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[Inquiry-Based Primary Source Lesson Template: The 1927 Vermont Flood](#)

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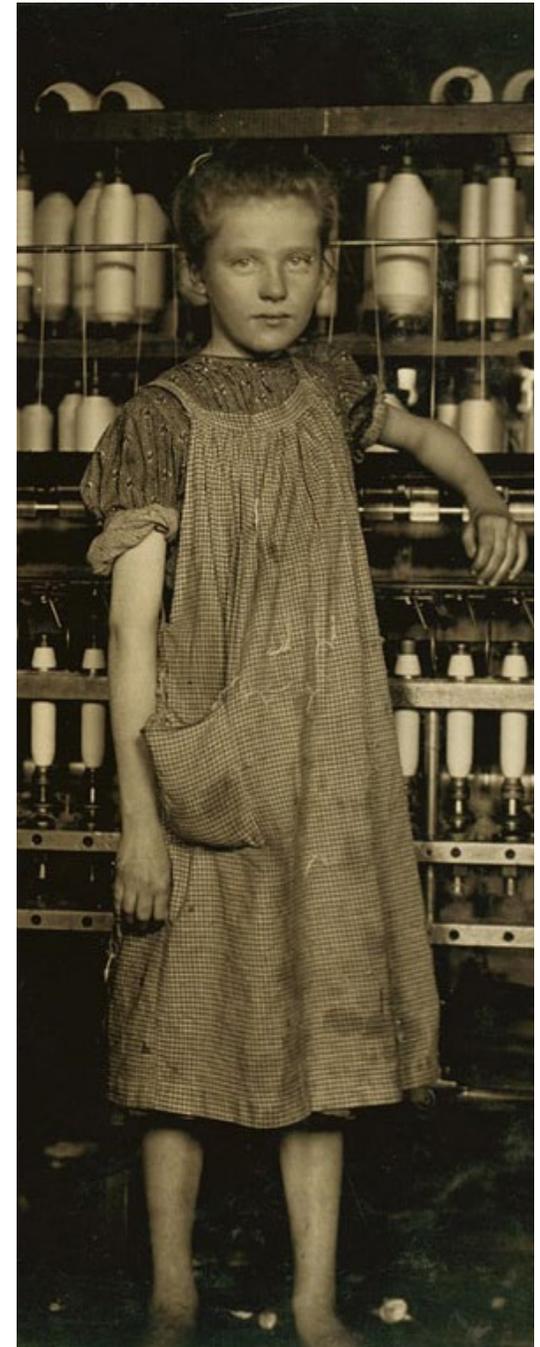
## America in Transition in the Early Twentieth Century: Teaching about Child Labor and the Flood of 1927

This issue of the Flow of History newsletter brings together the themes of both programs we have been running in 2012-13: Village Life and Modernization. During the latter part of the year both courses examined significant changes in American life that were happening around the turn of the 20th century. The Village Life groups focused on the experience of children, reading *A Little Girl's Diary: Life on a Farm in Strafford, Vermont* (1911), and *Counting on Grace*, the wonderful novel by Elizabeth Winthrop that explores the complexity of the child labor problem through the eyes of a French Canadian mill girl. The Modernization of America groups studied the epic floods of 1927 in the Mississippi Delta and Vermont. They considered what the consequences of and responses to these natural disasters reveal about how society was being transformed by the process we call modernization. We present here activities associated with each of these topics, which combine close reading of informational text and primary sources in a **Common Core** framework.

### *Counting on Grace: Using Historical Fiction in the Classroom*

The young adult novel *Counting on Grace* (2007), by Elizabeth Winthrop, is a superb example of historical fiction. The narrator, Grace, is a 12-year-old French-Canadian girl whose family works in a textile mill in a small Vermont town in 1910. The drama in the story revolves around the tension between families' need for the income contributed by children working, and children's desires to go to school and improve their opportunities in life. The

famous photographer Lewis Hine, whose images of children working galvanized the movement to reform child labor laws, plays a prominent role in the story. The book portrays the complexity of the problem with sympathy and historical accuracy. It offers students many ways to engage Common Core literacy and historical thinking skills, as well as to grapple with contemporary child labor issues.



## Web Resources about Child Labor

For some background on Lewis Hine and his work with the National Child Labor Committee: [Teaching With Documents: Photographs of Lewis Hine: Documentation of Child Labor](#)

## Contemporary Connections

### [Contemporary Connections in India.](#)

[Between a Rock and a Hard Pace: A history of American Sweatshops 1820 - Present](#)

[Made in LA documentary](#)

[T-Shirt Travels](#) (PBS site)  
[YouTube version](#)

[Facts and Figures: The Cotton Trade](#)

[Journey of a T-shirt Wiki –6th Grade Social Studies Unit](#)

[Glogster Social Action Poster](#)



The model Common Core lesson we walked through with teachers combines literature, close reading of informational texts, and primary source analysis, in this case photographs. The Flow of History has adapted the Vermont Department of Education's template for organizing a Short Focused Research Project, to include Historical Thinking Skills and emphasize the Inquiry process. It's presented here in detail (see pages 3-5); what follows is a brief summary of the lesson.

The lesson begins with a close read of a piece of informational text to activate prior knowledge. We used an article from the Vermont Historical Society called "The Bitter Cry of the Children," which includes a brief overview of child labor in Vermont and the U.S. as well as images. The article is read aloud, then the text is chunked and students read it themselves and define vocabulary, underline important passages, and summarize. Next the class reads *Counting on Grace*, using reading strategies of the teacher's choice. The book is first discussed from a literary point of view: who are the characters, what is the plot, etc. Then the class discusses the book as historical fiction, relating the novel to the informational text. Here we emphasize that both types of writing—history and historical fiction—have a point of view, and one of our objectives is to uncover and understand the author's point of view. To

further underscore this point, we read a passage about child labor from a textbook—in this case *A History of US* by Joy Hakim—and compared it's stance on the issue with the point of view presented in *Counting on Grace*. (We concluded that the description in the textbook is somewhat simplistic and the description in the novel is more complex.)

If you have ever seen the Hine photographs of children working in textile mills in Vermont, it's apparent that the author of *Counting on Grace* used some of them to write passages of the novel. We looked at a variety of these images and then asked teachers to find the passages inspired by or based on the photos. How did Elizabeth Winthrop use these historical sources to write her novel?

The close read of the informational text, the novel, and the primary sources beautifully sets the stage for student inquiry. These activities inspire students to generate questions and wonder about

the circumstances of families like Grace's and the children in the photographs. One place to search for answers is the census. On the Vermont Historical Society website there is a lesson that teaches students how to use the census to research the lives of these children who worked. ([vermonthistory.org](#)). In the lesson we designed, culminating activities included creating a facsimile of the "perfect little notebook" that Lewis Hine used to record his observations, writing a persuasive essay to the Child Labor Committee about what is happening in Vermont, and/or researching a contemporary child labor issue and considering the kinds of social action students could take to address the problem.



The Vermont Historical Society has posted online some rich lessons about child labor pegged to grades 4 and 5. One set involves examining Lewis Hine photos of children at work in Vermont and around the country. Students are asked to distinguish between primary and secondary sources, to analyze the images using Visual Thinking Skills, to compare and contrast the photographs from Vermont and other places, and to write a short essay comparing the life of a child in 1900 with the life of a child today. Another teaches students to use census records to learn more about the lives and families of the children in Hine's photographs. You can find these at: [vermonthistory.org](#).

## Inquiry-Based Primary Source Lesson Template: Child Labor



In 1904, the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) was formed to try and change the laws and protect the rights of children. The NCLC did not argue that children should never work, for chores at home and on the farm were and still are a part of growing up. But the NCLC opposed jobs for children that lasted ten to twelve hours a day, week after week, year after year.

— from “The Bitter Cry of the Children”

### Curriculum Context—What is the content/topic for the lesson? Child Labor in the United States during the Progressive Era.

#### Content Grade Expectations(s) | History & Social Sciences | Grade 6-8

##### Students show understanding of how humans interpret history by...

- Identifying different types of primary and secondary sources (for example, visual, literary, and musical sources), and evaluating the possible biases expressed in them (e.g., analyzing Paul Revere’s engraving of the Boston Massacre).

##### Students examine how access to various institutions affects justice, reward, and power by...

- Identifying and describing examples of tensions between belief systems and government policies and laws, and identifying ways these tensions can be reduced

#### Common Core State Standards: Include at least one writing standard, one reading standard, one speaking and listening standard that will be taught and assessed

##### Writing Standard(s)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1](#) Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

##### Reading Standard(s)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6](#) Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7](#) Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9](#) Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

##### Listening Standard(s)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.4](#) Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

#### Historical Thinking Skills: [Standards in Historical Thinking](#)

Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations  
Interrogate historical data  
Formulate a position or course of action on an issue

#### Enduring Understanding: What’s the big idea?

The actions of individuals, groups, and/or institutions affect society through intended and unintended consequences

#### Focusing Questions:

- How did children help their families to meet basic needs?
- What were some differing opinions about child labor?
- How can people advocate for change?



Assessment Evidence	
<p><b>Formative Assessment Practices:</b> Assessments that use evidence of learning to adapt instruction in real time to meet students' immediate learning needs.</p> <p>Close read of "The Bitter Cry of the Children" activates prior knowledge about child labor.</p> <p>Students will create a facsimile of Lewis Hine's "Perfect Little Notebook" to show their understanding of child labor in Vermont.</p>	<p><b>Summative Assessment:</b> Performance Task (e.g., presentation, paper, video, blog):</p> <p>Persuasive letter detailing child labor conditions and suggestions for change.</p>
Texts/Resources	
<p>Informational Text that provides the background knowledge/historical context:</p> <p>"The Bitter Cry of the Children"</p>	<p><b>Primary Sources:</b> Lewis Hine Photographs Historical Census Records</p>
Vocabulary	
<p><i>What academic vocabulary is essential for this lesson?</i></p> <p>Context, interpret, analyze, research</p>	<p><i>What vocabulary is needed for a close-read of the texts?</i></p> <p>Labor, doffer, spinner, bobbin, frame, advocate, perspective</p>
Instructional Process	
<p><i>How will reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language be incorporated throughout the lesson?</i></p> <p><i>How will the students use historical thinking skills in the lesson?</i></p> <p><i>How will the informational text and primary sources be investigated?</i></p> <p><b>Questions to consider as you develop an instructional plan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect: How will learners be engaged in the content and skills? What process for a close read of the informational text will allow students to gain the background knowledge they need to ask good questions of the primary sources?</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students will acquire historical context by reading together "The Bitter Cry of the Children." The close read process is:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. number the paragraphs</li> <li>b. chunk the text and read each chunk together, defining words as needed</li> <li>c. underline key phrases in the chunks</li> <li>d. in the margin, summarize in less than 10 words what the author is saying in the chunk</li> <li>e. at the bottom, summarize what changed</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Students read <i>Counting on Grace</i> and discuss first from a literary point of view for setting, character, plot, etc.</li> <li>3. Students discuss <i>Counting on Grace</i> as a piece of historical fiction.             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. History as having a point of view or argument by comparing the novel's stance on child labor to a textbook's description.</li> <li>b. History as being constructed from sources by analyzing Lewis Hine photographs and matching them to passages in the novel.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	



By 1914, thirty-five states had made it illegal to employ children under fourteen years old, and limited the work day to eight hours for those under sixteen years of age. By the 1930s, child labor was beginning to disappear.

— from “The Bitter Cry of the Children”

*How did the author use the photographs to write the story?*

- **Wonder:** *How will students develop higher-order questions to ask of the primary sources?*  
Students generate questions about child labor  
What work did children do? How old were they? Why did they need to work?  
What was their family circumstance? # children? Immigrants? Who worked?
- **Investigate:** *What process will students use to closely read and investigate the primary sources? If students are to find their own primary sources, where will they find them?*  
Source: Lewis Hine photographs; Process: Visual Thinking and Scaffolded Questioning  
Source: US Census Records; Process: Scaffolded Questioning
- **Construct:** *When and how will students work together as they investigate and draw conclusions? How will I support students to organize and synthesize information to answer the research question?*  
Students will create a facsimile “Perfect Little Notebook” with 2-column note taking
- **Express:** *How will students express new ideas and share learning with others? What technology might they use?*  
Students will write a persuasive letter to the Child Labor Committee providing details about child labor in Vermont and suggestions for reasonable change.
- **Reflect:** *How will I help the students reflect on the significance of the information?*  
Students will examine a Child Labor Law timeline and see what changes took place.
- **Connect:** *How will new understandings and questions connect to the next lesson?*  
The next lesson will focus on geography and social action. Students will research global child labor issues today and look at how various organizations are addressing it. They will then identify a concern of their own and choose to either write a persuasive letter or take on a photo action project as Lewis Hine did. For instance, lack of recycling in a community might result in photographs documenting plastic litter or a persuasive letter to the regional recycling agency.





## Teaching the Vermont Flood of 1927: A Common Core Approach

In the spring of 1927, it rained for weeks in the midsection of the country. At the end of April the Mississippi River and many of its tributaries reached record flood levels: more than 27,000 square miles of land, populated by more than a million people, was inundated, an area larger than the states of Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut combined. Then, in early November, an odd confluence of weather systems produced the worst flooding in Vermont's history. 84 people were killed, many miles of railroad track were washed away, and property damage was estimated at more than \$30 million.

These disasters occurred during a transitional time in U.S. history when the contours of what we would recognize today as the familiar markers of our social, cultural, and political life were taking shape. Historians have made a compelling case that both floods, and the response of people and governments to them, helped accelerate some of the trends of modernization that were already underway—Mississippi especially on the national level, and Vermont on the state level.

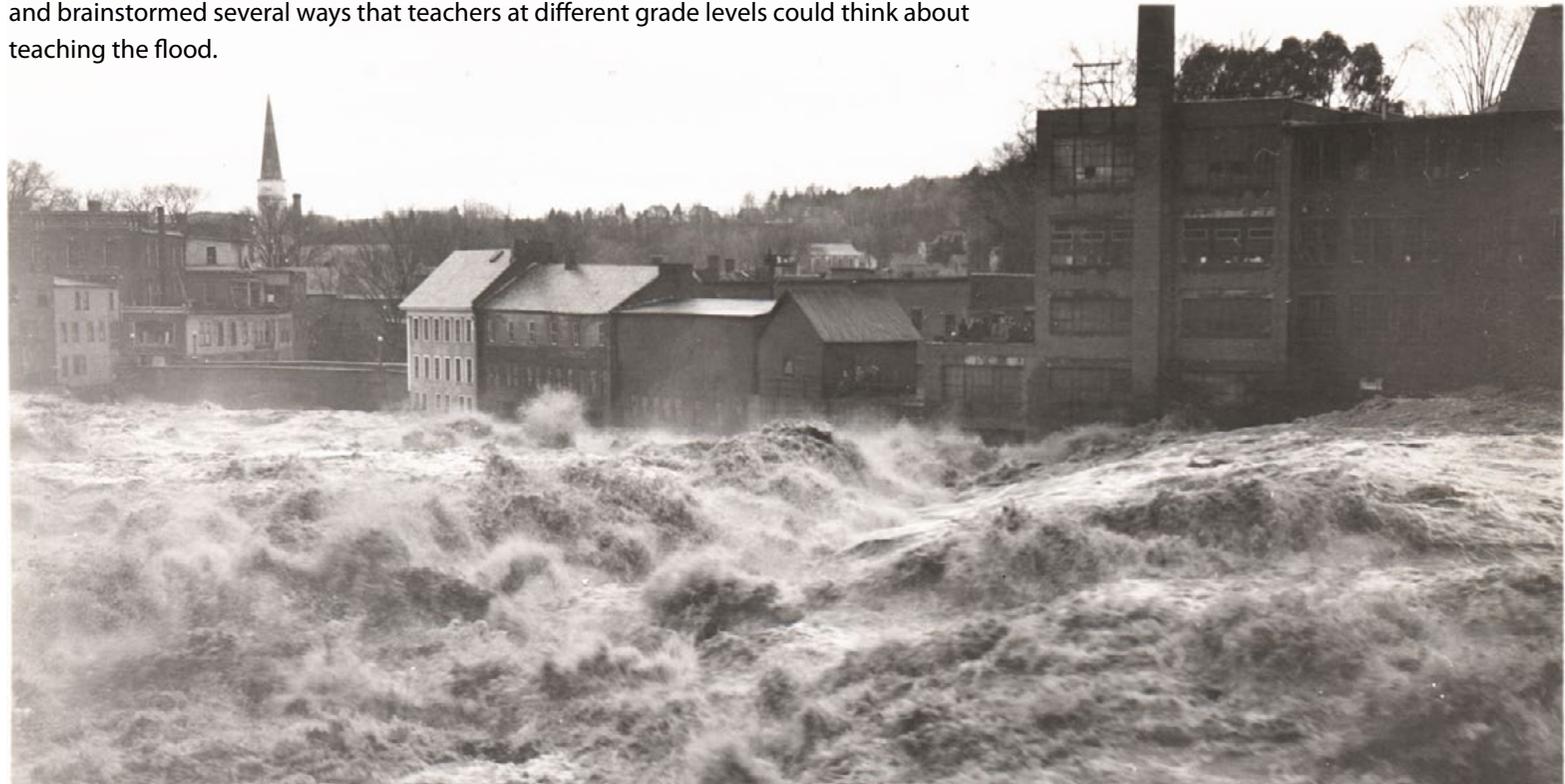
As a significant episode in Vermont history that has strong resonance today in the wake of Tropical Storm Irene in 2011, Superstorm Sandy in 2012, and deepening public awareness of the dramatic realities of climate change, the Flood of 1927 is a historical event rich with teaching possibilities. As with *Counting on Grace* and child labor, the Flow of History prepared a model Common Core-aligned historical inquiry template, based on the Vermont Department of Education's short focused research project template, and brainstormed several ways that teachers at different grade levels could think about teaching the flood.

In November, an odd confluence of weather systems produced the worst flooding in Vermont's history.

84 people were killed, many miles of railroad track were washed away, and property damage was estimated at more than \$30 million.



Images courtesy of the  
Vermont Historical Society.



Here are the ideas we came up with for topics, themes, and Enduring Understandings:

### Topics and themes

- \* Impact of the 1927 flood in Vermont
  - People helping other people
  - Accelerating shifts toward cars over trains and away from town toward state responsibility
  - Planning for the future
- \* Comparing the flood of 1927 with Tropical Storm Irene
  - People helping other people
  - Changes in public thinking about issues
  - Planning for the future

- \* How people respond to disasters
  - Then and now
  - Balancing personal freedom and community needs
  - Dealing with climate change

### Enduring Understandings

- \* Strong communities are resilient when faced with challenges.
- \* Natural disasters can be catalysts for change.
- \* Planning enables communities to minimize the disruptions that result from natural disasters or problems like climate change.

In class, we worked through one set of activities, outlined in the accompanying inquiry template, and then turned people loose to begin designing their own lessons appropriate to their curriculum and interests.

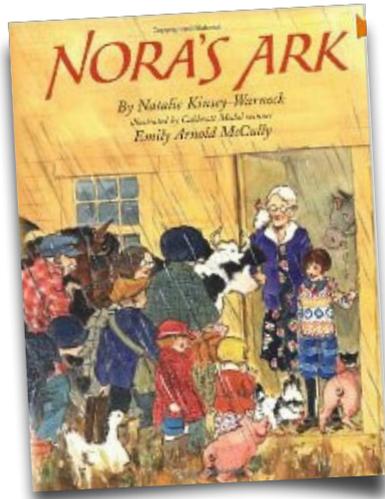
This elementary-level lesson used photographs of the 1927 flood, a quote from Herbert Hoover, and oral histories for primary sources, a picture book, and a brief informational text. The book, *Nora's Ark* by Natalie Kinsey-Warnock, tells the story of the flood through the eyes of a young girl as friends, neighbors, and their animals arrive at her house for shelter as the waters rise. "[Rain, Rain, and Still More Rain](#)," published by the Vermont Historical Society and available on their website, is an overview of the flood and its aftermath.

After listening to the teacher read *Nora's Ark* and conducting a close read of "Rain, Rain," students would be given the Hoover quote, a group of flood photographs, and some of the oral history transcripts.

Their task is then to identify statements in the transcripts that connect to the photographs, using a worksheet with scaffolded questions for guidance in analyzing the sources. Finally, they would write a paragraph explaining the meaning of Hoover's statement, using the primary sources as evidence.

The combination of a literary text, an informational text, and different kinds of primary sources, and the exercises of analyzing visual and documentary evidence and synthesizing all of this through writing in response to a prompt, is all aligned with Common Core standards. See the accompanying inquiry template for additional details.

On the Vermont History Explorer website developed by the Vermont Historical Society, you can find some of the resources used in this lesson as well as others and more lessons: [vermonthistory.org/explorer/vermont-az/vermont-ef/203-floodof1927az](http://vermonthistory.org/explorer/vermont-az/vermont-ef/203-floodof1927az)



*"I have seen Vermont  
at its worst, but I have also seen  
Vermonters at their best."*

– Herbert Hoover



Image courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.

## Inquiry-Based Primary Source Lesson Template: The 1927 Vermont Flood

<p><b>Curriculum Context—What is the content/topic for the lesson?</b>  <b>The 1927 Vermont flood.</b></p>		
<p><b>Content Grade Expectations(s)   History &amp; Social Sciences   Grade 4</b></p> <p><b>Students show understanding of how humans interpret history by...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying and using various sources for reconstructing the past, such as documents, letters, diaries, maps, textbooks, photos, and others. i</li> </ul> <p><b>Students show understanding of past, present, and future time by...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying an important event in their communities and/or Vermont, and describing a cause and an effect of that event (e.g., Excessive rain caused the flood of 1927, and as a result communication systems have changed to warn people.).</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Common Core State Standards: Include at least one writing standard, one reading standard, one speaking and listening standard that will be taught and assessed.</b></p>		
<p><b>Writing Standard(s)</b></p> <p><b>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.9:</b>  <b>Research to Build and Present Knowledge:</b> Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p>	<p><b>Reading Standard(s)</b></p> <p><b>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.2:</b>  <b>Literature:</b> Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.</p> <p><b>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.3:</b>  <b>Informational text:</b> Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.</p>	<p><b>Listening Standard(s)</b></p> <p><b>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.2:</b>  <b>Comprehension and Collaboration:</b> Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.</p>
<p><b>Historical Thinking Skills: <a href="#">Standards in Historical Thinking</a></b></p> <p>Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage</p> <p>Draw upon visual, literary, and musical sources</p> <p>Support interpretations with historical evidence</p>		
<p><b>Enduring Understanding: What's the big idea?</b>                  Strong communities are resilient when faced with challenges.</p>		
<p><b>Focusing Questions:</b></p> <p>What damage did the 1927 flood do to Vermont?</p> <p>How did people help their neighbors?</p>		

### Web Resources on the Floods of 1927

[U.S. Signal Corp video of the 1927 Flood](#)  
 (17 minutes)

[Lesson—“Southern Flood Blues”:](#)  
 The Great Flood of 1927

[1927 Mississippi River Flood: Music Resources](#)

[Fatal Flood: American Experience](#)—PBS

[Body of a Nation: Examining the Role of the Mississippi River in American History](#)

[Paul Searls: Two floods; two Vermonts](#)

[Satellites, Weather, and Climate Lesson plan: Vermont's Flood of 1927](#)





Images courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.

Assessment Evidence	
<p><b>Formative Assessment Practices:</b> Assessments that use evidence of learning to adapt instruction in real time to meet students’ immediate learning needs.</p> <p>Students use visual thinking skills to analyze photographs; then find quotes in primary sources that illustrate the photos.</p>	<p><b>Summative Assessment:</b> Performance Task (e.g., presentation, paper, video, blog):</p> <p>Students write a paragraph explaining the meaning of Herbert Hoover’s quote, “I have seen Vermont at its worst, but I have also seen Vermonters at their best.”</p>
Texts/Resources	
<p>Informational Text that provides the background knowledge/ historical context:</p> <p><a href="#">“Rain, Rain, and Still More Rain,” Vermont History Explorer</a></p>	<p><b>Primary Sources:</b> Photographs, oral histories</p>
Vocabulary	
<p><i>What academic vocabulary is essential for this lesson?</i></p> <p>Context, interpret, analyze, research</p>	<p><i>What vocabulary is needed for a close-read of the texts?</i></p> <p>damage, alter, saturated, deluge, property, disabled, frantic, salvage, desperate, debris, tragic, subside, rubble, fortunate, admirable</p>
Instructional Process	
<p><i>How will reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language be incorporated throughout the lesson?</i></p> <p><i>How will the students use historical thinking skills in the lesson?</i></p> <p><i>How will the informational text and primary sources be investigated?</i></p> <p><b>Questions to consider as you develop an instructional plan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect: How will learners be engaged in the content and skills? What process for a close read of the informational text will allow students to gain the background knowledge they need to ask good questions of the primary sources?</li> </ul> <p>1. Students will build background knowledge and context by reading together “Rain, Rain, and Still More Rain.”</p> <p>The close read process is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. number the paragraphs</li> <li>b. chunk the text and read each chunk together, defining words as needed</li> <li>c. underline key phrases in the chunks</li> <li>d. in the margin, summarize in less than 10 words what the author is saying in the chunk</li> </ol>	

# NOTICE TO ALL CITIZENS

The conditions in Waterbury require the services of every able-bodied man to remedy. The weather conditions make this more pressing. Unless things are cleaned up in a short time we will be confronted with disease and suffering.

All men who can work and have not been assigned to duty should report at once to headquarters which after 11 a. m. today will be located in town clerk's office, enter back way.

Visitors who are not prepared to stay and work should leave at once so that they will not have to be fed. Meeting place for those leaving at Waterbury Inn.

The water system should begin to function today.

The Post Office has opened in the Rialto Theatre.

The Army has taken over the guard and has been requested to bring into headquarters all loiterers and idlers.

Beginning at supper tonight no one will be fed at the Emergency Mess without a ticket issued at Headquarters.

ROY W. DEMERITT, Village President

R. E. LEE, Major U. S. Army

November 7, 1927

- **Wonder:** How will students develop higher-order questions to ask of the primary sources?  
Students will read together the picture book, *Nora's Ark*, and ask questions about how real people acted during the flood. Did neighbors take in displaced people? Did people bring animals into houses? How many houses were destroyed? How did people get food?
- **Investigate:** What process will students use to closely read and investigate the primary sources? If students are to find their own primary sources, where will they find them?
  1. Teacher will introduce Herbert Hoover's statement: "I have seen Vermont at its worst, but I have also seen Vermonters at their best."
  2. Students will examine photographs of the flood and use Visual Thinking Skills to answer questions about what they see.
- **Construct:** When and how will students work together as they investigate and draw conclusions? How will I support students to organize and synthesize information to answer the research question?
  1. Students will find quotes in oral histories and other contemporary accounts that connect to the photographs and Hoover's statement. A set of scaffolded questions will guide them through analysis of these sources.
- **Express:** How will students express new ideas and share learning with others? What technology might they use?  
Students will write a paragraph explaining the meaning of Hoover's statement.
- **Reflect:** How will I help the students reflect on the significance of the information?
- **Connect:** How will new understandings and questions connect to the next lesson?

Images courtesy of the  
Vermont Historical Society.

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