

Grades 6-8, Prompt for Informative / Explanatory Writing Common Core Standard W.CCR.2

Great historical events often have deep effects upon the people who live through them. Depending on the person and the situation, those effects can be very different – or not.

The Great Depression of the 1930s, in the United States, was one of these events. Lasting for nearly ten years, the Great Depression closed thousands of banks, put millions of people out of work, and seared itself into the memory of those who lived through it.

The President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, responded by creating new government programs to help Americans, known as the New Deal.

You are going to read three texts about the Great Depression: a memoir called *Digging In* by Robert Hastings, a poem, “Debts” by Karen Hesse, and a short text about the programs of the New Deal of President Roosevelt. As you read and re-read these texts, think about what the texts show you about how the Great Depression seems to have affected the individual people who lived through it.

Finally, using these texts, you will write an essay, explaining your thinking.

For the essay, your Focusing Question is:

According to these texts, what effect did the Great Depression have on people who lived through it? Be sure to use evidence from the texts to support and develop your thinking.

Remember, a good informative essay:

- *Has a clear introduction*
- *States a focus/topic clearly, precisely, and thoughtfully*
- *Uses specific evidence from the text(s) to support and develop the topic and explains that evidence*
- *Concludes effectively*
- *Uses precise language*
- *Shows control over conventions*

You will have three class periods to complete this reading/thinking/writing task. The essay will have a single draft, and you may want to take some time to plan your writing before you begin work. When you have finished, be sure to proofread.

Informative / Explanatory Writing
Common Core Standard W.CCR.2
6-8

Teacher Directions

- The texts provide the information needed to address the prompt, and students should independently read the texts carefully before writing. Encourage students to refer back to the text while writing and to take notes, and to mark up the text as much as is helpful to them.

- Students should be given three sessions for the prompt. Allow approximately 45 minutes for each, but the prompt should not be strictly timed. Students should be given as much time as needed to plan, write, and proofread.

- The writing must be done without help, but students may have access to personal dictionaries, or any other resources to support spelling and mechanics that they are accustomed to using while writing.
 - Be sure students have paper to take notes or do whatever pre-planning they might choose to do.
 - If students are writing by hand, provide lined paper from your classroom for writing. If they are using a word processor, make sure they save their work so it can be accessed the next day.

- This will be first draft writing, but encourage students to proofread and correct any errors they find.

Digging In

By Robert J. Hastings

The closing of Old West Side Mine meant the end of anything resembling a steady job for the next eight years. From 1930 on, it was a day's work here and a day's work there, a coal order from the welfare office, a few days on WPA, a garden in the back yard, and a few chickens and eggs.

We weathered the storm because of Dad's willingness to take any job and Mom's ability to stretch every available dollar. It was not so much a matter of finding a job as of filling in with odd jobs wherever and whenever you could, and most of the "jobs" were those you made for yourself.

My diary shows that Dad sold iron cords door to door, "worked a day in the hay," bought a horse to break gardens, rented an extra lot for a garden on the shares, picked peaches, raised sweet potato slips, traded an occasional dozen of eggs at the grocery, hung wallpaper, "painted Don Albright's house for \$5," picked up a day or two's work at the strip mines, guarded the fence at the county fairgrounds, cut hair for boys in the neighborhood, sold coal orders, and when he had to and could, worked intermittently on WPA.

With no dependable income, we cut back on everything possible. We stopped the evening paper, turned off the city water and cleaned out our well, sold our four-door Model T touring car with the snap-on side curtains and isinglass, stopped ice and milk delivery, and disconnected our gas range for all but the three hot summer months. There was no telephone to disconnect, as we didn't have one to start with!

We did keep up regular payments on two Metropolitan Life Insurance policies. Page after page of old receipt books show entries of 10 cents per week on one policy and 69 cents a month on another. As long as we could, we made house payments to the Marion Building and Loan, but a day came when we had to let those go, too.

Fortunately, we were able to save our house from foreclosure. When so many borrowers defaulted, the Marion Building and Loan went bankrupt. Creditors were allowed to pay just about any amount to satisfy the receivers. But that was the catch – who had "just about any amount" to pay? A house behind ours sold for \$25. Many good houses in Marion sold for \$5 to \$100 and were torn down and moved to nearby towns. We settled with the loan company for \$125, or ten cents on the dollar for our \$1250 mortgage. I'll never forget the day Dad cleared it all up, making two or three trips to town to bring papers home for Mom to sign. He was able to borrow the \$125 from his aunt, Dialtha James, who as the widow of a Spanish-American war veteran had a small pension.

Looking back, I find it amazing what we did without. A partial list would include toothpaste (we used soda), toilet paper (we used the catalog), newspaper or magazine subscriptions, soft drinks, potato chips and snacks, bakery goods except bread and an occasional dozen of doughnuts, paper clips, rubber bands and restaurant meals. We had no water bill, sewer bill, telephone bill, no car expenses – gasoline, tires, batteries, licenses, insurance, repairs – no laundry service, no dry cleaning (we pressed woolens up with a hot iron and wet cloth), no bank service charge (no bank account), no sales or income tax. We sent no greeting cards except maybe half a dozen at Christmas...

Typical of the simple economies Mom practiced was keeping the electric bill to \$1 a month and the gas bill to \$1 a month in June, July, and August....Since our only appliance was an electric iron, the chief use of electricity was for lighting. With only a single bulb suspended by a cord from the ceiling of each room, there weren't many lights to burn...On winter evenings, Mom would turn on the kitchen light while she cooked supper. If I had lessons I brought them to the kitchen table or sprawled on the floor between the kitchen and dining room.

After supper we "turned off the light in the kitchen" and moved to the dining-sitting room, where another light was switched on. If we wanted to read on winter afternoons, we sat as near a window as possible, with the curtains pinned back, to save the lights until it was nearly dark...

Dad had some old-fashioned shoe lasts, and he would buy stick-'em-on soles at the dime store to patch our shoes in winter. With simple barber tools he cut my hair and that of other kids in the neighborhood, for maybe ten cents a head. In cold, wet weather, when he worked outdoors on WPA, he often cut strips of cardboard to stuff in the soles of his shoes and keep his feet warm.

We took care of what we had. Every cotton cloth was used over as a dish cloth, wash cloth, dust cloth, shoe-shining cloth, window-washing cloth, to scrub and wax floors, make bandages, make quilt pieces, make kite tails, or to tie boxes and papers together. The cotton bags from flour, salt, and cracked chicken feed were washed, bleached, and cut into dish cloths and towels. Some neighbors made curtains or even dresses from feed sacks. Every paper bag was saved for lunches or cut and used for wrapping paper. String was wound into balls for later use.

Each August Mom would find someone who was a year ahead of me in school, and buy his used books. One exception was a spelling book used in all eight grades. Since it was to be used for eight years, we decided it would be a wise investment to buy a new one when I started first grade. In the seventh grade, I dropped that speller in the snow. I thought Mom was unfair when she sent me all the way back to school, retracing my steps to look for the book...

Before the Depression, we hung a four-cornered black-and-white cardboard sign in the front window each morning. The figures in the corners told the iceman how many pounds to bring – 25, 50, 75, or 100. But ice was one of the casualties of the Depression, although we managed a small piece two or three times a week for iced tea. About eleven in the morning I would pull a little wagon, filled with a gunny sack and assorted old quilts and tarpaulins, down to the neighborhood ice house to buy a “nickel’s worth of ice,” which was half of a 25-pound chunk. By wrapping it carefully and storing it in a cool, damp spot under the house, we could stretch that piece of ice for two or three days. In rainy, cool weather, maybe four days! It was our glistening prize, and any left over from tea was emptied back into a pitcher of ice water, or used for lemonade that afternoon. So as not to waste any, we chipped only what was needed, with much of the same care used by a diamond cutter.

Whatever was free was our recreation. This may have included playing records on our wind-up victrola or listening to the radio. You might watch a parachute jump at the airport or a free ball game at the city park, with perhaps a free band concert afterwards...the band concerts survived only the first two years of the Depression...

We liked music, and one of my earliest memories is of Dad singing to me:

Two arms that hold me tight,
Two lips that kiss goodnight;
To me he’ll always be,
That little boy of mine.

No one can ever know,
Just what his coming has meant:
He’s something heaven has sent,
That little boy of mine.

At one point in the Depression, the cupboard was literally bare of money. We weren’t hungry, but we were penniless. Then Dad went back in the pantry and came out with a jar in which he had saved a few nickels and dimes for such an emergency.

Later, Mom said to me, “I’ve learned that whatever happens, your Daddy always has a little dab of money put back somewhere...”

Excerpted from “Digging In”, 1986. Found in *Dark Days*, Perfection Learning, 2006
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Debts

By Karen Hesse

Daddy is thinking
of taking a loan from Mr. Roosevelt and his men,
to get some new wheat planted
where the winter crop has spindled out and died.
Mr. Roosevelt promises
Daddy won't have to pay a dime
till the crop comes in.

Daddy says,
"I can turn the fields over,
start again.
It's sure to rain soon.
Wheat's sure to grow."

Ma says, "What if it doesn't?"

Daddy takes off his hat,
roughs up his hair,
puts the hat back on.
"Course it'll rain," he says.

Ma says, "Bay,
it hasn't rained enough to grow wheat in
three years."

Daddy looks like a fight brewing.

He takes that red face of his out to the barn,
To keep from feuding with my pregnant ma.

I ask Ma

how, after all this time,

Daddy still believes in rain.

“Well, it rains enough,” Ma says,

“now and again,

to keep a person hoping.

But even if it didn’t

your daddy would have to believe.

It’s coming on spring,

and he’s a farmer.”

March 1934

The New Deal

In 1932 [Franklin Delano Roosevelt](#) was elected overwhelmingly on a campaign promising a New Deal for the American people. Roosevelt worked quickly upon his election to deliver the New Deal, an unprecedented number of reforms addressing the catastrophic effects of the Great Depression. Unlike his predecessor, [Herbert Hoover](#), who felt that the public should support the government and not the other way around, Roosevelt felt it was the federal government's duty to help the American people weather these bad times.

Together with his "brain trust," a group of university scholars and liberal theorists, Roosevelt sought the best course of action for the struggling nation. A desperate Congress gave him carte blanche and rubber-stamped his proposals in order to expedite the reforms. During the first 100 days of his presidency, a never-ending stream of bills was passed, to relieve poverty, reduce unemployment, and speed economic recovery.

His first act as president was to declare a four-day bank holiday, during which time Congress drafted the Emergency Banking Bill of 1933, which stabilized the banking system and restored the public's faith in the banking industry by putting the federal government behind it. Three months later, he signed the Glass-Steagall Act which created the FDIC, federally insuring deposits

The [Civil Conservation Corps](#) was one of the New Deal's most successful programs. It addressed the pressing problem of unemployment by sending 3 million single men from age 17 to 23 to the nation's forests to work. Living in camps in the forests, the men dug ditches, built reservoirs and planted trees. The men, all volunteers, were paid \$30 a month, with two thirds being sent home. The [Works Progress Administration](#), Roosevelt's major work relief program, would employ more than 8.5 million people to build bridges, roads, public buildings, parks and airports.

The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) and the National Recovery Administration (NRA) were designed to address unemployment by regulating the number of hours worked per week and banning child labor. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), created in 1933, gave \$3 billion to states for work relief programs. The Agricultural Adjustment Act subsidized farmers for reducing crops and provided loans for farmers facing bankruptcy. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) helped people save their homes from foreclosure.

While they did not end the Depression, the New Deal's experimental programs helped the American people immeasurably by taking care of their basic needs and giving them the dignity of work and hope.

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File Name: I7P Living Through The Great Depression

Informative / Explanatory

Grade 7

On-Demand Writing, Uniform Prompt

Living Through The Great Depression

The Great Depression affected many people especially those who lived through it. With that said the main point of this essay is how people who lived through the Depression were affected during it.

During The Great Depression people had things to deal with that made them struggle. Some people didn't have an abundant amount of money not a decent amount. Instead they had little or none at all. It was a struggle to earn money with the lack of jobs, people ended up doing side jobs to earn money. In "Digging In" the family of four had to find ways to obtain money. They ended up cutting back on a lot of things like the water system and starting using their well. The father did his best to get some type of income by doing side jobs, like cutting the boys hair for _____. People also looked to Roosevelt for help or farming for a decent or better income. For instance in the poem "Debts The family owned land that they used for farming. The father grew wheat three years ago and hasn't been able to since. With scarce rain no wheat grew, without wheat to harvest no money would flow in. Bay, the father, even thought about getting a loan from Mr. Roosevelt, and he promised he didn't have to pay a dime 'till the crop came

Introduces the topic clearly, previewing what is to follow: The writer gives little context but does state a main idea/focus

Organizes ideas and information using categories: The writer organizes text-by-text within an overall cause-effect structure

Develops topic with appropriate, relevant facts and concrete details, uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary in evidence from the text to inform about the topic

Uses appropriate, varied transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts

Develops topic with appropriate accurate, facts and concrete details, uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary in evidence from the text

Analyzes evidence

in. All he could do was hope things got better. Not only did people have things to worry about the President did too. In the article "The New Deal" Roosevelt wanted to find a way to help the people suffering from the Great Depression. He created several ways to help with some of the issues. He made the NIRA and NRA, these systems banned child labor and address unemployment by regulating the number of hours worked per week. The FERA gave \$3 billion to states for work relief programs. In the end these systems only helped people take care of their basic needs.

Continues to develop topic with appropriate accurate, facts and concrete details, uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary in evidence from the text

The people who lived through the Great Depression had to find ways to obtain income, work and help. The Government did their best to support the people through this time but have you ever thought that this might happen again.

Establishes and maintains a reasonably formal style

Provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the information presented

In this on-demand assignment, students were asked to explain the effects of the Great Depression on people who lived through it. This writer gives no context about the Great Depression in the introduction but does state the main point (the Great Depression affected people who lived through it in many ways), which serves to preview the essay that follows.

The writer organizes ideas, concepts, and information clearly using the texts as categories, and supplies textual evidence to support the main point. She uses appropriate transitions. For example, she writes, *"Not only did people have things to worry about, the President did too."* (Note: this would be easier to see if the writer had started a new paragraph with each transition.) Within each chunk, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to name and explain the effects, which she has identified from the texts she has read. This makes the writer's thinking and understanding easy to follow.

The essay has an appropriately formal style. The conclusion follows from and supports the information presented.

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Informative / Explanatory

Grade 7

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During The Great Depression people had things to deal with that made them struggle. Some people didn't have an abundant amount of money not a decent amount. Instead they had little or none at all. It was a struggle to earn money with the lack of jobs, people ended up doing side jobs to earn money. In "Digging In" the family of four had to find ways to obtain money. They ended up cutting back on a lot of things like the water system and starting using their well. The father did his best to get some type of income by doing side jobs, like cutting the boys hair for ____.

People also looked to Roosevelt for help or farming for a decent or better income. For instance in the poem "Debts The family owned land that they used for farming. The father grew wheat three years ago and hasn't been able to since. With scarce rain no wheat grew, without wheat to harvest no

money would flow in. Bay, the father, even thought about getting a loan from Mr. Roosevelt, and he promised he didn't have to pay a dime 'till the crop came in. All he could do was hope things got better. Not only did people have things to worry about the President did too. In the artical "The New Deal" Rosevelt wanted to find a way to help the people suffering from the Great Depression. He created several ways to help with some of the issues. He made the NIRA and NRA, these systems banned child labor and adress unemployment by regulating the number of hours worked per week. The FERA gave \$3 billion to states for work relief programs. In the end these systems only helped people take care of their basic needs.

The people who lived through the Great Depression had to find ways to obtain income, work and help. The Government did their best to support the people through this time but have you ever thought that this might happen again.

File Name: I7R To Build a Fire

Informative/Explanatory

Grade 7

Range of Writing

To Build a Fire

One of the most important things in life is to know how to build a successful fire. For ages fire has been a critical part of our lives. Fire provides heat, and this is what it is mainly used for. Heat cooks food. This is also critical because some uncooked foods can cause some very nasty, unmentionable diseases. And, of course, there is aesthetics. Could one be more cheerful than roasting chesnuts over an open fire?

So, now that you're all convinced that fire is the greatest thing in the world, you probably should know how to make a successful fire. Well, I agree wholeheartedly to teaching you. So, let us go through the steps one by one.

First you need to decide where you are going to build the fire, whether it be in a woodstove, in a fireplace, or out in the open. They are all relatively the same in terms of process, but materials used can differ. The basic process is as follows.

First you need to find some newspaper, or other easily burnt materials such as birch bark, office papers, old report cards, etc. Crumple up enough of the paper to cover the bottom of your fire area (if you are using birch bark just lay a few strips down). Next you need kindling. Kindling usually is best in the form of split boards, but split wood is also fine as long as the wood is dry and not green (not in color but if wood has been cut recently it is usually referred to as "green"). About four to eight pieces should be laid on top of the paper in a criss-cross design in order to allow the fire air. See Figure 1. Note: Fire will not burn without oxygen! Do not smother it!

Introduces the topic / focus clearly, previewing what is to follow: The writer provides background information about the importance of fire, leading into an explanation of how to build a fire.

Organizes ideas, concepts, and information using sequence: The writer explains the process of building a fire in a step-by-step fashion

Develops the topic with appropriate accurate, facts and concrete details about the materials and steps needed to build a fire.

Uses precise, domain-specific vocabulary to explain and analyze.

Establishes and maintains a formal style.



Figure 1

Uses graphic to aid comprehension

Then you need a small piece of firewood, preferably not green. This should be laid diagonally across the top of the kindling.

Well, that’s the hard part. Now you just need a match. Light the paper (or bark) in a few places and watch the fire blaze. Note: The wood will need to be replenished now and then. Just lay a piece of firewood across the top of the currently burning log and it will soon start blazing. Enjoy your wonderful fire wherever you are!

Uses appropriate transitions to create cohesion and clarify relationships among ideas and concepts

I hope that if you survive your first fire you will continue to use this wonderful power of nature safely so that all can enjoy it. And remember, ‘only YOU can prevent forest fires!’

Provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the explanation presented

In this assignment, from a language arts class, students were asked to explain a concrete procedure. This writer gives some background information about fire in the introduction and then states his purpose (to explain how to build a fire), thereby previewing the sequential steps to follow.

The writer organizes the essay sequentially, explaining each step carefully. Within each chunk, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to name and accurately explain the steps in building a fire. He uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts, and to create cohesion. To make the steps easier for a reader to follow, he includes a graphic. This makes the writer’s thinking and understanding easy to follow.

Except for a few lapses (“*only you can prevent forest fires*”), the tone of the essay is objective and the style formal—both appropriate for procedural writing. The conclusion follows from and supports the information given.

File Name: I7R To Build a Fire

Informational/Explanatory

Grade 7

Range of Writing

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One of the most important things in life is to know how to build a successful fire. For ages fire has been a critical part of our lives. Fire provides heat, and this is what it is mainly used for. Heat cooks food. This is also critical because some uncooked foods can cause some very nasty, unmentionable diseases. And, of course, there is aesthetics. Could one be more cheerful than roasting chesnuts over an open fire?

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Figure 1

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File Name: I7R Question 1

Informative/Explanatory

Grade 7

Range of Writing

Question 1

Jean Baptiste de Lamarck and Charles Darwin were both naturalists that had theories about organisms getting helpful variations. Lamarck's theory was called the theory of acquired characteristics and Darwin's was called the theory of evolution by natural selection. Lamarck and Darwin's theories are the same and different in some ways.

Darwin and Lamarck's theories were very different. Darwin theory said that organisms get helpful variation before changes in the environment. He thought they got the variation by chance at birth. He explained that the reason giraffes had long necks was because some giraffes had a variation which was a longer neck. The giraffes with short necks could only get food on the ground so they had to compete for it so they died. The giraffes with the long necks did not have to compete because they could get the food up high and they survived and passed the long necks onto their young. Lamarck theory said that organisms got helpful variation after a change in the environment. He said that giraffes got long necks when the food on the ground ran out. The giraffes needed to eat food and there was food up high so they stretched out their necks. They then passed it on to their young. Their theories are different because Lamarck thought that organisms changed out of need and after a change in the environment and Darwin thought organisms changed by chance when they were born and before there was a change in the environment.

Darwin and Lamarck's theories were very different but they were also very similar. They both thought that organisms changed. They thought these changes could be very useful and could help them survive. The

Introduces the topic clearly, previewing what is to follow: The writer gives provides general context, background information about the theories of evolution of Lamarck and Darwin, states the main point, and signals that similarities and differences in the theories will be the essay's focus.

Organizes ideas, concepts, and information using comparison/contrast. This paragraph discusses differences between the two theories, first describing Darwin's theory and then Lamarck's.

Develops topic with appropriate, accurate facts and concrete details about theories of evolution; provides analysis of content

Uses precise and domain-specific vocabulary and a formal style.

Uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts

changes could then get passed down to the young. That is how Lamarck and Darwin's theories are similar.

Lamarck and Darwin's theories are both the same and different in some ways.

Provides a concluding statement, which follows from the information provided

For this summative assessment from a seventh-grade science unit, students were asked to explain the differences and similarities in Lamarck's and Darwin's theories of evolution, respectively. This writer provides some background information about Lamarck's and Darwin's theories in the introduction and then establishes his focus on similarities and differences in Darwin's and Lamarck's theories, which serves also to preview his compare/contrast organizational structure.

The writer organizes his essay by first discussing differences between the two theories and then the similarities. He uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts. Within each chunk, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to characterize the theories and analyze them. This makes the writer's thinking and understanding easy to follow.

The tone of the essay is objective and the style formal—both appropriate for science writing. The conclusion follows from the information given. Though it is a simple restatement, this is appropriate for a content assessment.

File Name: I7R Question 1

Informative/Explanatory

Grade 7

Range of Writing

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