

Demo:Dram Workshops The Great Depression: Creating a human historic situation

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Demo:Dram Workshop summary

The workshop offers a framework for the exploration, analysis and transformation of documents from the time of The Great Depression of the 1930's in the United States of America.

The facilitator offers the frame of creating one huge image that condenses different causes and impacts of this complex historical event. She/he offers some resources to investigate the period.

The lesson could build into a series of lessons that are developed from this simple idea.



Pic 1. The Great Depression (by G. Csozó)

Target audience

The workshop can be conducted with 13-14 year olds, or 17-18 year olds, when this period in history is studied in Hungary. The structure can be adapted to any historical event where the teacher can find original texts, images for research.

What are the aims/overall goals of the workshop?

- That students get the opportunity to examine and analyse original documents related to a historic event.
- That participants transform their factual knowledge into human situations, images.
- That participants get the opportunity to think about the contemporary relevance of a historic event.

What are the objectives/stages of the workshop?

- The objective is to offer a central concept – in this case value – that can be a reference point in the analysis of all documents and in the creation of the images.
- The frame offered aims to offer a structure through which participants can transform documents, articles photographs into human situations.

Why this workshop; what is the rationale?

Students often learn history from secondary sources rather than getting the chance to investigate original documents, photographs, articles and other resources. This framework offers the possibility for such investigation. The structure also highlights the impact of historic processes and events on people and this creates the possibility to make connections with the past and also see the present in relation to historic events.

Description of workshop process: what we did and how we did it

Whole group discussion: The facilitator takes out a one US dollar bill and asks the group “what is the value of this banknote?”

This discussion aims to engage in questions concerning different types of value (fiscal value – use value – sentimental value) and questions concerning how value is related to context.

The discussion continues with the questions: “what influences the value of this banknote?”

This question aims to widen the scope of the context that defines the value of the banknote.

Image presented by the facilitator: The facilitator presents an image (Teacher in Role) of a woman in a street in Detroit in 1931 with the one dollar banknote in her hand. She is standing in front of a store window and looking at the banknote. After stepping out of the image the facilitator tells the group that this is the time that is called the Great Depression in the United States of America, which was a global phenomenon, but we will be investigating what happened in the US in this lesson. The facilitator asks the participants what questions do they have about the woman, or the situation?

Discussion follows – it is not the role of the facilitator to answer all the questions, the task is aimed to help them collect research questions for their investigation.

Offering the frame of the investigation: The facilitator explains that the image she/he showed will be the central image of a bigger depiction which is titled “The Great Depression”. It is an image of a street in Detroit, but it should contain as many causes and impacts of the historic event as possible. But to be able to create this image we need to understand a little bit more about what the causes and impacts of the Great Depression were.

Group work: Groups receive original newspaper cuttings, photographs, key terms and documents from this historic time (see some resources here) but are also encouraged to use their mobiles or laptops to find further information online. It is important to give groups enough time to investigate and read.

Whole group discussion: The groups are invited back to share what they have found out and to talk about what they found the most interesting. It is useful for the facilitator to note down on a sugar paper or the black board the main causes, impacts, key terms used and the interests expressed by the participants. It is also useful to turn the discussion towards what the connection between these different things could be, so that the event can be seen as a complex web of interconnected components.

Group work: The facilitator asks the group to choose one topic from those noted down and to create an image that could contain those causes and impacts the most dynamically. The image should be like an actual photograph that could have been taken on the street in Detroit around 1931. The facilitator should try to assist in different groups choose different subjects, but it is more important that they have a real interest in their choice, than to cover all topics.

Sharing: The groups share their images and the differences and similarities are discussed. It is useful to reflect on how the causes or the impacts of the Great Depression appear on the image and what is visible of the thoughts of the group concerning what they found the most important.

Discussion: How could these separate images be put into one huge image? How could their sequence add extra meaning to the individual images? Is there something important missing that needs to be added to connect the images? What are the questions concerning the Great Depression that need to be investigated further?

There are a variety of ways to continue this work – one is actually creating the whole image as one piece and thinking about how it should be documented (actual photo – video). See further thoughts about this in the post workshop ideas section.

Resources to support the workshop

A google drive folder containing all the articles and images used in the workshop: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19KIMzjfBOzSqaGvhQVPt3Vez4snWL4wU?usp=sharing>

A useful online archive of documents: <https://jessekeener.wordpress.com/2016/12/02/the-great-depression-archival-timeline/>

An interesting analysis of the Great Depression: <http://sites.austincc.edu/caddis/stock-market-crash-great-depression/>

Post workshop ideas

Developing a story out of one of the images: In case there is an image that raises many questions or interests the group it is possible to develop a whole narrative around it. You could choose one character from the image and develop their story or choose the site itself and see what happened there earlier. In case there is a significant object in the image it might be possible to develop the story of that specific object (e.g. the story of the bank note).

Site specific images: If the group is interested in the implications of the Great Depression for today it might be useful to work on finding where would it be useful to place a memorial to the Great Depression today. Would be in front of the National Bank? Or the Parliament? Or a small village? Or a slum area? How would these specific sites determine what is useful to put on the image? What can bankers learn from it? Or poor people? This general idea can be developed into interesting projects or works of art.

