

A Christmas Story About the Movie

Ralphie Parker wants only one thing for Christmas: an Official Red Ryder Carbine-Action 200-shot Range Model Air Rifle. Set in the 1940s in the fictional town of Hohman, Indiana, *A Christmas*

PROJECT LEARNING OBJECTIVES,

SWBAT:

View *A Christmas Story* set
Gain understanding of individuals, groups, ideas, developments, and turning points in the era of the Great Depression through World War II in United States history (1930-1945).
Understand how limited resources require choices

R Story tells of Ralphie's desperate quest to ensure that this most perfect of gifts ends up under his tree this Christmas.

The biggest obstacle standing in his way is his mother's fear that "You'll shoot your eye out!" But Ralphie is a man with a mission, and he hatches a series of schemes designed to win his coveted holiday prize.

Along the way, he has to deal with his annoying little brother, a friend with his tongue frozen to a lamppost, a yellow-eyed bully, a cantankerous department store Santa, the neighbors' dogs, his old man's obsession with a "major award" he's won in a contest, his mom's militant defense of her Christmas turkey, a smoke-belching furnace, and an untimely, four-lettered slip of his tongue.

TASK A: STANDING UP TO A DARE:

1. This tale may be set in the 1940, but the situations these kids face are very familiar today. For example, when a friend dares you to do something that you know is not a good idea, what will you choose to do?

Do friends influence what we say and do? _____ How? _____
Why? _____

2. What makes a dare so powerful? _____

3. What would happen if we said "no" to a dare? _____

4. What does the expression "To be the leader of the band, you've got to turn your back to the crowd." Mean? _____

5. Will Your Tongue Really Stick to a Frozen Flagpole? _____ Why was the fire department called? _____



TASK B: REVIEW VOCABULARY

- Look up the definitions of the words in the dictionary.
- Do you remember how the vocabulary words were used in the show?
- Write sentences using the vocabulary words.
- Write a "theme" using the above vocabulary words. Perhaps the topic could be, "What I want for Christmas." Use as many of the vocabulary words as you can!

TASK C: READ BELOW THE GREAT DEPRESSION FACTS & FIGURES

Prize	Stock	Poison	Department Store
Subtle	Maneuver	Appointed	Connection
Fragile	Epic	Benefit	Fuse
Insinuate	Struggle	Conclusion	Retribution
Boggle	Fluidity	Cabbage	Spectacular
Ozone	Emporium	Jealous	Icicle
Glorious	Plastic	Shattered	Gradually
Beautiful	Academic	Remains	Season
Symbol	Fudge	Annihilation	Christmas
Victory	Guillotine	Disappointed	Marauders
Radio	Connoisseur	Explanation	Nuance
Electric	Profanity	Equations	Remorse
Natural	Justice	Hound Dog	Eloquent
Margin	Mysterious	Mangy	Bully
Compass	Punishment	Strange	Victim
Theme	Stricken	Santa Claus	

- In 1929—before the Depression began—the unemployment rate averaged 3%.
- In the 1920s, the banking system in the U.S. was responsible for about \$50 billion, which was about 50% of GDP.
- Between 1929 and 1932, industrial production fell by nearly 45% and homebuilding dropped by 80%.
- From 1929 to 1932, about 5,000 banks went out of business.
- By 1933, 11,000 of the 25,000 U.S. banks had failed.
- Between 1929 and 1933, U.S. GDP fell around 30% and the stock market lost almost 90% of its value.
- Corporate profits had dropped from \$10 billion in 1929 to \$1 billion in 1932.
- 13 million people became unemployed. In 1932, 34 million people belonged to families with no regular full-time wage earner.
- In 1933, 25% of all workers and 37% of all nonfarm workers were unemployed.
- In Cleveland, the unemployment rate was 50%; in Toledo, Ohio, 80%.
- One Soviet trading corporation in New York averaged 350 applications a day from Americans seeking jobs in the Soviet Union.
- Over one million families lost their farms between 1930 and 1934.
- Between 1929 and 1932, the income of the average American family was reduced by 40%.
- Nine million savings accounts were wiped out between 1930 and 1933.
- 273,000 families had been evicted from their homes by 1932.
- There were two million homeless people migrating around the country.
- Over 60% of Americans were categorized as poor by the federal government in 1933.
- In the last prosperous year (1929), there were 279,678 immigrants recorded, but in 1933 only 23,068 came to the U.S.
- In the early 1930s, more people emigrated from the United States than immigrated to it.
- With little economic activity, there was scant demand for new coinage. No nickels or dimes were minted in 1932-33, no quarter dollars in 1931 or 1933, no half dollars from 1930-32, and no silver dollars in the years 1929-33.
- New York social workers reported that 25% of all schoolchildren were malnourished. In the mining counties of West Virginia, Illinois, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania, the proportion of malnourished children was perhaps as high as 90%.
- Many people became ill with diseases such as tuberculosis (TB).

TASK C: COST OF LIVING IN RALPHIE'S WORLD:

Televisions were very rare in 1939. Instead, radios and newspapers provided the information lifeline for Americans. Whole families gathered around the radio to listen to news broadcasts and popular programs like “Little Orphan Annie,” quiz shows, mysteries, dramas, music and sports.



Before Harry Potter, Ralphie and his friends might have read books like Daniel Boone and Make Way for Ducklings. But one of the most popular forms of entertainment was found at the local movie house where films like National Velvet, Lassie Come Home, and Superman costs about 25 cents and included a cartoon. A candy bar costs five cents.

Because personal computers were decades away from being conceived, there were no cell phones or email, Xbox or Wii. One of the earliest computers, the ENIAC was completed in 1945; it weighed 30 tons and was two stories high. Popular toys in 1939 included comic books, 3-D view master, X-ray glasses, Monopoly, Sorry and Scrabble. Many of the toys and activities mentioned in A Christmas Story are unheard of today.

1. In 1939, many families were struggling financially. How does the Great Depression compare to our current economic downturn? _____
2. Below, costs are listed for items typically purchased in 1939. How do these items compare with the costs today? _____
3. Are there items on these lists that have become obsolete? _____
4. What new items have replaced them? _____
5. What are the costs for these new items? _____
6. How have families today had to cut back? _____
7. How can students help their families save money? _____
8. How can having less actually become more meaningful? _____

How Much Things Cost in 1939

Average cost of new house \$3,800.00
Average wages per year \$1,730.00
Average cost for house rental \$28.00 per month
Average price for a new car \$700.00
Cost of a gallon of gas 10 cents
Cost of a loaf of bread 8 cents
Cost of a pound of hamburger meat 14 cents
Cost of a pound of steak 20 cents
Cost of a toaster \$16.00
Cost of a Red Ryder BB Gun \$2.95
Cost of ladies sandals 89 cents
Cost of single vision glasses \$3.85
Cost of an Emerson bedroom radio \$9.95

How Much Things Cost Now

If you had \$100 converted from 1939 it would be equivalent to \$1300 today.

Task D: WANTS vs. NEEDS

Ralphie Parker wants only one thing for Christmas: an official Red Ryder Carbine-Action 200-shot Range Model Air Rifle. Sometimes before we want something, we must first think about what we need. It is important to prioritize how money is spent. During hard economic times there is less money to spend on “wants” or luxury items. Children, too, may be asked to assist their family in limiting expenses.

1. What do you want for the holidays? _____
2. How is a want different from a need? _____
3. Is saving for the future a want or a need? _____ Why? _____
4. Is donating to charity a want or a need? _____ Why? _____
5. Is health insurance a want or a need? _____ Why? _____
6. How can those with small incomes still afford to be charitable? _____ To save? _____

Task E: OPPORTUNITY COST

Opportunity cost as the value of what you give up when you make one choice instead of another. Example: A person who invests \$10,000 in a stock denies herself or himself the interest that could have accrued by leaving the \$10,000 in a bank account instead. The opportunity cost of the decision to invest in stock is the value of the interest.

Using systematic decision-making is key to making wise financial decisions. Discuss how systematic decision-making is a course of action that consists of prioritizing and determining if financial goals are wants or needs. In addition, the process includes determining if a purchase is a want or need, identifying opportunity costs, weighing the pros and cons, and considering all consequences.

Present Day Scenario:

Albert wants to buy a new computer game that costs \$59 and a sports jersey that costs \$65. Albert has \$25. He earns \$15 a week mowing yards. What should Albert do? Why?

TASK F: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A Christmas Story takes place during the late 1930's and early 1940's in Hohman, Indiana (inspired by the author's true hometown of Hammond, Indiana). What do you know about this era? What was going on in Indiana during this time? What kind of struggles were people experiencing and how did those struggles affect family relationships? Discuss.

2. Despite the number of times Ralphie hears "no" or "you'll shoot your eye out," he refuses to give up on his dream of owning a Red Ryder 200-Shot Carbine Action Range Model Air Rifle. Have you ever wanted something so badly that you refuse to give up on the dream of having it? If so, talk about that experience. If not, do you think Ralphie is being unreasonable or are his pleas for the gun justifiable?

3. Spend the next couple of minutes thinking back on different Christmas memories. After you have thought for a little bit, pick your favorite one and close your eyes. What smells do you associate with the memory? Do you remember any distinctive tastes? What do you hear when you think back on this time? Think and write down as many sensory details as you can and then share the memory with a peer or the whole class.
