

## Background for Teachers

### *The Dark Years*

It was the late 1920s and Canadians were enjoying greater prosperity than ever before. Then it all came tumbling down. Nobody saw it coming. The cigar-chomping Harry Hindmarsh, editor of the *Toronto Daily Star*, and his hardboiled newsmen would go on to chronicle the far-reaching and catastrophic consequences of the crash of '29.

Viewing history through the lively prism of an urban newsroom, *The Dark Years* blends dynamic animation and an epic cast of characters with documentary authenticity and a zippy narrative to chart the years of the Great Depression.

Popular history at its most entertaining and pertinent, this program deftly frames the stories of ordinary folk against the big issues of the day — mass poverty, widespread unrest and the looming threat of fascism. Prime ministers, celebrity aviators and visiting royals share the stage with prairie farmers, bankrupted office girls and railriding hoboes. Both the style and subjects of *The Dark Years* make it well-suited for the secondary school classroom.

This document has been designed to help teachers in Grades 9-12 use this series in History, English or Media Studies courses. In the pages that follow, you will find:

- A **Film Chronology**, outlining the issues and events addressed in each episode.
- A **5-Day Unit Plan**, to use all three episodes, over five days.
- Three **Lesson Plans**, to use a single episode in one class period
- **Activity Sheets**, to help students focus on important questions as they watch the film
- **Activity Sheet Answers**

The DVD is available for sale on line at [www.nfb.ca/store](http://www.nfb.ca/store) or by calling the NFB's toll-free customer service line at: 1-800-267-7710. More information about these and other educational films can be found on the NFB Web site: [www.nfb.ca](http://www.nfb.ca). Extensive collections of NFB productions are also available at partner libraries across Canada.

## **Film Chronology:** ***The Dark Years***

### Episode 1 (46 min, 58 s)

- 0:00 The end of the 1920s – Roaring 20s – aviation
- 7:48 The “Crash”
- 11:20 Implications of The Crash – unemployment – assistance
- 23:25 Riding the rails, work camps, dealing with the unemployed
- 29:40 Communists
- 37:30 Kingston penitentiary

### Episode 2 (46 min, 53 s)

- 0:00 Prime Minister R.B. Bennett and aid
- 10:30 Effects of the Depression and the story of the Bates family
- 20:00 The Dionne Quintuplets
- 25:00 Arthur Evans and workers’ rights – On to Ottawa Trek – strikes
- 35:00 Crime figures turned heroes – Red Ryan
- 42:30 Prime Minister R.B. Bennett and fireside chats – promises of change

### Episode 3 (46 min, 20 s)

- 0:00 Farming and grasshoppers
- 5:00 The commercialization of the Dionne Quintuplets
- 10:00 The mine collapse in Nova Scotia, story of hope – Moose River
- 15:50 The working class – GM – working conditions – unions
- 20:00 Oshawa strikes – breaking communism
- 25:00 The Spanish Civil War
- 33:20 The rise of fascism
- 37:00 The return of the Canadian veterans
- 38:40 The visit of the King and Queen of Britain – French Canadians
- 42:00 The advent of the war industry – World War II
- 44:00 Conclusion

## **5-Day Unit Plan:** ***The Dark Years, Episodes 1-3***

### Overview

This week-long unit is based on viewing Episodes 1, 2 and 3 of *The Dark Years*, in which animated versions of Harry Hindmarsh (editor of the *Toronto Daily Star*) and his fellow newsmen chronicle the events of the Great Depression. During this unit, students will generate their own perspectives by producing a newspaper article, as well as an advertisement, horoscope, or crossword puzzle (or other, in consultation with their teacher). At the end of the unit, students should be able to explain the major events and themes of the Great Depression and how newspaper companies obtained and reported information during the 1930s.

### Day 1 Instructions

- The teacher presents the elements of a successful newspaper article, making reference to clarity of style, use of evidence and attention to audience. The teacher also addresses the physical layout of newspaper pages, making reference to headlines, leads, etc. (For more information, see [www.media-awareness.ca](http://www.media-awareness.ca), and search “News Journalism: Lesson Two.”)
- Students review the Film Chronology (see attached) and select from it the topic for their newspaper article.
- Students view *Episode 1* and complete Activity Sheet 1 (see the following page) as they watch the film.

### Day 2 Instructions

- Students view *Episode 2* and complete Activity Sheet 2 as they watch the film.
- Student will research their topic using classroom materials.

### Day 3 Instructions

- Students view *Episode 3* and complete Activity Sheet 3 as they watch the film.
- Students conduct further research about their selected topic, answering questions that the film may have raised about their topic.
- Students decide on their advertisement, horoscope, crossword puzzle (or other, in consultation with their teacher) and conduct research for this.

### Day 4 Instructions

- Students write a first draft of their articles and create a first draft of their horoscope, etc.
- Each checks his or her article against the criteria developed on day 1 and proofread one other student’s draft.

### Day 5 Instructions

- Students type and print their articles in the classroom or computer lab and organize these, like a newspaper, on large sheets of Bristol board or paper.
- Students assemble and bind their sheets into a single newspaper.

## **Lesson Plan:** ***The Dark Years, Episode 1***

### Overview and Instructions

*Episode 1* chronicles the early years of the Great Depression, focusing on the Stock Market Crash of 1929, mass unemployment and the rise of the Communist Party of Canada. Students should complete Activity Sheet 1 as they watch the film.

### Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of “scoops” were important for newspapers in the 1930s? Are the same kinds of scoops important today?
2. How did Canadians benefit from the competition among newspapers?
3. Why did Prime Minister Mackenzie King tell Canadians that the Stock Market Crash would have little impact on Canada?
4. Should prime ministers try to minimize citizens’ anxieties during a crisis?
5. While the economic conditions in the 1930s prevented many people from spending money on consumer goods, the newspaper industry was surprisingly profitable. Why?

### Extension Questions and Activities

1. Provide students with newspaper articles. The students must summarize the article in 100 words, then answer the following questions:
  - Why is this article more newsworthy than other articles?
  - Do you think your article might be more important to the person sitting beside you? Less important? If so, why?
  - How do you think newspaper reporters cope with the challenge of appealing to the diverse readers of their newspapers?
  - On what page was your article printed? Why do you think your article was placed here and not on the first or last page of the newspaper?
2. Before viewing *Episode 1*, have students write a paragraph predicting the consequences of a present-day economic collapse. After viewing the film, students are to revisit their paragraphs and write an additional paragraph reflecting on how their predictions about the present were similar or different from the reality of the Great Depression in the 1930s.
3. Students create a timeline to highlight the major events of the Great Depression, as described in the film. Place the timeline on the classroom wall.

**Activity Sheet 1**  
***The Dark Years, Episode 1***

As you watch the film, make notes in response to the following questions:

1. What is the name of the plane that crashed in Labrador?
2. What happened during the Crash of '29?
3. What was the extreme response of some people to the financial crisis?
4. What promise did Prime Minister R.B. Bennett and his Conservative Party make to get elected in 1930?
5. Which party was rising to power in Germany on a promise of solving unemployment?
6. What was the “jungle”? What happened to the people who lived here who could no longer cope with the Great Depression?
7. How did unemployed men travel around the country, without paying? What was this called?
8. What program did the government set up to deal with the unemployment crisis?
9. Where were the convicted members of the Communist Party of Canada taken, and what were the conditions there?

**Answer Sheet 1 Answers**  
***The Dark Years, Episode 1***

1. What happened during the Crash of '29? (The stock market crashed as share prices collapsed, and investors sold their stocks at steep losses. As a result, investment in business activity declined substantially. Stock valuations would not return to the same levels until the mid-1950s.)
2. What was the extreme response of some people to the financial crisis? (Some people responded to financial ruin by committing suicide.)
3. What promise did Prime Minister R.B. Bennett and his Conservative Party make to get elected in 1930? (They promised that they would create better working conditions and a job for every man.)
4. Which party was rising to power in Germany on a promise of solving unemployment? (The Nationalist Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party)
5. What was the "jungle"? What happened to the people who lived here who could no longer cope with the Great Depression? (The jungle, with a lack of food and water, was where homeless people lived.)
6. How did unemployed men travel around the country, without paying? What was this called? (These men travelled on unused railway cars; this practice was known as "riding the rails.")
7. What program did the government set up to deal with the unemployment crisis? (The government set up military-run labour camps at various locations across the country.)
8. Where were the convicted members of the Communist Party of Canada taken, and what were the conditions there? (They were taken to Kingston penitentiary; they were fed poor-quality food; they were not allowed to exercise; they were beaten.)

## **Lesson Plan:** ***The Dark Years, Episode 2***

### Overview and Instructions

*Episode 2* chronicles the middle years of the Great Depression, including the election and administration of Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, the media frenzy surrounding the Dionne Quintuplets and the On to Ottawa Trek. Students should complete Activity Sheet 2 as they watch the film.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why were some people reluctant to accept aid during the Great Depression? How did accepting aid affect other aspects of people's lives?
2. Many people wrote letters to the Prime Minister, asking for money, during the Great Depression. If you were going to ask for financial or material aid, what would you say to guarantee that you received it?
3. Why did Canadians blame the federal government for the Great Depression, when the federal government was not at fault for creating the Great Depression? Why do Canadians hold governments accountable for events for which those governments may not be at fault?
4. What would you have said to the Canadian people if you had been Prime Minister R.B. Bennett campaigning for re-election in 1935?
5. How would the economy have affected students your age during the 1930s?
6. If you distributed aid to Canadians in the 1930s, to whom would you give the highest priority? Why?

### Extension Questions and Activities

1. Write a letter, as a Canadian during the 1930s, to Prime Minister R.B. Bennett or Prime Minister Mackenzie King, asking for financial help.
2. Research items that a family of four in the 1930s would need to survive – housing, food, and essentials such as clothing and hygiene items.
3. After watching the story of the Bates family, brainstorm items that Canadians, such as the Bates family, might have asked for, other than money. Hold a used item collection in your classroom to collect items for a charitable organization.

**Activity Sheet 2**  
***The Dark Years, Episode 2***

As you watch the film, make notes in response to the following questions:

1. How did Prime Minister R.B. Bennett respond to the public outcry for help?
2. How did the lawyers for the jailed members of the Communist Party of Canada respond when Prime Minister Bennett ignored their demands?
3. What happened to the Bates family? Why did they act the way that they did?
4. How did the *Toronto Daily Star* cut costs during the economic downturn?
5. What was the big new story from Callander, Ontario?
6. What did Arthur “Slim” Evans do in the work camps?
7. What was the name of the massive movement of unemployed workers who were challenging government inaction on the Depression? How did Prime Minister Bennett respond?
8. What was the result of the discussions between Arthur “Slim” Evans and Prime Minister Bennett?
9. Who was Canada’s infamous bank robber, and why was he admired?
10. What did Prime Minister Bennett decide as a result of the Red Ryan incident?



## **Activity Sheet 2 Answers**

### ***The Dark Years, Episode 2***

1. How did Prime Minister R.B. Bennett respond to the public outcry for help? (The Prime Minister told the public to stop complaining, because previous generations of Canadians had lived without government help.)
2. How did the lawyers for the jailed members of the Communist Party of Canada respond when Prime Minister Bennett ignored their demands? (They held a stage play entitled *Eight Men Speak* in an attempt to appeal to the public for justice.)
3. What happened to the Bates family? Why did they act the way that they did? (The family closed their shop due to a lack of business. They were unable to get aid in Vancouver or in Saskatoon and were too ashamed to ask for aid in their hometown. They attempted suicide and killed their son in the process.)
4. How did the *Toronto Daily Star* cut costs during the economic downturn? (Cost-cutting efforts included firings, turning in pencil stubs, turning off lights and giving reporters multiple stories.)
5. What was the big new story from Callander, Ontario? (The Dionne Quintuplets were born.)
6. What did Arthur “Slim” Evans do in the work camps? (He inspired the workers to protest against the government until they received better working conditions. Eventually the relief camp union organized a mass walkout in Vancouver.)
7. What was the name of the massive movement of unemployed workers who were challenging government inaction on the Depression? How did Prime Minister Bennett respond? (The movement was called the On to Ottawa Trek. Prime Minister Bennett had it halted in Regina.)
8. What was the result of the discussions between Arthur “Slim” Evans and Prime Minister Bennett? (The men rioted after Prime Minister Bennett stated that they would not receive assistance.)
9. Who was Canada’s infamous bank robber and why was he admired? (The bank robber was known as Red Ryan. He was viewed as someone who battled a broken economic and political system.)
10. What did Prime Minister Bennett decide as a result of the Red Ryan incident? (Prime Minister Bennett spoke to the public via radio and announced political changes such as the minimum wage and unemployment insurance.)

## **Lesson Plan:** ***The Dark Years, Episode 3***

### Overview and Instructions

*Episode 3* chronicles the closing years of the Great Depression, focusing on labour unrest, the rise of fascism in Europe and the beginning of World War II. Students should complete Activity Sheet 3 as they watch the film.

### Discussion Questions

1. According to Harry Hindmarsh (the film's narrator), the Great Depression would only be solved when individual men and women changed the way that they lived. Was this statement true in the context of the 1930s? Why or why not?
2. What role can the media play in small-scale economic crises such as labour strikes, or large-scale crises such as economic depressions?
3. Does the news media tend to take sides (such as that of workers, or the business class) during an economic crisis? If so, why?
4. How did the events of the Great Depression support German leader Adolf Hitler's rise to power? What personal qualities and policies helped him convince people that he had a solution to their economic problems?

### Extension Questions and Activities

1. Students participate in a placemat brainstorming activity on working conditions, and what the students expect in their own jobs. Divide student into five groups of equal size. Give each group a placemat with one of the following titles:

- Security I expect from my employer/company
- Safety conditions I expect in my workplace
- Freedoms I expect to have on the job
- Responsibilities I owe my employer
- Protection I expect from the government

Each group of student writes as many ideas as they can in two minutes, then passes their placemat to the next group. After each group has written on each placemat, the teacher leads the class in a brainstorming session focused on how men and women in the 1930s would have responded to the placemat statements. The teacher highlights how responses in the 1930s might have been similar or different to the responses of today.

2. Before watching *Episode 3*, have each student consider how she/he would have run a company during the Great Depression. Each student divides a sheet of paper into four sections – “Production,” “Working Conditions/Safety,” “Wages” and “Technology.” Each student can spend \$10,000 on her/his company. While watching the film, the student must allocate a portion of the \$10,000 in the four sections. Following the film, each student must explain their decision.
3. Have the class debate which economic system – capitalism or communism – best responded to the Great Depression. Students prepare for the debate by researching their economic system and preparing arguments in its defence. Have students produce posters highlighting the key issues that support their side.

**Activity Sheet 3**  
***The Dark Years, Episode 3***

As you watch the film, make notes in response to the following questions:

1. What attacked crops on the Prairies?
2. What was Mr. Dionne's solution to the financial challenge of raising the Dionne Quintuplets?
3. What Nova Scotia story caught the public's attention? What aspect of this story gave readers hope?
4. What corporation continued to make money during the Depression and how?
5. Critics of Mitch Hepburn said that his approach to workers was similar to that of another major political leader of the time. Who was that leader?
6. How did Canadians respond to the Spanish Civil War?
7. Which armies aided Franco's rebel army during the Spanish Civil War? How did these armies benefit from their involvement in the war?
8. How were Canadian veterans of the Spanish Civil War treated upon their return to Canada and why?
9. How did French Canadians receive the King and Queen of Britain? Why did this reaction surprise some observers?
10. What event eased the unemployment that had plagued Canada through the Great Depression? What were the Canadians who took these new jobs producing?

**Activity Sheet 3 Answers**  
***The Dark Years, Episode 3***

1. What attacked crops on the Prairies? (Many crops were attacked by swarms of grasshoppers.)
2. What Nova Scotia story caught the public's attention? What aspect of this story gave readers hope? (A mine collapsed in Moose River, Nova Scotia, and the workers struggled to help the trapped owner and managers. Previously, employees had challenged their bosses.)
3. Critics of Mitch Hepburn said that his approach to workers was similar to that of another major political leader of the time. Who was that leader? (Adolf Hitler)
4. How did Canadians respond to the Spanish Civil War? (1200 volunteers travelled to Spain to fight alongside Loyalists and defend democracy. These volunteers fought without the support of the Canadian government.)
5. Which armies aided Franco's rebel army during the Spanish Civil War? How did these armies benefit from their involvement in the war? (The Italian and German armies aided Franco's army; they benefited from testing their new military inventions.)
6. How were Canadian veterans of the Spanish Civil War treated upon their return to Canada and why? (Very few people welcomed the soldiers upon their return; few Canadians were worried even in far-away Europe.)
7. How did French Canadians receive the King and Queen of Britain? Why did this reaction surprise some observers? (Millions of French Canadians greeted the King and Queen. This was a surprise because French-English relations had been strained.)
8. What event eased the unemployment that had plagued Canada through the Great Depression? What were the Canadians who took these new jobs producing? (Jobs were created as war industries emerged. These Canadians were producing ammunitions, vehicles and weapons.)