, don't you remember, they called me Al
It was Al all the time
Say, don't you remember, I'm your pal
Buddy, can you spare a dime?

Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Warm-Up Exercise: Understanding Perspective
“Brother Can You Spare a Dime?”

Analyzing a Source: Use the chart below (which is based on the National Archives and Records Administration analysis model) to examine the primary source. Remember that every document is created by a person with a specific point of view that is based on their background, beliefs, and experiences. These questions help you to understand that point of view, or perspective.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Meet the source.</p> <p>What type of source is it? What do you notice first? How would you describe it to someone who hasn't read it?</p> | |
| <p>Observe its parts.</p> <p>Who created it? Who is the intended audience? When was it created? Where was it created?</p> | |
| <p>Try to make sense of it.</p> <p>What is it talking about? Why did the maker create it? What was happening at the time in history when this source was created?</p> | |
| <p>Use it as historical evidence.</p> <p>What did you find out that you might not learn anywhere else? What evidence does the creator present that you should “fact check”? What questions do you have that this source doesn't answer?</p> | |

Checking for Understanding: After reviewing the source using the chart above, answer these questions as a class.

- What is the tone of the song?
- What imagery appears in the lyrics? What is the purpose of this imagery?
- What accomplishments does the song describe?
- What hardships does the song describe?
- How might the experiences described in the song influence someone's voting?



**Excerpt from “Principles and Ideals of the United States Government”
Herbert Hoover
October 22, 1928**

Context: Herbert Hoover gave this speech in 1928, prior to the outbreak of the Great Depression. He championed voluntary initiatives and private incentives, and his approach to government intervention followed these beliefs.



...

There has been revived in this campaign, however, a series of proposals which, if adopted, would be a long step toward the abandonment of our American system and a surrender to the destructive operation of governmental conduct of commercial business. Because the country is faced with difficulty and doubt over certain national problems—that is, prohibition, farm relief and electrical power—our opponents propose that we must thrust government a long way into the businesses which give rise to these problems. In effect, they abandon the tenets of their own party and turn to state socialism as a solution for the difficulties presented by all three. . . .

There is, therefore, submitted to the American people a question of fundamental principle. That is: shall we depart from the principles of our American political and economic system, upon which we have advanced beyond all the rest of the world, in order to adopt methods based on principles destructive of its very foundations? And I wish to emphasize the seriousness of these proposals. I wish to make my position clear; for this goes to the very roots of American life and progress.

I should like to state to you the effect that this projection of government in business would have upon our system of self-government and our economic system. That effect would reach to the daily life of every man and woman. It would impair the very basis of liberty and freedom not only for those left outside the fold of expanded bureaucracy but for those embraced within it.

Let us first see the effect upon self-government. When the Federal Government undertakes to go into commercial business, it must at once set up the organization and administration of that business, and it immediately finds itself in a labyrinth, every alley of which leads to the destruction of self-government.

Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Questions for Excerpt from “Principles and Ideals of the United States Government”

1. This address is sometimes referred to as Herbert Hoover’s “Rugged Individualism” speech. What does this alternative title imply about Hoover’s views on the government’s role in addressing the economic problems of the Great Depression?
2. According to Hoover, what were the dangers of government intervention in the economy?
3. Hoover asserted that the federal government’s attempts to control business have effects on state and municipal governments and also on “the average man.” Describe these effects.
4. What did Hoover claim will be the ultimate outcome if his opponent increased the role of the government in the economy? Explain.

ANSWER KEY

Questions for Excerpt from “Principles and Ideals of the United States Government”

1. This address is sometimes referred to as Herbert Hoover’s “Rugged Individualism” speech. What does this alternative title imply about Hoover’s views on the government’s role in addressing the economic problems of the Great Depression?

Hoover believed that the solution to the Great Depression rested with individuals rather than with the government.

2. According to Hoover, what were the dangers of government intervention in the economy?

Hoover said that the very basis of liberty and freedom were at stake.

3. Hoover asserted that the federal government’s attempts to control business have effects on state and municipal governments and also on “the average man.” Describe these effects.

State/municipal governments: Deprived of control and subject to unfair taxation

Average man: Loss of autonomy, particularly if left “outside the fold”

4. What did Hoover claim would be the ultimate outcome if his opponent increased the role of the government in the economy? Explain.

The ultimate outcome was despotism and the destruction of self-government.

**“Breadline on Sixth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, NY”
Photographer unidentified
1932**

Context: Prior to the New Deal, most support for those affected by the Great Depression came from private funds. This photograph of a breadline on Sixth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, shows free food being distributed to large numbers of unemployed citizens.



Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Questions for “Breadline on Sixth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, NY”

1. Examine the photograph very carefully. How would you describe the people standing in line?
2. Looking at the people in the photograph, who is missing or is not represented by those standing in line? Why might this be?
3. Who provided assistance to those in line, and what was being asked of others?
4. Which presidential candidate most likely supported using private (nongovernmental) funds to provide meals? Explain your answer.

ANSWER KEY

Questions for “Breadline on Sixth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, NY”

1. Examine the photograph very carefully. How would you describe the people standing in line?

Student must demonstrate visual analysis skills and point out details found in the photograph.

2. Looking at the people in the photograph, who is missing or is not represented by those standing in line? Why might this be?

Women and children do not seem to appear in the line.

Student should make a claim and support their answer with evidence. Answers could point to the breadline feeding unemployed workers, a majority of whom were men.

3. Who provided assistance to those in line, and what was being asked from others?

A restaurant, a private business, was providing the assistance. The restaurant owner asked for donations of money from others.

4. Which presidential candidate most likely supported using private (non-governmental) funds to provide meals? Explain your answer.

Hoover.

Student should make a claim and support their answer with evidence.



**Excerpt from “Commonwealth Club Address”
Franklin D. Roosevelt
September 23, 1932**

Context: Roosevelt made this speech at the Commonwealth Club, an organization that promotes public affairs forums, just over a month before the election.



I feel that we are coming to a view through the drift of our legislation and our public thinking in the past quarter century that private economic power is, to enlarge an old phrase, a public trust as well. I hold that continued enjoyment of that power by any individual or group must depend upon the fulfillment of that trust. The men who have reached the summit of American business life know this best; happily, many of these urge the binding quality of this greater social contract.

The terms of that contract are as old as the Republic, and as new as the new economic order.

Every man has a right to life; and this means that he has also a right to make a comfortable living. He may by sloth or crime decline to exercise that right; but it may not be denied him. We have no actual famine or dearth; our industrial and agricultural mechanism can produce enough and to spare. Our Government formal and informal, political and economic, owes to everyone an avenue to possess himself of a portion of that plenty sufficient for his needs, through his own work.

...

This implication is, briefly, that the responsible heads of finance and industry instead of acting each for himself, must work together to achieve the common end. They must, where necessary, sacrifice this or that private advantage; and in reciprocal self-denial must seek a general advantage. It is here that formal Government — political Government, if you choose — comes in. Whenever in the pursuit of this objective the lone wolf, the unethical competitor, the reckless promoter . . . declines to join in achieving an end recognized as being for the public welfare, and threatens to drag the industry back to a state of anarchy, the Government may properly be asked to apply restraint. Likewise, should the group ever use its collective power contrary to the public welfare, the Government must be swift to enter and protect the public interest.

The Government should assume the function of economic regulation only as a last resort, to be tried only when private initiative, inspired by high responsibility, with such assistance and balance as Government can give, has finally failed. As yet there has been no final failure, because there has been no attempt; and I decline to assume that this Nation is unable to meet the situation.

Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Questions for Excerpt from “Commonwealth Club Address”

1. What do you think was the purpose of Roosevelt’s speech?
2. When Roosevelt spoke of the “public trust” and the “social contract” in the first paragraph, he implied that those with private economic power also have a duty to do what?
3. According to Roosevelt, what is the government’s role in protecting the public welfare?
4. If private business failed to act in the public interest, according to Roosevelt, what was the government’s final option? Do you agree or disagree with his point of view? Explain.

ANSWER KEY

Questions for Excerpt from “Commonwealth Club Address”

1. What do you think was the purpose of Roosevelt’s speech?

Student must state a claim and support it with evidence from the text. Answers should relate to expressing his beliefs about the role of government.

2. When Roosevelt spoke of the “public trust” and the “social contract” in the first paragraph, he implied that those with private economic power also have a duty to do what?

Those with private economic power have a duty to do what is best for the people.

3. According to Roosevelt, what is the government’s role in protecting the public welfare?

The government owes people enough support so that everyone has “an avenue to possess himself of a portion of that plenty sufficient for his needs, through his own work.”

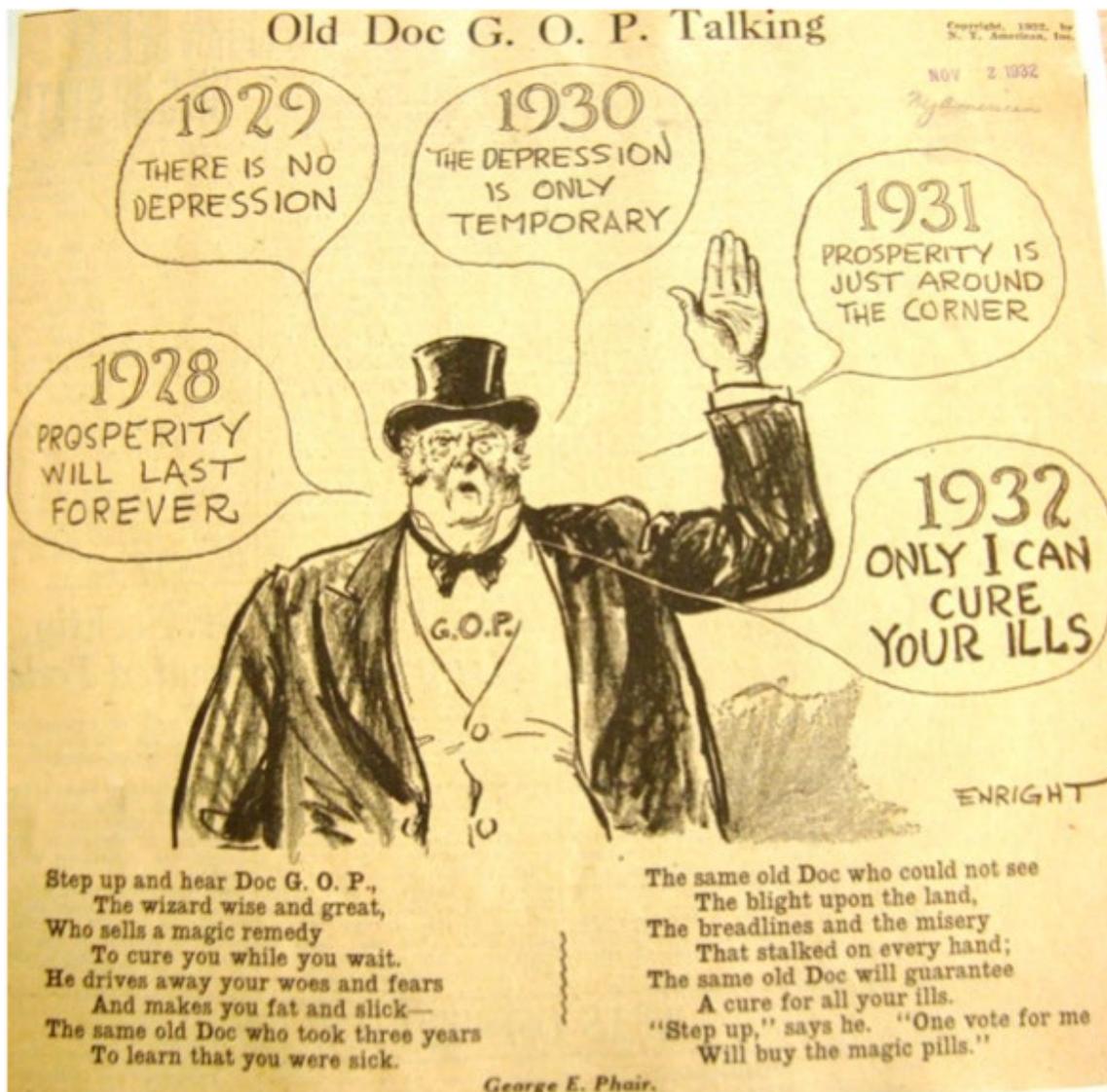
4. If private business failed to act in the public interest, according to Roosevelt, what was the government’s final option? Do you agree or disagree with his point of view? Explain.

The government had the right to fully regulate business if it failed to act in the public interest.

Student must state a claim and support it with evidence.

**“Old Doc G.O.P. Talking,”
George E. Phair
November 2, 1932**

Context: This cartoon, published just six days before the election, criticized the Hoover administration for its many failures and missteps since the Great Depression began. Hoover repeatedly minimized the severity of the Depression in his speeches and was unconvincing in his explanation of the causes of the crisis.



ANSWER KEY

Questions for “Old Doc G.O.P. Talking”

1. Whose point of view is represented by this cartoon’s message?

This cartoon represents the Democratic Party’s point of view.

2. According to the cartoon, what message has the G.O.P. (Grand Old Party), otherwise known as the Republican Party, been telling the American people? How did the G.O.P.’s message change from 1928 to 1932?

The G.O.P. has been telling the American people that the Depression is only temporary and prosperity will soon return. Their message evolved from denying a problem to downplaying it to saying G.O.P. policies were the solution.

3. The poem at the bottom of the cartoon refers to “Doc G.O.P.” as a wizard who sells a “magic remedy.” Why do you think the Republican Party’s solution to the Great Depression might be characterized that way?

Student must state a claim and support it with evidence.

4. According to the cartoon, what is the G.O.P. unable to see yet claims to be able to cure?

The G.O.P. could not see the Depression as a real problem, but claimed their policies were the cure.



**Excerpt from First Inaugural Address
Franklin Roosevelt
March 4, 1933**

Context: During the campaign, Roosevelt was vague about specific actions he would take to end the Depression. With his inaugural address, he began to provide more details.



President Hoover, Mr. Chief Justice, my friends:

This is a day of national consecration. And I am certain that on this day my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our people impels. This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days.

. . .

Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources.

Hand in hand with this we must frankly recognize the overbalance of population in our industrial centers and, endeavor to provide a better use of the land for those best fitted for the land. The task can be helped by definite efforts to raise the values of agricultural products and with this the power to purchase the output of our cities. It can be helped by preventing realistically the tragedy of the growing loss through foreclosure of our small homes and our farms. It can be helped by insistence that the Federal, State, and local governments act forthwith on the demand that their cost be drastically reduced. It can be helped by the unifying of relief activities which today are often scattered, uneconomical, and unequal. It can be helped by national planning for and supervision of all forms of transportation and of communications and other utilities which have a definitely public character. There are many ways in which it can be helped, but it can never be helped merely by talking about it. We must act and act quickly.

Finally, in our progress toward a resumption of work we require two safeguards against a return of the evils of the old order: there must be a strict supervision of all banking and credits and investments, so that there will be an end to speculation with other people's money; and there must be provision for an adequate but sound currency.

. . .

If I read the temper of our people correctly, we now realize as we have never realized before our interdependence on each other; that if we are to go forward, we must move as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline, because without such discipline no progress is made, no leadership becomes effective. We are, I know, ready and willing to submit our lives and property to such discipline, because it makes possible a leadership which aims at a larger good. . . .

Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Questions for Excerpt from First Inaugural Address

1. This speech contains the well-known quotation “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” What does this mean in the context of Roosevelt’s address?
2. Name at least three specific actions Roosevelt recommended for the nation.
3. Roosevelt spoke about the importance of discipline as the nation moved forward. Why did he say discipline is important?
4. What was the tone of Roosevelt’s address? How did it compare to what Hoover had been saying about the Depression?

ANSWER KEY

Questions for Excerpt from First Inaugural Address

1. This speech contains the well-known quotation “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” What does this mean in context of Roosevelt’s address?

Roosevelt urged Americans to not become so afraid that they would be overcome by indecision. Decisive action was required.

2. Name at least three specific actions Roosevelt recommended for the nation.

Student should list from the actions proposed in the second, third, or fourth paragraph of this excerpt.

3. Roosevelt spoke about the importance of discipline as the nation moved forward. Why did he say discipline is important?

No progress can be made without discipline, and no leader can be effective without discipline. Roosevelt projected confidence and self-discipline in large part to restore confidence in the economy.

4. What was the tone of Roosevelt’s address? How did it compare to what Hoover had been saying about the Depression?

Roosevelt’s address was hopeful and inspirational. He acknowledged the position of the country, but provided specific actions that he said the nation should take. This was in contrast with Hoover’s previous policies, which largely looked to individuals to support themselves and each other without government intervention.