

## **Tom Joad**

### **The Basics**

#### **Time Required**

2-3 class periods

#### **Subject Areas**

US History

American Literature

The Great Depression and World War II, 1929-1945

#### **Common Core Standards Addressed:**

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

Writing Standards for English Language Arts 6-12

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### **The Lesson**

#### **Introduction**

The impact of the great Depression upon the American culture is realized in such songs as “Tom Joad” and novels such as *The Grapes of Wrath*. By looking at Woodie Guthrie’s song in particular, this lesson aims to deepen the understanding of students regarding this important time in American history.

#### **Guiding Questions**

**Hook:** “Dust Storm in Kansas” photo and map from The National Archives. What do you see? What do you think it means?

Discuss student responses.

#### **Learning Objectives**

Students will visualize the Great Depression through the songs/story of Tom Joad.

#### **Preparation Instructions**

Songs used in this lesson:

“Tom Joad” by Woodie Guthrie

“The Ghost of Tom Joad” by Bruce Springsteen

### Lesson Activities

1. On the smartboard write the word DEPRESSION. Invite the students to brainstorm what that word means to them.
2. Share an overview of The Great Depression. Info from The New Deal Website (<http://newdeal.feri.org/index.htm>): For many people, life was a daily struggle. At the peak of the Depression, 25% of the nation's workers— one out of four—were unemployed. No job meant no money to pay the mortgage or buy food and clothes for the family. Times were hard whether you lived in a city or on a farm, whether you were an adult or a child. Families unable to pay the mortgage lost their homes and farms. As a result, about 250,000 young people were homeless in the early years of the Depression. Many became nomads, traveling the highways and railways. Introduce/Review vocabulary: McAlester Pen, parole, homicide, tractor, soothing syrup, and vigilante.
3. Share with the class that today we are going to look at the Great Depression from two (possibly three—Rage Against Time has done a new version of the Bruce Springsteen lyrics) different time periods and perspectives.
4. Play the song “Tom Joad” by Woodie Guthrie. While they’re listening, ask the students to describe what they are hearing. Whose voice? What are they saying? Why?
5. Hand out the lyrics. Read them aloud.
6. Separate the students into groups of 2 or 3. Explain that today we are going to plot the story. Hand out the graphic organizers and replay the song.
7. Have groups share their work with the class.
8. Introduce/Review vocabulary: patrol, choppers, campfire, shelter line, underpass, Promised Land, and aqueduct.
9. Play the song “The Ghost of Tom Joad” by Bruce Springsteen. Again invite the students to describe what they are hearing. Whose voice? What are they saying? Why?
10. Hand out the lyrics. Read them aloud.
11. Regroup the class. Invite them to plot the story. Hand out the graphic organizers and replay the song.
12. Have groups share their work with the class.
13. Explain that we will be looking for the similarities and differences between the 2 songs. Model the lesson using 2 ordinary objects such as a pen and a pencil.
14. Regroup the class. Using the Song Comparison graphic organizer, invite students to compare and contrast the songs.
15. Have groups share their work with the class.

### Assessment

Students will write an essay comparing the different perspectives presented by the composers/artists. They will describe perspective of the 1940's and compare it to the perspective from the 1990's.

## Resources

### Lyrics

"Tom Joad"

by Woody Guthrie (written 1940 – recorded 1944)

Tom Joad got out of the old McAlester Pen;  
There he got his parole.  
After four long years on a man killing charge,  
Tom Joad come a-walkin' down the road, poor boy,  
Tom Joad come a-walkin' down the road.

Tom Joad, he met a truck driving man;  
There he caught him a ride.  
He said, "I just got loose from McAlester Pen  
On a charge called homicide,  
A charge called homicide."

That truck rolled away in a cloud of dust;  
Tommy turned his face toward home.  
He met Preacher Casey, and they had a little drink,  
But they found that his family they was gone,  
He found that his family they was gone.

He found his mother's old fashion shoe,  
Found his daddy's hat.  
And he found little Muley and Muley said,  
"They've been tractored out by the cats,  
They've been tractored out by the cats."

Tom Joad walked down to the neighbor's farm,  
Found his family.  
They took Preacher Casey and loaded in a car,  
And his mother said, "We've got to get away."  
His mother said, "We've got to get away."

Now, the twelve of the Joads made a mighty heavy load;  
But Grandpa Joad did cry.  
He picked up a handful of land in his hand,  
Said: "I'm stayin' with the farm till I die.  
Yes, I'm stayin' with the farm till I die."

They fed him short ribs and coffee and soothing syrup;  
And Grandpa Joad did die.  
They buried Grandpa Joad by the side of the road,  
Grandma on the California side,  
They buried Grandma on the California side.

They stood on a mountain and they looked to the west,  
And it looked like the promised land.  
That bright green valley with a river running through,  
There was work for every single hand, they thought,  
There was work for every single hand.

The Joads rolled away to the jungle camp,  
There they cooked a stew.  
And the hungry little kids of the jungle camp  
Said: "We'd like to have some, too."  
Said: "We'd like to have some, too."

Now a deputy sheriff fired loose at a man,  
Shot a woman in the back.  
Before he could take his aim again,  
Preacher Casey dropped him in his track, poor boy,  
Preacher Casey dropped him in his track.

They handcuffed Casey and they took him in jail;  
And then he got away.  
And he met Tom Joad on the old river bridge,  
And these few words he did say, poor boy,  
These few words he did say.

"I preached for the Lord a mighty long time,  
Preached about the rich and the poor.  
Us workin' folkses, all get together,  
'Cause we ain't got a chance anymore.  
We ain't got a chance anymore."

Now, the deputies come, and Tom and Casey run  
To the bridge where the water run down.  
But the vigilante thugs hit Casey with a club,  
They laid Preacher Casey on the ground, poor Casey,  
They laid Preacher Casey on the ground.

Tom Joad, he grabbed that deputy's club,  
Hit him over the head.  
Tom Joad took flight in the dark rainy night,  
And a deputy and a preacher lying dead, two men,  
A deputy and a preacher lying dead.

Tom run back where his mother was asleep;  
He woke her up out of bed.  
An' he kissed goodbye to the mother that he loved,  
Said what Preacher Casey said, Tom Joad,  
He said what Preacher Casey said.

"Ever'body might be just one big soul,

Well it looks that a-way to me.  
Everywhere that you look, in the day or night,  
That's where I'm a-gonna be, Ma,  
That's where I'm a-gonna be.

Wherever little children are hungry and cry,  
Wherever people ain't free.  
Wherever men are fightin' for their rights,  
That's where I'm a-gonna be, Ma.  
That's where I'm a-gonna be."

"The Ghost Of Tom Joad"  
by Bruce Springsteen (1995)

Men walkin' 'long the railroad tracks  
Goin' someplace there's no goin' back  
Highway patrol choppers comin' up over the ridge  
Hot soup on a campfire under the bridge  
Shelter line stretchin' round the corner  
Welcome to the new world order  
Families sleepin' in their cars in the southwest  
No home no job no peace no rest

The highway is alive tonight  
But nobody's kiddin' nobody about where it goes  
I'm sittin' down here in the campfire light  
Searchin' for the ghost of Tom Joad

He pulls prayer book out of his sleeping bag  
Preacher lights up a butt and takes a drag  
Waitin' for when the last shall be first and the first shall be last  
In a cardboard box 'neath the underpass  
Got a one-way ticket to the promised land  
You got a hole in your belly and gun in your hand  
Sleeping on a pillow of solid rock  
Bathin' in the city aqueduct

The highway is alive tonight  
But where it's headed everybody knows  
I'm sittin' down here in the campfire light  
Waitin' on the ghost of Tom Joad

Now Tom said "Mom, wherever there's a cop beatin' a guy  
Wherever a hungry newborn baby cries  
Where there's a fight against the blood and hatred in the air  
Look for me Mom I'll be there  
Wherever there's somebody fightin' for a place to stand  
Or a decent job or a helpin' hand  
Wherever somebody's strugglin' to be free

Look in their eyes Mom you'll see me."

The highway is alive tonight  
But nobody's kiddin' nobody about where it goes  
I'm sittin' down here in the campfire light  
With the ghost of old Tom Joad

### **Sources, Links & Further Information**

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C-Span "[Book TV](#)" interview with [Rick Wartzman](#), author of *Obscene in the Extreme: The Burning and Banning of John Steinbeck's the Grapes of Wrath*, PublicAffairs Press, September 2008.

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