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Causes of the Depression

The *Great Depression* was a world-wide economic disaster that lasted from 1929 until 1942. It was the greatest economic disaster in modern times and affected the lives of most people in the industrialized nations of the world. Its effects on the United States were overwhelming.

Boom to Bust

The 1920s was regarded as an era of prosperity for most people in the United States. World War I had ended, and America had become a major world power. Most businesses seemed to be thriving, and businessmen were respected as the true leaders of the country. In fact President Calvin Coolidge said, “The business of America is business,” meaning that everything else was less important.

Farm Failures

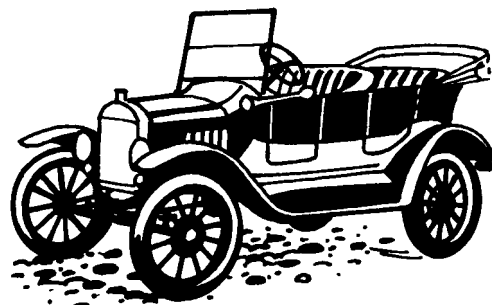
Underneath this apparent business boom, however, were some major problems. Farmers were not sharing in the general financial success. They were producing large crops, but the prices paid for farm products actually fell 40 percent. Many farmers were forced off their farms because they were unable to make the loan payments they owed to the banks.

Bank Failures

Although some banks were very successful, there were many bank failures. These failures occurred when a bank could not pay back the money that its customers had on deposit. More than 550 banks closed—mostly in agricultural areas—because the loss of farm jobs and lower prices made the economies of these communities very shaky. People who had savings in these failed banks usually lost everything.

Lower Wages

Another weakness of the 1920s boom was low pay for many factory workers. While a few businesses like Henry Ford’s automobile factories paid good wages, most factory workers were not well paid. Owners tried to squeeze every dollar of profit out of their businesses. Competition from immigrants and Southern blacks moving to the North and West made it easy for factory owners to keep wages low. Workers had to cut their personal spending in order to survive, and businesses could not sell products to people who could not afford to buy them.



The Dust Bowl Quiz

Directions: Read pages 12–14 about the Dust Bowl. Answer each question below by circling the correct answer.

- From 1931 to 1937 the Great Plains experienced
 - snowstorms
 - floods
 - drought
 - earthquakes
- Which word means a long period with no rain?
 - blizzard
 - drought
 - bumper
 - erosion
- What were black blizzards?
 - dust storms
 - hail storms
 - snowstorms
 - thunderstorms
- In which state did migrants from the Dust Bowl sometimes get work picking crops on large farms?
 - Texas
 - California
 - Oklahoma
 - Idaho
- What are *jalopies*?
 - migrant workers
 - hand carts
 - broken-down cars or trucks
 - horse-drawn wagons
- How many people from the Great Plains left during the Dust Bowl years?
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ million
 - $2\frac{1}{2}$ million
 - 1 million
 - 9,000
- How did the dust storms affect people and animals?
 - smothered them
 - killed the insects
 - made them sick
 - both a and c
- What destroyed crops besides dust storms?
 - cows
 - thunderstorms
 - grasshoppers
 - lightning
- Why was wheat bad for the soil?
 - it grew too tall
 - it did not hold the topsoil
 - it did not need rain
 - it was used to make bread
- Which was not a problem found in migrant camps?
 - too much food
 - contagious diseases
 - polluted water
 - insects