

DOROTHEA LANGE'S AMERICA

K-12 Educator's Guide



Dorothea Lange, *Woman in Trailer Camp*, California, 1940

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed as a multidisciplinary companion for K-12 educators viewing *Dorothea Lange's America* at Gilcrease Museum from September 13, 2019 - January 5, 2020. Our intent is to offer a range of learning objectives, discussion facilitation, and extension suggestions to stimulate the learning process, encourage dialogue, and connect the exhibition to the classroom curriculum. Teachers should glean from this guide what is most relevant and useful for their students.

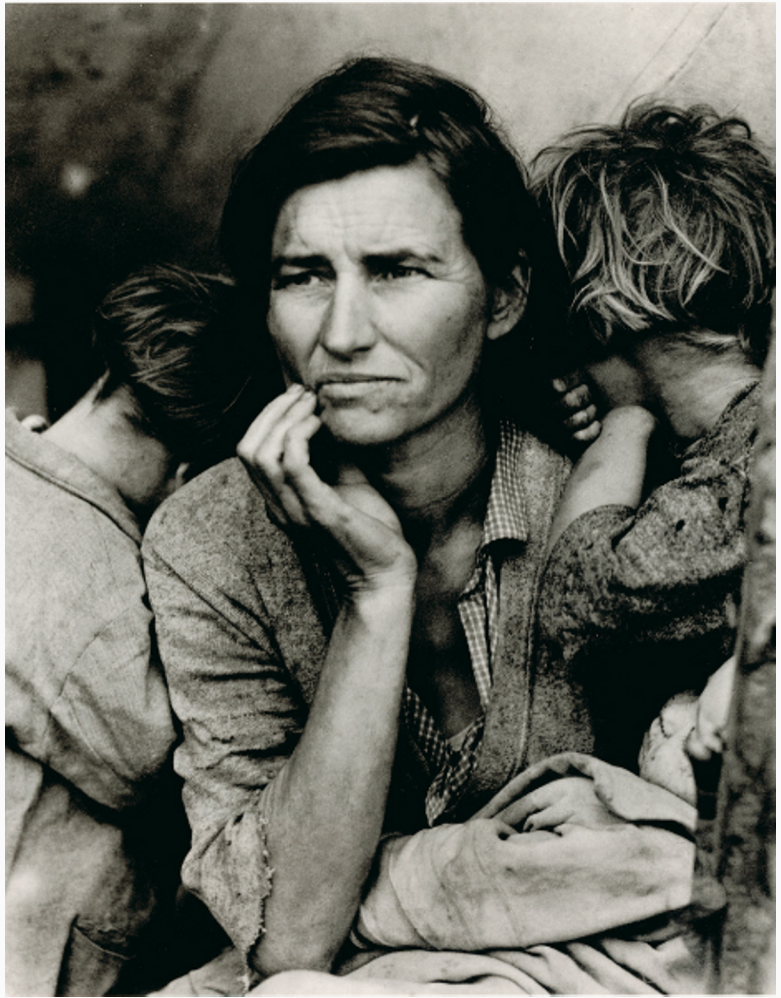
WHAT'S INSIDE

About the Exhibition	2
Essential Questions	3
Learning Objectives	3
Before you Visit	3
Exhibition Themes	4
In the Exhibition	4
Extension Activities	7
Vocabulary	8
Additional Resources	9

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Dorothea Lange's America presents the faces and stories of the Great Depression. These stories were chronicled by a group of socially conscious photographers who used their cameras and the power of photography to help the very people they documented for the Resettlement and Farm Security Administrations. This traveling exhibition from art2art Circulating Exhibitions contains 30 photographs by Dorothea Lange as well as 25 additional works by 11 other photographers working during this period.

Unique to the Gilcrease Museum presentation of *Dorothea Lange's America* is the inclusion of several additional elements that focus on the experiences of Oklahoma and Oklahomans during the Depression. Among these additions are the Migrant Mother wall (with six additional photographs); the Woody Guthrie



Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*, Nipomo, California, 1936

wall and soundtrack; the "Tractored Out" wall (with two additional photographs); the film *The Plow That Broke the Plains*; and the Oklahoma and the Great Depression gallery, with 28 additional photographs.

Pre-eminent among the RA/FSA photographers was Dorothea Lange (1895-1965). Her empathetic images documented the toll the Depression was taking on the nation. Lange's photographs made the human cost of the Depression personal by searing these images into America's consciousness. The importance of Lange's Depression-era work was recognized almost immediately and led to a long and fruitful collaboration with President Franklin Roosevelt's administration. Following World War II, she was the first woman photographer awarded a Guggenheim fellowship, helped found *Aperture* magazine, and was honored by the Museum of Modern Art with a career retrospective. Her photographs of the Great Depression helped to alleviate the suffering of the very people she chronicled by raising public awareness that eventually convinced congress to provide the financial and employment assistance they so desperately needed.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How did the photography of the RA/FSA photographers help raise the public's awareness and influence policy at the national level?
2. How can the composition of a photograph affect how the viewer understands an image?
3. What were the contributing factors that led to the Dust Bowl, and how can we learn from the past?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After visiting *Dorothea Lange's America*, students will be able to:

- Recognize Dorothea Lange as a skilled and groundbreaking photographer.
- Empathize with the suffering of the people in the photographs.
- Discuss how Dorothea Lange and other RA/FSA photographers used their photographs to influence social and political change.
- Evaluate how arrangement and composition of a photograph can affect viewers understanding.
- Recognize the Great Depression as a transformative moment for both Oklahoma and the United States.
- Identify the factors, both natural and human, that contributed to the Dust Bowl.

Before You Visit

Suggested topics and activities to explore before your visit

- Research and explore life during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl using books, videos, or websites. What was life like for families during this time? Why did many families migrate west? What did they eat and wear? What did children play with? Have students synthesize their learning into a project such as a poster presentation, an illustrated book, a poem, or a song. (Additional multi-level resources located on page 9)
- Have your students write down what they think and know about the Dust Bowl. Show the film *The Plow that Broke the Plains* and write down new information they learn. How did the understanding of the Dust Bowl change after watching the film? What was surprising? What can we do today to help to preserve and protect the land around us? (Link located on page 9-10)
- Visit the PBS website for the Ken Burns film, *The Dust Bowl*. Watch the video about the Farm Security Administration(FSA) photographers. Browse and explore the photo gallery. Why might the FSA have used photographs rather than just words and statistics to communicate with people? (Link located on page 9)

EXHIBITION THEMES

1. Art and social/political change: How Dorothea Lange and other RA/FSA photographers helped influence federal policy during the Great Depression
2. The mechanization of American agriculture
3. The Dust Bowl and the Okie Migration
4. Oklahoma's two-fold Great Depression/Dust Bowl experience
5. The dignity and resilience of rural Americans
6. Home, Family, and Community

In the Exhibition

Suggested activities to engage with the exhibition

Room One-Two: Lange's Depression Era Works

• Key Works

- Dorothea Lange, *White Angel Breadline*, San Francisco, 1933
- Migrant Mother wall: Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*, Nipomo, California, 1936
- Dorothea Lange, *Migratory Cotton Picker*, Eloy, Arizona, 1940 "Tractored Out" wall
- Dorothea Lange, *Five Tenant Farmers Without Farms*, Hardeman County, Texas, 1938
- Dorothea Lange, *Woman in Trailer Camp*, California, 1940
- Great Depression-era unemployment rate wall graphic

• Conversation Starters

- Dorothea Lange's photographs were a part of the Resettlement and Farm Security Administrations' (RA/FSA) efforts to document the Great Depression and communicate its effects to the rest of the United States. Why might the RA/FSA have used photographs rather than just words and statistics?
- How might these photographs have influenced President Franklin D. Roosevelt and congress?
- Listen to Woody Guthrie's music playing in the first gallery. How does the music you hear impact the way you experience the photographs you see around you?
- Locate the Migrant Mother wall in the first room. This wall is a series of photographs Lange took as she was approaching Florence Owens Thompson, her subject. The final image was the only image printed and distributed. Describe what each separate image shows. How are they alike? How are they different? Why do you think one became most famous?

Room Three: *The Plow That Broke the Plains*

- **Key Work**

- Pare Lorentz, *The Plow That Broke the Plains* film, 1936

- **Conversation Starters**

- Watch the film *The Plow That Broke the Plains* located in the theater gallery. Did your understanding of the Dust Bowl and Okie migration change as a result? How do you think people during the 1930s–40s reacted to seeing this film? In what ways is this film applicable to modern environmental issues?

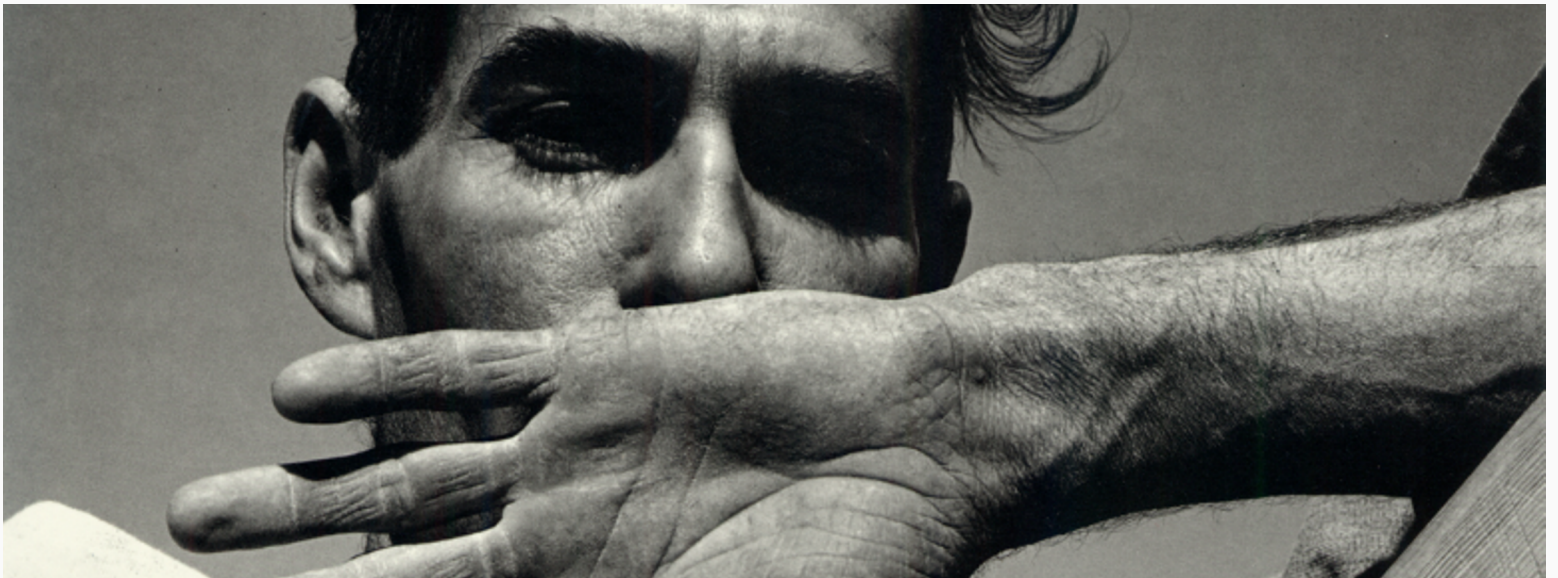
Room Four: The Great Depression in Oklahoma

- **Key Work**

- The Great Depression and Oklahoma gallery (the “darkroom”) as an experience

- **Conversation Starters**

- This room is set up to mimic a photographer's dark room. These are rooms with a safe light, usually red, that allows photographers to develop film without damaging the light sensitive paper. Each photo is accompanied by the field notes the photographers wrote about their subjects.
 - Look at each photo. What do you see? What story is being told?
 - Next, read the notes. How do the notes change your perception of the image? What message is the photographer trying to convey?
- Photographs can evoke empathy in the viewer. In what ways do these photos help viewers connect with the subjects? Think of an example that illustrates your responses.



Dorothea Lange, *Migratory Cotton Picker, Eloy, Arizona, 1940*

Room Five: Other RA/FSA Photographers

• Key Works

- Marion Post Wolcott, *Migrant vegetable pickers waiting in line to be paid*, near Homestead, Florida, 1939
- Arthur Rothstein, *Dust is too much for the son of a farmer*, Cimarron County, OK, 1936

• Conversation Starters

- Write a poem from the point of view of someone in the photographs using the template located in the gallery.
- Find a photograph that gives you a strong feeling. Talk about how it makes you feel and why.

Room Six: Non RA/FSA Depression Era Photographers and Dorothea Lange Post-Depression Work

• Key Works

- The four works (as a group) by Michael Disfarmer of Heber Springs, AR
- Doris Ulmann, *Ancient mountain couple near Selma, N.C. ("We is Still Married Up")*, 1925
- Dorothea Lange, *Bad Trouble over the Weekend*, 1964

• Conversation Starters

- A home and belongings can tell a story about the people who owned them. Find photos depicting a home or someone's belongings. What do the items in the photographs tell about their owners?
- Think about the story being told in one of the photographs. What might have happened before this moment? What might happen next?
- Dorothea Lange has a legacy as a groundbreaking documentary photographer. This room shows some of her work post-depression. How are these photos similar to or different from her Depression Era photos? If Lange were still taking photographs today, what might she photograph and why?



Russell Lee, *Part of a room in cut over farm house*, near Norhome, Minnesota, 1936

Extension Activities

Suggested activities to extend learning after your museum visit

- **Suggested Readings**

- Read one or more of the suggested books from the "Additional Resources" section together. Options for additional engagement:
 - Discuss the book as a class
 - Complete a traditional book report
 - Create an artistic representation, poem, or song related to the book

- **Think-Pair-Share**

- Many families during the Great Depression were forced to leave their homes in the Great Plains and migrate west in order to survive. They traveled with only what could fit in their car, so most of their belongings were left behind. Using Think-Pair-Share, have students think about what they would bring with them to remind them of home. Share with a partner, then share as a class.

- **Documentary Project**

- Have students work in groups to plan their own present day documentary film projects. Some questions to consider are:
 - What are some of the major political and humanitarian issues America faces today?
 - What are some issues of concern in your school or community?
 - If you were to select one of these issues to document through photography, what would you photograph? Why?
 - What places, people, or details would you show to tell the story?
 - Why would this be an effective way to spark change?
- Groups may share these project plans with the class through PowerPoint, Prezi, or other types of presentations.

- **Story Sharing**

- Listen to first hand experiences or family stories from the Great Depression. Possibilities include:
 - Bring in a guest speaker who was alive at the time
 - Listen to stories from a database such as Story Corps or the OSU Oral History Project
 - Have students interview a family member about their experience during the Great Depression or interview a family member about any family stories they know from the time.

Vocabulary

- **Great Depression** - Worldwide economic downturn that began in 1929 and lasted until about 1939. It was the longest and most severe depression ever experienced by the industrialized Western world, sparking fundamental changes in economic institutions, macroeconomic policy, and economic theory.
- **Dust Bowl** - A period of severe dust storms that greatly damaged the ecology and agriculture of the American Great Plains during the 1930s.
- **Okie** - A native or inhabitant of Oklahoma; historically, used derogatorily to describe a migrant agricultural worker from Oklahoma who had been forced to leave during the Depression of the 1930s.
- **The New Deal** - Enacted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt between 1933 and 1939; A series of U.S. laws and executive orders creating programs, public work projects, financial reforms, and regulations. It aimed to bring about immediate economic relief and reforms in industry, agriculture, finance, water power, labor, and housing and provided support for farmers, the unemployed, youth, and the elderly. Major federal programs included the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the Farm Security Administration (FSA), the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 (NIRA), Works Project Administration (WPA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA).
- **Resettlement Administration** - A New Deal agency created in 1935. It relocated struggling urban and rural families to communities planned by the federal government. The RA constructed 95 camps in California serving 75,000 people from the Great Plains region. In 1937 it became part of the Farm Security Administration.
- **Farm Security Administration** - A New Deal program created in 1937 that helped with rural rehabilitation, farm loans, and subsistence homestead programs. Farmers could use these loans to buy land, equipment, livestock, or seeds. Additionally, the FSA assisted families by providing healthcare, education, and training programs. The goal of these measures was to help families become self-sustaining. The FSA functioned until 1946.
- **Propaganda** - Ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause, or, to damage an opposing cause.
- **Composition** - The arrangement of visual elements within a work of art.
- **Darkroom** - A room with no light or with a safe-light that photographers use to develop light-sensitive photographic materials.



Dorothea Lange, *Hands*, Maynard and Dan Dixon, California, 1930

Additional Resources

Videos:

- *The Plow that Broke the Plains*: https://archive.org/details/plow_that_broke_the_plains
- PBS Ken Burns Dust Bowl Videos: <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/dustbowl/watch-videos/#2219206510>

Photos:

- PBS Dust Bowl Photo Gallery: <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/dustbowl/photos/>
- Interactive Map of RA/FSA Photography: <http://photogrammar.yale.edu/map/>
- Library of Congress RA/FSA Image Collection: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/>

Websites:

- PBS Website: <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/dustbowl/educators/overview/>
- Library of Congress Primary Sources:
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/dust-bowl-migration/>
- Archive of 1966 Dorothea Lange Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art:
<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3483>
- Getty Museum's Dorothea Lange/US History Timeline:
https://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/dorothea_lange/lange_timeline.html

Print:

- **Non-Fiction:**

- Sandler, Martin W. *The Dust Bowl Through the Lens: How Photography Revealed and Helped Remedy a National Disaster*. (New York: Walker & Co.), 2009.
- Gordon, Linda. *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 2009.
- Stanley, Jerry. *Children of the Dust Bowl: The True Story of the School at Weedpatch Camp*. (New York: Crown), 1992.

- **Fiction:**

- **Elementary School:**

- Weatherford, Carole B. *Dorothea Lange: The Photographer Who Found the Faces of the Depression*. (Albert Whitman & Company), 2017.
- Rosenstock, Barb. *Dorothea's Eyes*. (Honesdale, PA: Calken's Creek), 2016.

- **Middle School:**

- Hesse, Karen. *Out of the Dust*. (New York: Scholastic), 1997.
- Janke, Katelan. *Dear America Survival in the Storm: The Dust Bowl Diary of Grace Edwards*. (New York: Scholastic), 2002.

- **High School:**

- Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*. (New York: Viking Press), 1939.
- Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. (New York: Covici Friede), 1937.
- Lange, Dorothea. "The Assignment I'll Never Forget." *Popular Photography* 46, no. 42, (1960): 126.

Story Sharing Audio:

- Story Corps: <https://archive.storycorps.org/keywords/the-great-depression/>
- OSU Oral History Project: <https://library.okstate.edu/search-and-find/collections/digital-collections/dustbowl/>
- Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/todd-and-sonkin-migrant-workers-from-1940-to-1941/about-this-collection/>