



Black Sunday: A Visual Analysis of the Great American Dust Bowl

Paula Simonson; Wasatch Range Writing Project

Summary:

In this lesson, students will read and analyze a graphic novel, paired with a variety of creative and primary sources. Students will conduct a brief research project designed to evaluate authors' varying points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Core Standards:

- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies Grade 11–12
Standards 6–9
- Reading Standards for Informational Text Grade 11–12
Standards 1–3

Objectives:

- Students will read and discuss the graphic novel, *The Great American Dust Bowl* by Don Brown.
- Students will make an informal assessment of the author's claims and note any points of view that may be considered more deeply. For example, many things are presented in the graphic novel but some are brief and lack detail. Do these inclusions show a particular point of view?
- Students will evaluate some of the sources used by the author and determine the accuracy of the author's claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Context:

This lesson was designed for secondary history/social studies and/or ELA classrooms but could be adapted for use in upper elementary grades as well.

Additionally, it could be taught independently or as an introduction into several works by John Steinbeck if used in an ELA setting.



Materials:

- A projected version of *The Great American Dust Bowl* by Don Brown
- Chromebooks or access to computers for additional research
- Individual copies of the Selected Bibliography from *The Great American Dust Bowl* by Don Brown

Time Frame:

Allow 2–5 days based upon desired outcomes or intensity of discussion and research. This could be used as an informal starting point for a research project or be a quick introduction into a novel or history unit.

Procedures:

1. Begin with a whole group reading of *The Great American Dust Bowl* by Don Brown. Unless you have classroom copies for each student, this will need to be projected as it is a graphic novel.
2. Have a class discussion of the book or ask students to write a short personal response to the reading. This should include something new that they learned about the dust bowl and a response to the images within the text.
3. Hand out copies of the Selected Bibliography. For younger students, this could be paired with a short lesson on proper formatting for a bibliography.
4. Ask students to research each of the sources used by Brown. This could be a good team project that could allow for each student to take a smaller number of sources and then work in small groups to determine how each source was used by the author to support his claims.
5. Have students write or verbally share, either as individuals or as small groups, as to whether the author presented an accurate retelling of the event. Students should also be able to articulate the author's point of view and how it connects to current events.
6. Ask students to select and research a particular topic presented in the book, such as Westward Expansion, Native Americans and buffalo populations, poor farming practices, current implications, etc. Then have students use "Storyboard That" (a free version is available online) to create their own graphic novella to capture the event.

**Extensions:**

- Have students listen to *The Dust Bowl Ballads*—an album by Woodie Guthrie—and draw some comparisons between the graphic novel and the songs.
- Pair this graphic novel with Ken Burns documentary or short experts from *The Worst Hard Time* by Timothy Egan.
- Have students write a personal narrative comparing and contrasting the events from *The Great American Dust Bowl* to the recent experiences of Covid 19.

Rationale:

This lesson will help students understand various aspects of research and the analysis of primary and creative documents. Additionally, students will gain a deeper understanding of individual authors' claims, reasoning, and use of evidence to support their points of view.

Sources:

Brown, Don. *The Great American Dust Bowl*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2013.

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