

Teachers' Orientation Pages to:
Depression Era Art

The Exhibit and Collection

The works in The Depression Era Art online exhibit are part of a traveling exhibit of WPA works in the collection of the Illinois State Museum. The exhibit is an historical look at Illinois artists in the 1930s and 1940s who worked for the Works Progress Administration Fine Arts Program. The images of the artworks not only reflect what styles were popular at that time, but also reflect what was happening to people during the Depression and how they and the artists felt about it. The WPA exhibit will reopen at our **Lockport Gallery** in January of 2000.



The Artists

The staff researched the artists lives using published sources and by making phone calls, Web searches, and directory searches. Some of the WPA artists may not have continued their art after the WPA Programs closed. Others were perhaps not shown enough to be tracked by art historians. Most of the artists may be deceased. We will pursue any leads we receive to add to the biographical information.

Text

The questions were the main text in this module, which is used to discuss the elements of art as used by artists in different media. Other text might be a hint about the visual elements, a short biography, when available, or a note that points out an issue of the Depression, a quote by an artist, or a note on the style. Each of these could be the basis of a discussion of all the art; the questions are a starting point and do not have short, easy answers. It may take several minutes of the viewer's talking to himself about it to start getting new insights into a work—the Aha!

Interdisciplinary Use

Teachers can use the images when teaching social studies, history, language arts, and art. The images are not only illustrations of historical events or eras, but also intimate interpretations of people, events, places, and feelings. Teachers could present each one or each set as a discussion topic about history, about art as social comment, and about art as personal statements.

Grade Levels of Activities

The offline activities are designed to prompt a close look at individual artworks. There are many ways to adapt the activities to the time you want to spend on the topic and the grade level and number of your students. Adjust the number of works at which younger students look.

For example, a kindergarten teacher may show the students one or two artworks, perhaps the paintings of the workers – the woman ironing and the street repair crew. The children will bring their own experience with workers to interpret the pieces with the guidance of the teacher. (e.g. Can we still see these workers and jobs today? Can women be seen on road crews today? How do you think each worker feels about his/her job? How do you know? Where are the workers located? How do you know?) After the talk, the students can each draw a picture of a worker and job they know, talking about tools, materials, location, etc.

Depression Era Web sites

The National Archives and Records Administration site

<http://www.nara.gov/exhall/newdeal/newdeal.html>

Library of Congress. *American Memory*; Farm Home Administration Photo Database. 55,000 b & w, 1,600 color photographs of *American from the great Depression to World War II*.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html>