

## Primary Source Analysis – Teacher Handout

**Source#1:** Picture of Great Plains with buffalo grazing. The caption reads: “The Great Plains Buffalo grass roots are 5 feet deep. The ground is moist at 1 foot deep. Sometimes there are droughts. There is always a breeze.” Students can see what the Great Plains actually looked like with buffalo grazing. They can see how vast it was.

Close Reading: What do you see? How vast is this area? Is the land flat?

**Source #2:** Picture of wheat growing in the Midwest. The caption reads: “Wheat Fields Farmers grew wheat, a lot of wheat. They also raised cattle.” Students can visualize the endless wheat fields in the Midwest.

Close Reading: What do you see? How vast is this area? Is the land flat? Does the landscape look similar to where the buffalo grass used to be?

**Source #3:** “Three Tractors Plowing at Night.”

This is an image of three tractors plowing at night from what appears to be around 1930. Wheat farmers in the Midwest plowed all day and had their son or a hired hand plow at night to plant more wheat. They were hoping to sell more wheat to compensate for the drop in wheat prices.

Close Reading: Do these look like hard working people? Did they want to pay their bills? Was this hard work?

**Source #4:** “Sunday, April 14, 1935. Dust Clouds rolling over the Prairies.” This is an image, attribution unknown, from Black Sunday. The photograph has recorded on it, “Storall Studio. Dodge City, Kansas, 1935.” Black Sunday, as it became known, was one of the first of many severe dust storms. The day started out clear, but a mountain of dust rolled across a large portion of the Midwest. It was so black that people couldn’t see their hand in front of their face at midday.

Close Reading: What do you see in this picture? How do you feel?

Sourcing: What is the photographer trying to show you? What is his point of view? Were there obstacles to overcome? Is the picture believable?

Contextualization: What was it like to be alive in the Midwest during the 1930’s? How were things different? How did the Great Depression make it worse? Do you have asthma? If so, would breathing be even harder for you? What is the same today as then?

Corroboration: How are these pictures the same? Do they all tell the same story? Do you have a better understanding with all the pictures?

**Source #5:** “Three Girls Model Mask.” This is a photograph by Bert Garia from about 1935. Because the dust was so invasive, people needed to wear gas masks to breathe. People who didn’t could get dust pneumonia and without treatment, they died.

Close Reading: What do you see in this picture? What emotions do you see in their faces? How do you feel?

Sourcing: What is the photographer trying to show you? What is his point of view? Were there obstacles to overcome? Is the picture believable?

Contextualization: What was it like to be alive in the Midwest during the 1930's? How were things different? Do you have asthma? If so, would breathing be even harder for you? What is the same today as then?

Corroboration: How are these pictures the same? Do they all tell the same story? Do you have a better understanding with all the pictures?

**Source #6:** "Sand, blown by the wind, piles up in dunes in front of farmhouse in Cimarron County, Oklahoma." Image by Arthur Rothstein from April 1936. In this picture, one can see how the wind has blown sand into dunes in front of a farmhouse. About half of the door is covered in sand as well as the majority of a fence post. This image was taken in the height of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. The farmhouse has no paint; the curtains inside are in tatters.

Close Reading: What do you see in this picture? How do you feel?

Sourcing: What is the photographer trying to show you? What is his point of view? Were there obstacles to overcome? Is the picture believable?

Contextualization: What was it like to be alive in the Midwest during the 1930's? How were things different? Do you have asthma? If so, would breathing be even harder for you? How did the Great Depression make it worse? What is the same today as then?

Corroboration: How are these pictures the same? Do they all tell the same story? Do you have a better understanding with all the pictures?

**Source #7:** "Dust Bowl Farmer raising fence to keep it from being buried under drifting sand. Cimarron County, Oklahoma." This image is also by Arthur Rothstein from April 1936. During the Dust Bowl farmers continued to try to save their farms. In this picture, one can see a farmer digging his fence out of the rising dust, so he can keep his cattle from wandering off his property. His young son is in the picture also. If farmers didn't do this, the cattle could get caught in the low fencing and barbed wire and die or they could just wander out of the "pasture" never to be seen again.

Close Reading: Who do you see in this picture? What emotions do you see in their faces? How do you feel?

Sourcing: What is the photographer trying to show you? What is his point of view? Were there obstacles to overcome? Is the picture believable?

Contextualization: What was it like to be alive in the Midwest during the 1930's? How were things different? Do you have asthma? If so, would breathing be even harder for you? How did the Great Depression make it worse? What is the same today as then?

Corroboration: How are these pictures the same? Do they all tell the same story? Do you have a better understanding with all the pictures?

**Source #8:** “Son of farmer in dust bowl area.” Photograph by Arthur Rothstein from April 1936. In this image, one can see a young child walking back from what appears to be an outhouse. The area is bleak as it is covered in dust. The outhouse has been shoveled near the door to remove the dust that has blown into the area. The fence lines are also partially buried in sand.

Close Reading: Who do you see in this picture? What emotions do you see in the young boy’s face? How do you feel?

Sourcing: What is the photographer trying to show you? What is his point of view? Were there obstacles to overcome? Is the picture believable?

Contextualization: What was it like to be alive in the Midwest during the 1930’s? How were things different? Do you have asthma? If so, would breathing be even harder for you? How did the Great Depression make it worse? What is the same today as then?

Corroboration: How are these pictures the same? Do they all tell the same story? Do you have a better understanding with all the pictures?

**Source #9:** “The Lincoln Memorial in the Middle of a Dust Storm.” Attribution unknown on 21 March 1935. Washington, D.C. was not affected by the Dust Bowl and so very few politicians were concerned. However, on 21 March 1935, the dust traveled from the Midwest all the way to Washington, D.C. It even went as far north as New York City and out into the Atlantic Ocean. Hugh Bennett, the Director of the Soil Erosion Service, was just about out of money. As Bennett was giving his testimony to a congressional subcommittee, the dust clouds rolled into Washington. The sun was blocked by dust in Washington from the storms in the Midwest. He was able to obtain permanent funding.

Close Reading: What do you see in this picture? How do you feel?

Sourcing: What is the photographer trying to show you? What is his point of view? Were there obstacles to overcome? Is the picture believable?

Contextualization: What was it like to be alive in the Midwest during the 1930’s? How were things different? Do you have asthma? If so, would breathing be even harder for you? How did the Great Depression make it worse? What is the same today as then? Did the dust travel far?

Corroboration: How are these pictures the same? Do they all tell the same story? Do you have a better understanding with all the pictures?

**Source #10:** “Collage of 1930’s headlines about the Dust Bowl (Library of Congress)”. This is a photograph of newspaper clippings from the 1930’s. The titles tell of many disasters and trials for those living through the Dust Bowl. Examples include: “Three year old Benson boy survives almost 20 hours in raging dust storm”, “Black Gale Howls in Southwest”, “Two Planes Make Forced Landing as Black Blizzard Hides Airport”, and “Storms Rage from Kansas as far West as California.” These headlines give a glimpse into what happened during the Dust Bowl.

Close Reading: What does the text say? What words do you notice?

Sourcing: What is the photographer trying to show you? What is his point of view? Were there obstacles to overcome? Are the headlines believable?

Contextualization: When were the newspaper articles written? Who was the audience?

Corroborating: How are the pictures the same as the newspaper articles? Do they tell the same story?

**Source # 11:** “Oklahoma dust bowl refugees. San Fernando, California.” This image was taken by Dorothea Lange in June 1936. It states the following on the photograph; “More Oklahomans reach California via the cotton fields of Price.” This car is not only packed with people, it is stuffed with all the belongings this family owns. Suitcases and other belongings are tied to the outside of the vehicle and along the running board. It was not an uncommon site in California. These people followed the crops as migrant workers.

Close Reading: What do you see in this picture? What emotions do you see in their faces? How do you feel?

Sourcing: What is the photographer trying to show you? What is her point of view? Were there obstacles to overcome? Is the picture believable?

Contextualization: What was it like to be alive in the Midwest during the 1930’s? How were things different? How did the Great Depression make it worse? What is the same today as then?

Corroboration: How are these pictures the same? Do they all tell the same story? Do you have a better understanding with all the pictures?

**Source #12:** “Farmer and sons walking in the face of a dust storm. Cimarron County, Oklahoma.” This photograph is by Arthur Rothstein in April 1936. One can observe how the farmhouse is partially buried in dirt, as the top of the door is much lower than the father’s head and about the height of the boy. The fence posts are also partially buried in dust. The younger child is covering his face to protect his face from the storm.

Close Reading: What do you see in this picture? What emotions do you see in their faces? How do you feel?

Sourcing: What is the photographer trying to show you? What is his point of view? Were there obstacles to overcome? Is the picture believable?

Contextualization: What was it like to be alive in the Midwest during the 1930’s? How were things different? Do you have asthma? If so, would breathing be even harder for you? How did the Great Depression make it worse? What is the same today as then?

Corroboration: How are these pictures the same? Do they all tell the same story? Do you have a better understanding with all the pictures?

**Source #13:** “Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age 32.” This picture is by Dorothea Lange from March 1937 in Calipatria, California. This woman in this picture is the same as the very famous picture of a Dust Bowl refugee woman in California

holding a baby. The family is living in a meg-shift tent with only a few possessions. Their clothes are ragged and their faces tired.

Close Reading: What do you see in this picture? What emotions do you see in their faces? How do you feel?

Sourcing: What is the photographer trying to show you? What is her point of view? Were there obstacles to overcome? Is the picture believable?

Contextualization: What was it like to be alive in the Midwest during the 1930's? How were things different? Do you have asthma? If so, would breathing be even harder for you? How did the Great Depression make it worse? What is the same today as then?

Corroboration: How are these pictures the same? Do they all tell the same story? Do you have a better understanding with all the pictures?

**Source 14:** "Fireside Chat with President Franklin D. Roosevelt." President Roosevelt had thirty fireside chats during his presidency. He addressed Americans over the radio. He would explain his positions and why he was taking certain actions. The students will listen to an actual fireside chat given by President Roosevelt discussing the Dust Bowl. A picture of him in a car talking to a Midwest farmer will be shown while listening to part of his chat.

Close Reading: Who is speaking? What are his motives? Is he a good reporter of the events?

Sourcing: What is the tone of the fireside chat? What verbal images are used?

Contextualization: Who is the audience of the fireside chat? When did President Roosevelt give fireside chat? What important events happened before and after this speech?

Corroborating: Does President Roosevelt's words agree with the pictures we saw? Is this a reliable source?

**Source #15:** "Preview of the Dust Bowl," by Ken Burns. This is a commercial clip from the PBS documentary of The Dust Bowl, by Ken Burns. It shows a storm coming in and the dust actually quickly approaching. There are excerpts of actual interviews from people who lived through The Dust Bowl. Its purpose is to encourage you to watch the TV program on PBS.

Close Reading: What words do you notice? What is the overall message of the movie clip?

Sourcing: Who is the author? Who is speaking? Is the account believable?

Contextualization: Who is the audience? When was it written?

Corroborating: Does this match all the pictures we've looked at and the Fireside Chat? Is the person speaking reliable?

**Source #16:** “Dust Bowl Refugee,” by Woodie Guthrie. Woodie Guthrie was a very popular musician. He was from the Midwest and witnessed Black Sunday. He lost his job and hitchhiked, walked, and rode the train to California hoping to find work to support his family. His music did become popular in California among the Oklahomans because he knew their plight as it was also his plight. This song, “Dust Bowl Refugee” helps one understand the emotions of the plight of the Dust Bowl Refugees. The song will have photographs from the Dust Bowl and the Dust Bowl Refugees for the students to watch.

Close Reading: What do the words of this song say? What do the pictures add to the music?

Sourcing: Who is the author of the song? Is his account believable?

Contextualization: When was the song written? Who was the audience? Why did he write the song?

Corroborating: Does the song agree with the pictures, the Fireside Chat, and Ken Burns’ clip?