

Surviving the Depression in Champaign-Urbana

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Lesson #1: Impact of the Crash in Champaign-Urbana

Abstract: In this lesson, students will investigate primary sources related to the impact of the 1929 stock market crash in Champaign-Urbana. Students will focus on the ways in which the stock market crash affected the lives of local citizens, and they will also study 1930 census data on unemployment to compare the local impact of the crash to its statewide and nationwide impact.

Essential Questions:

- How did the October 29, 1929, stock market crash impact the lives of Champaign-Urbana citizens in 1929-1931?
- Did Champaign-Urbana citizens fare better or worse in the early years of the Depression than most citizens across the state of Illinois and across the country?

Assessment: Students will be assessed based on their ability to read and analyze the local newspaper articles about the early impacts of the Depression in Champaign-Urbana. Students will also be assessed based on their ability to make comparisons between federal, state, and local census data on unemployment in order to determine the impact of the stock market crash locally, statewide, and nationwide. Finally, students will be expected to incorporate information from the primary sources in this lesson in their essays at the end of the unit.

Procedures:

- 1) *Setting the Purpose:* In order to frame this unit in a context with which students are familiar, this lesson begins with a discussion of the local and national impacts of the current economic crisis. At the beginning of the class period, the teacher should give the students about five minutes to brainstorm ways in which the current economic crisis has impacted their lives and community. In addition, students should think about ways in which the crisis has impacted the nation as a whole. Encourage students to think of any positive impacts of the crisis, not just the negative ones. After five minutes have passed, the students should share the impacts that they came up with, starting with national impacts and then shifting to local impacts. The teacher should write down student responses on an overhead or large sheet of paper that the class can refer to throughout the unit.
- 2) After the introductory exercise, the teacher should briefly review with students the events leading up to the October 29, 1929, stock market crash. Students should be familiar with how people across the nation reacted to the stock market crash.

- 3) The students should then be exposed to the essential question of how the stock market crash impacted the lives of Champaign-Urbana citizens from 1929-1931. To gain an understanding of the early effects of the Depression in the community, students will read and analyze the October 29, 1929, article from the *Urbana Courier*, “October, 1929: Stock Market Teeters; Champaign-Urbana Unaware” (**Source #1**). As students read the article, they should complete the T-chart notes by noting important facts about life in Champaign-Urbana in 1929, as well as the cost of important goods at the time. The teacher should then discuss with the students how the stock market crash impacted the local community. The students should document the source for the final essay on their source charts.
- 4) After reading the article on the early impacts of the Depression in Champaign-Urbana, students will analyze data on unemployment from the 1930 census (**Source #2**). The teacher should hand out the census data and introduce the second essential question for the lesson about how Champaign-Urbana fared compared to the rest of the state and country. The teacher should spend a few minutes explaining to students how to read the census data and calculate the percentage of unemployed people. Students should then complete the census data analysis sheet. After the students have finished analyzing the data, the teacher should discuss with the class whether Champaign-Urbana fared better than the rest of the state and country in terms of employment at the beginning of the Depression. Students should document the source for the final essay on their source charts.
- 5) To give more context to the census data, students should read the May 8, 1930, article from the *Daily Illini*: “Data on Labor Survey Is Ready for Twin Cities” (**Source #3**). They should answer the questions about this article on the census data analysis sheet. Students should also document the source for the final essay on their source charts. The teacher may want to wrap up the lesson by having students answer a few questions about the impact of the stock market crash in Champaign-Urbana versus the impact in the rest of the state and country.

Analysis of Local Primary Sources: During this lesson, students will analyze two local newspaper articles about the impact of the stock market crash in Champaign-Urbana. The first article, from the *Urbana Courier*, will help students to understand life in Champaign-Urbana at the time of the stock market crash. The second article, from the *Daily Illini*, will provide more context about local unemployment to supplement the census data.

Ties to National Primary Sources: During this lesson, students will analyze unemployment data from the 1930 census. This data includes information on unemployment at the national, state, and local levels.

List of Materials and Resources:

“October, 1929: Stock Market Teeters; Champaign-Urbana Unaware,” *Urbana Courier*, October 29, 1929

“Data on Labor Survey Is Ready for Twin Cities,” *Daily Illini*, May 8, 1930

1930 Census data

Life in Champaign-Urbana T-chart

Census data analysis sheet

Source chart