

Oral Histories Student Instruction Worksheet

Directions: This activity will allow you to listen to various individual experiences during the Great Depression.

1. Log onto *Studs Terkel: Conversations with America* at <http://www.studsterkel.org/>.
2. Click on “Hard Times” (to the right of the screen).
3. Scroll down and locate the oral histories listed below.
4. Listen to the audio clip, and answer the questions that follow.

Virginia Durr

- Whom did people blame for the effects of the Great Depression?
- Why did people feel shame during the Great Depression?
- What were people’s two main responses to the Great Depression?

Ward James

- What did James do when he lost his job?
- Why was it so hard for him to ask for help from the government?
- What types of questions did the government ask James when he went to apply for relief (money)?

Emma Tiller (sharecropper in East Texas)

- Why did the government slaughter so many cattle?
- Why was Tiller so upset by the killing of the cattle?
- What did Tiller think the moaning of the cows sounded like?

Mary Owsley (widow living on welfare)

- Why did Mary Owsley’s husband quit the coal mine?
- Why did she have to buy her water?
- How did the Owsleys lose their furniture?

Oscar Helene (farmer in Marcus, Iowa)

- What happened to Helene’s father’s farm?
- What happened at a farm “sell off”?
- What actions did the farmers take against the judge who was taking their farms?
- What actions did the farmers take to keep food from going to market?
- What does Helene think ended the Great Depression?

Emil and Ruth Loriks (farmers)

- How much did farm produce, such as corn, wheat, and barley, cost during the Great Depression?
- Why did farmers burn wheat and corn to keep warm in the winter?
- What actions did farmers take to protect their farms?

- What was it like to be in a dust storm?