

Henry Koczur on Riding the Rails

We caught a Southern Pacific passenger train to Niland, California, riding the blinds with two other hobos. When the train stopped, we all got off. We were caught by a bull, who ordered us to line up next to the train. Had any of us tried to jump back on, I'm sure he would've shot us.

When the train left, the bull asked how much money I had. "Not a cent," I said. One of the men who rode the blinds with us was next to me. The man had \$2.00. The bull told him to take it out and hold it in his hand. The second man had 50 cents. My buddy, Jensen, had 20 cents. The bull collected the money. 'This will pay for your fare,' he said. He put the \$2.70 in his pocket and told us to start walking.

I tripped over a railroad tie. The bull thought I was trying to get away. He gave me a kick in the butt that to this day I never forgot. I saw he was going to hit me over the head with a blackjack. I raised my arm, and he struck my fingers, cracking the knuckle of my forefinger. He warned us to hit the highway and never set foot on railroad property again. We slept the night in the desert.

Walking down the road in the morning, we saw a train being made up for Yuma. There must've been 50 hobos waiting there, who'd met the same fate the night before. We all climbed into an empty boxcar and shut the door, not making a sound as we waited for the freight to leave. All of the sudden, the door slid open. Who is looking at us, but the same bull who kicked and black-jacked me. 'Get the hell out of here,' he shouted. I was the first to jump out and run.

We were 100 feet from the train, when one of the bums hollered, 'Hold it, guys! There are 50 of us. He has six bullets in his gun. He knows he can shoot six of us; after that he's a dead man.' We listened to him. When the engineer gave the highball, we ran to the train. Almost all climbed back into the boxcar for the ride to Yuma. We left the bull standing there, with his legs spread out and his hands crossed over under his arms.

<http://www.phschool.com/atschool/pathways/MAH/Student%20Area/MAH%20SC12%20AC%20T1%20index.html>

This Land is Your Land

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York island;
From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me.

As I was walking that ribbon of highway,
I saw above me that endless skyway:
I saw below me that golden valley:
This land was made for you and me.

I've roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts;
All around me a voice was sounding:
This land was made for you and me.

When the sun came shining, and I was strolling,
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling,
As the fog was lifting a voice was chanting:
This land was made for you and me.

There was a big high wall there that tried to stop me
Sign was painted, it said "private property";
But on the back side it didn't say nothing,
This land was made for you and me.

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,
By the relief office I seen my people;
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking
Is this land made for you and me?

Nobody living can ever stop me,
As I go walking that freedom highway;
Nobody living can ever make me turn back
This land was made for you and me.

God Bless America

Words and Music by Irving Berlin

While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,
Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free,
Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,
As we raise our voices in solemn prayer.

God bless America,
Land that I love.
Stand beside here, and guide her
Through the night with a light from above.

From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans, white with foam
God bless America, my home sweet home
God bless America, my home sweet home.

Group Members:

Period/Date:

Dust Bowl – Stations Activity

Station 1 – Movietone News Clips

Answer the following questions after viewing the Movietone News clips from 1934.

1. How did the United States government respond to the extreme drought in the Midwest?
2. What was the general attitude of the farmers toward both the ecological conditions, and the government's response to the crisis?

Station 2 – Map and Causes

Read the excerpt about the Dust Bowl on pgs.. 638-639 in your textbook and answer the following questions.

1. What were the causes (both natural and human-made) of the Dust Bowl?
2. What were the effects of the massive dust storms on humans, farmland, and machinery?
3. Which states lost population during the 1930's? In which direction did most people fleeing the Dust Bowl move?

Station 3 – *The Grapes of Wrath* Video Clips

Watch the video clips from the film 'The Grapes of Wrath' and answer the following questions.

1. What happens to Muley's family? What explanation does the man from the bank give?
2. How were farm owners taking advantage of workers when they reached California? According to the film, how did they deal with those who questioned their practices?

Station 4 – Primary Source Document

Read the account by Henry Koczur (age 16) about "riding the rails" during the Great Depression, and answer the following questions.

1. Henry Koczur refers to a "bull" in this document. What/who do you think this is?
2. What happens to Koczur in his first encounter with the "bull"? How are things different the second time they meet?

Station 5 – Dust Bowl Photography

View the video presentation on Dorothea Lange's Dust Bowl-era photography and answer the following questions.

1. Dorothea Lange worked for the Farm Security Administration. Is it surprising to see such “honest” images being promoted by the federal government? Explain.
2. The song in the video (“California Stars”) was written by Woody Guthrie, who worked with and lived among Dust Bowl migrants. How does the message of the song match the imagery of Dorothea Lange’s photographs?

Station 6 – Song Analysis Activity

Read the lyrics to “God Bless America” and “This Land is Your Land” and answer the following questions.

1. Which song seems to more accurately reflect the mood of America during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression era? Explain.
2. Woody Guthrie’s song has generated a fair amount of controversy – particularly due to the content of some of the song’s later verses. Why do you think these verses are controversial? Would you consider Guthrie to be a “radical”, as many have claimed him to be? Explain.

Station 7 – Reflection Questions

Answer the following questions after completing the first six stations.

1. Do you believe that life improved for migrants once they reached California? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the first six stations.
2. Do you believe that the government should have done more to help “Dust Bowl refugees”? Should the federal government have provided direct aid, regulated farming in non-affected regions, or put displaced mid-westerners to work in other parts of the country? Explain.