

## **Seventh Grade Lesson Plan: Ropesville During the Great Depression**

### **Mapping the Dustbowl**

**Introduction** During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many farmers in the Texas Panhandle lost their jobs and land due to a period of drought and dust storms known as the Dust Bowl. Having lost their own farms, many Texans were forced to work as low paid farm laborers or sharecroppers on farms owned by others. In 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal Rural Rehabilitation Program created subsistence farms that allowed these struggling, landless farmers to once again own their own farms. One of these subsistence farms was The Ropesville Resettlement Project, south of Lubbock, Texas. At Ropesville, physical and cultural geography merged as farmers learned to work their new land on the Texas High Plains.

**Objective** Students will gain an understanding of how both the physical and cultural geography of the Texas High Plains region influenced the lives of farmers in the Dustbowl area of the state, especially in the Ropesville Settlement Project area.

**Lesson Duration** Two 45 minute class periods or one 90 minute block period

**TEKS** Social Studies Requirements Seventh Grade

(7) History. The student understands how individuals, events, and issues shaped the history of Texas during the 20th century. The student is expected to:

(C) describe and compare the impact of the Progressive and other reform movements in Texas in the 19th and 20th centuries

(E) analyze the political, economic, and social impact of major events, including the **Great Depression** on the history of Texas

(F) analyze the political, economic, and social impact of major events in the latter half of the 20th century such as migration.

(9) Geography. The student understands the location and characteristics of places and regions of Texas. The student is expected to:

(A) locate the **Great Plains**, region and places of importance in Texas

during the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries such as major cities and local points of interest

(C) analyze the effects of physical and human factors such as climate, weather, landforms, irrigation, on major events in Texas.

(10) Geography. The student understands the effects of the interaction between humans and the environment in Texas during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The student is expected to:

(A) identify ways in which Texans have adapted to and modified the environment and analyze the positive and negative consequences of the modifications

(B) explain ways in which geographic factors such as the **Dust Bowl**, limited water resources have affected the political, economic, and social development of Texas.

(21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(C) organize and interpret information from visuals, including **maps**

(22) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

(C) transfer information from one medium to another, including written to visual and statistical to written or visual, using computer software as appropriate;

(D) create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information.

### **Teacher and Student Materials**

1. *Building Hope: The Ropesville Resettlement Project* DVD
2. Texas Precipitation Map
3. Texas Wind Speed Map
4. Student Handouts:
  - *Region of the Dustbowl, 1930s* map

- *Mapping the Dustbowl - Map Directions*
- *Mapping the Dustbowl - Map Questions*

## 5. Colored Map Pencils

### **Lesson Vocabulary**

**Dust Bowl** - period of severe dust storms caused by extreme drought and poor farming practices that caused major and agricultural damage to American prairie lands from 1930 to 1936

**Great Depression** - a severe worldwide economic depression, which started in about 1929 and lasted until the late 1930s or early 1940s

**New Deal** – President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s progressive program that included a wide variety of laws and programs designed to fight the Great Depression

**physical geography** – deals with the physical environment of the earth, such as wind, precipitation, landforms, climate, etc.

**cultural geography** – deals with man’s interaction with his physical environment

**natural region** - area distinguished by its natural features of geography, such as desert, mountains, etc.

**compass rose** - shows the four cardinal directions (north, south, east west) on a map

**map legend** – explains information on a map

**precipitation** - the amount of rain, snow, hail, etc., that has fallen at a given place within a given period, usually expressed in inches or centimeters of water.

### **Procedures for the Teacher**

#### **Day 1**

1. Explain to students that the Dust Bowl was a period of severe dust storms that caused major agricultural damage to land on the American Great Plains during the Great Depression, from 1930 to 1936. Centered on the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, and adjacent parts of New Mexico, Colorado, and Kansas, the Dust Bowl affected over 100,000,000 acres.

2. Explain that the Dust Bowl was a result of both cultural and physical geography. Poor farming methods (cultural geography) that allowed soil to dry, turn to dust, and blow away in large, dark clouds had helped cause the Dust Bowl. But other uncontrollable factors, such as drought and high winds (physical geography) had made things worse. Due to the Dust Bowl, many farmers and ranchers in the Texas Panhandle lost their land and found themselves without work or homes.
3. Have students view the *Ropesville Resettlement Project* DVD, and instruct them to note how flat and dry the land around Ropesville appears. Ask them what factors of physical geography (such as wind, topography, climate, precipitation, etc.) might create such a landscape.
4. Show the Texas Precipitation Map (on overhead projector or document camera). Using the map legend, ask students to compare the Panhandle to the rest of the state in dryness. Point out that students will create a map of the Dust Bowl, as well as an explanatory map legend.
5. Show the Texas Wind Speed Map, and again, ask how the area around Ropesville compares to the rest of the state. Point out that in such a dry, windy area, farmland would dry up and blow away if not cultivated properly.
6. Explain to students that the Ropesville government agents taught their farmers to terrace and contour plow their land, keep their land planted so that the dirt wouldn't blow away, and conserve water at all times. All these factors not only helped the farmers be more successful at the time, but also helped prevent future erosion of the land and another Dust Bowl.

## **Day 2**

1. Briefly review the lesson from Day 1.
2. Distribute the *Region of the Dustbowl, 1930s* map and the *Mapping the Dustbowl Map Directions* student handout. Have students use colored map pencils to complete their maps.
3. Distribute the *Mapping the Dustbowl Map Questions* and instruct students to

use their textbooks, atlases, and/or the Internet to complete these questions.

### **Extension Activities**

The Dust Bowl in the Texas Panhandle near Ropesville was an environmental problem. Have students work with a partner to list at least ten current environmental problems in Texas. See the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality homepage for examples. <http://www.tceq.texas.gov>

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Have students access the Texas Wind Speed Map, which gives real time wind speeds statewide. Have them compare wind speed where they live to winds in the Panhandle near the Ropesville community. <http://www.usairnet.com/weather/maps/current/texas/wind-speed/>

View the Texas Almanac page on extreme weather conditions in Texas. <http://www.texasalmanac.com/topics/environment/extreme-weather-records> Invite students to share stories of their own experiences with extreme weather conditions.

