



Lesson 2: Connections to the Past

How Does My Identity Shape My Experience in America?

Activity 1: Setting the Scene: America in the 1940s

How do we connect with the past?

Objective:

Students evaluate similarities and differences between life in the 1940s and today.

Procedure:

- Play big band or jazz music from the 1940s, or pick a particular artist such as Louis Armstrong, Nat “King” Cole, Bing Crosby, Billie Holiday, Judy Garland, Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller, Woody Guthrie, Tommy Dorsey or any others from that time period. Play radio programs such as *The Green Hornet* and/or watch newsreels. Online resources include:

Universal Newsreels- www.archive.org/details/universal_newsreels

Old-Time Radio Shows- www.archive.org/details/oldtimeradio

- Ask students if they have ever heard the music or radio show before, and if so, ask them what time period they think it is from. Show current TV shows, advertisements or movies that use music from the late 1930s to early 1940s. If possible, print out the music and sing the songs together.
- Have students research what life was like in the early 1940s. Give them class time and ask them to continue the assignment as homework. Ask the class to journal their findings with a paragraph answering the following questions. Students should use the library, internet and/or family/friends who lived during that time as part of their research.

What were popular leisure activities?

What foods were popular?

What were popular professions?

Who was the target of prejudice and racism, in your area? Who wasn't?

What were some big news stories?



Fruits and Vegetables Market in Los Angeles, Dorothea Lange, 1942 (I AM AN AMERICAN sign was posted December 8, 1941)

Grade Level: 10 & 11
Time: 75 minutes (class)
30 minutes (home)

Materials:
1940s music and radio recordings and/or newsreels
DVD films (optional)
Song lyrics (optional)
Library & internet access

Concepts Covered:

Listen for detail.

Determine the purpose and standpoint of media communication from the past.

Learn different points of view.

CDE Standards:

10th Grade
English/Language Arts
Listening and Speaking
1.10 1.11

History-Social Science
10.8.6

11th Grade
English/Language Arts
Listening and Speaking
1.2 1.3

History-Social Science
11.8.7



Activity 1: **Setting the Scene: America in the 1940s**

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*Louis Armstrong and His Orchestra, New York City, 1937
Library of Congress photograph*

Procedure (continued):

- ✓ As a class discuss the following questions:

How did the African American musicians of swing and jazz music emerge during a time when segregation and discrimination were still accepted and legal across America?

What was America like in the early 1940s? How is life different today? Compare and contrast the differences.

How do you feel connected to or alienated by the cultures and traditions of America?

How does the past define us today? What impact does history have on your life?

