Curriculum Unit Introduction

Title of Unit: Eleanor Roosevelt

Vital Theme of the unit: Eleanor Roosevelt's interest in East Tennessee because of her concern for the improvement of social conditions, education, and children in poverty

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Grade level: Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement U.S. History Students

Number of lessons in unit: 2 **Time needed to complete**: 1 week

Curriculum standards addressed: Advanced Placement U.S. History Course Description Outline

Unit introduction and overview of instructional plan: This unit on Eleanor Roosevelt uses a compilation of seven primary source documents and six photographs to allow students to research Eleanor Roosevelt's interest in East Tennessee due to her concern for improving social conditions, equalizing educational opportunities, and aiding children in poverty during the Great Depression. The students will read an article written by Mrs. Roosevelt requesting letters from people across the nation suffering during the economic setback, and then read some of the responses to that request in the form of letters written from children living in Tennessee. From these documents, the students will try to understand the economic conditions that existed in Tennessee during the 1930s. The students will also observe and interpret some historical photographs taken in East Tennessee during the Great Depression and then read some newspaper and magazine articles written by or about Eleanor Roosevelt and her interest in improving the conditions in impoverished areas. The students will also write essays summarizing how these primary source documents can be used to suggest Tennessee's qualification for Mrs. Roosevelt's interest. All of these activities allow students the opportunity to connect historical facts with actual documents and then to use their language art skills to write essays to express their understanding of the content. This unit will take approximately one week of class instruction.

Eleanor Roosevelt: First Lady Activist

Few First Ladies have served with as much distinction or yielded as much influence during their tenure as Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Known as an activist, humanitarian, inspirational writer, and leader, Mrs. Roosevelt is truly one of the most respected and admired women of the twentieth century. Robin Gerber, author of *Leadership the Eleanor Roosevelt Way*, articulated well the legacy of Mrs. Roosevelt by saying, "Eleanor led by breaking down isolation, by bringing communities together and forging ties across racial and class lines." [1] It was her interest in those very ideals that brought Eleanor Roosevelt to East Tennessee on several occasions to witness first the remoteness and impoverished living conditions, and later the improvements in housing, education, and agriculture as a result of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

While campaigning in 1932, Eleanor Roosevelt visited East Tennessee and was struck by the sheer number of poor people, including children, who greeted them at the train stations. She noted the inadequacy of their clothing, homes, and automobiles in her memoir of her life as a president's wife, *This I Remember*. "They were so poor; their houses were unpainted, their cars dilapidated, and many grown-ups as well as children were without shoes or adequate garments, "she wrote. [2]

Mrs. Roosevelt's concern for this type situation, particularly those involving children in poverty and the need for educational improvements, was the subject of many of her "My Day" columns, where she routinely commented on the situation of poverty

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[1] Wigal, Donald. *The Wisdom of Eleanor Roosevelt*, (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2003), iii-iv.

[2] Roosevelt, Eleanor. *This I Remember,*(New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1949), 136-137.

and the need for federal aid programs for the poor, and of her weekly radio shows where she spoke to a national audience about these same issues. She also used these opportunities to describe her firsthand observations of New Deal work relief projects that she had visited where she could report some progress was being made. Another avenue that the First Lady used to demonstrate her concern for impoverished Americans was to invite them to write letters to her at her column in *Woman's Home Companion* about their problems and concerns during the turbulent times of the Great Depression so that she could learn of their experiences. As a result, Mrs. Roosevelt received more than 300,000 pieces of mail, mainly from working class individuals suffering from the economic crisis and from their children. In these letters, Mrs. Roosevelt learned of the struggle that many families endured to keep their children in school, as well as the hardships that other families suffered when sending their children to school was not economically feasible. Children wrote to the First Lady to express their fears of having to leave school, or their embarrassment at the condition of their clothing, and even of their guilt over the financial burden that the cost of their schooling brought on their families. In response, Mrs. Roosevelt became an advocate for the poor in several ways. She was a driving force behind the National Youth Administration which provided employment for America's students. She also forged an alliance with the American student movement during the 1930s and helped to raise funds to support the nation's needy youth, as well as making her own charitable contributions to nongovernmental programs which gave assistance to schools for underprivileged children.[3]

[3] Cohen, Robert. *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression*, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 11-14.

In regards to East Tennessee, Eleanor Roosevelt was very interested in the progress made in this area in terms of the improved living conditions as a result of the Tennessee Valley Authority and in the creation of the model town associated with that project, Norris, Tennessee. The TVA was a government experiment to control flooding in the region drained by the Tennessee River and to provide cheap electricity to the people living there. The town of Norris was a planned community created in a rural section of East Tennessee located approximately six miles from one of the major dams built as part of the TVA project. Homes, businesses, and a state-of-the-art school were designed and built to accommodate the workers and engineers associated with the project, as well as the local rural residents. Eleanor Roosevelt made several visits to the TVA sites and to Norris; she was reportedly very cordial and attentive to the residents of the community (Guyol, 16).[4] She later commented that "Scarcely eight years later, after the housing and educational and agricultural experiments had had time to take effect, I went through the same area, and a more prosperous region would have been hard to find. I have always wished that those who oppose authorities to create similar benefits in the valleys of other great rivers could have seen the contrast as I saw it." [5]

Eleanor Roosevelt served as First Lady during a time when few women rarely even commented on the issues of their time, let alone shared their opinions of them. Yet Eleanor Roosevelt was able to use her position to enlighten and inspire during a very turbulent time in our nation's history. Perhaps she best expressed her philosophy of the need to assist others in her book *You Learn By Living: Eleven Keys For A More Fulfilling*

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[4] Guyol, Hazel. *"Remembering Eleanor Roosevelt: A most accessible first lady", Daily Siftings Herald*, 22 September 2000, p. 16.

[5] Roosevelt, Eleanor. *The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt* , (New York: 1st Da Capo Press, 1992), 182-183.

Life. When she wrote to explain how a person can learn to be useful, "Charitable organizations and hospitals, poverty and pain—there exist, alas, everywhere. Their needs are enormous, beyond calculation. But there are others, less dramatic though no less real. There is loneliness within reach of your outstretched arm; there is unhappiness that requires, perhaps, only understanding and a fortifying word; there is hunger and sickness and despair somewhere in your neighborhood. " [6]

[6] Roosevelt, Eleanor. *You Learn By Living: Eleven Keys for a More Fulfilling Life.* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1960), 107.

Are We Overlooking the Pursuit of Happiness?

Parent's Magazine 11 (September 1936): 21, 67.

[See also Speech and Article File, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt Papers,
Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York]

Document 1: Eleanor Roosevelt used this *Parent's Magazine* article to espouse her opinion that the federal government should create a new department to deal with social problems, other than the existing departments of Public Health Service and the Social Security. Her main focus in this article was to discuss the situation of the elderly, poverty, and equalizing education opportunities among children. She ended by pleading for the parents of the country to support the reorganization of the government to include these departments and thereby improve the quality of life for Americans.

With a committee actually appointed in Congress to consider the efficiency and reorganization of the government's business in Washington, I suppose we may expect a careful survey of all the functions of the federal government departments, and a reclassification to bring into a better grouping such things as are related to each other.

With this in mind, it has long seemed to me that fathers and mothers in this country would be deeply interested in the creation of a department in the Federal Government which dealt directly with the problems touching most closely the homes and the children of the nation.

All government departments touch our homes and our general welfare in one way or another, but certain things very obviously touch more closely than others the daily life of the home. Health, for instance. The Public Health Service does much to cooperate with the various state departments of health and now through the new Social Security Act, we shall be able to do much more than ever before for our handicapped and crippled children, our blind children, and for dependent children either living at the home with a widowed or deserted mother, or orphaned and living in foster homes or in institutions.

All social welfare measures touch the home very closely. Take the question of old age pensions. This has direct bearing on the employment of youth, for if we take out of the labor market the older people there naturally will be more opportunity for the young. Added to that, many and many a home where young people love their parents has become embittered by the fact that so much had to be given up in order to take care of the old people. I remember a story my mother-in-law used to tell me of an old Scotch farmer who remarked to her that one father and mother could take care of any number of children, but any number of children could not take care of one old father and mother!

It is all very well to think that young people are selfish. I have seen them struggle many a time to do what they felt was right for parents, and as their children grew up they wanted to give them opportunities for education or recreation or even provide them with proper food for building healthy bodies for the future, and the drag of the responsibility for the older people became almost more than human nature could stand.

For the old people who have lived so long a life of independence, how bitter it must be to come for everything they need to the youngsters who once turned to them!

From every point of view, it seems to me that the old age pension for people who so obviously could not lay aside enough during their working years to live on adequately through their old age, is a natural responsibility and one that must be faced when we are planning for a better future.

Unemployment insurance in many homes is all that stands between many a family and starvation. Given a breathing spell, a man or woman may be able to get another job or to re-educate himself in some new line of work, but few people live with such a wide margin that they have enough laid aside to face several months of idleness.

Next comes education and we are certainly coming to realize that education is of vital importance. Many of us who have completely accepted the idea that our system of education is perfect in this country have made a mistake in not realizing that nothing in the world is ever perfect and that we should watch and constantly study public education to make it more responsive to the needs of our day.

We must equalize educational opportunities throughout the country. We must see that rural children have as good a general education as city children can acquire, and the advantages of both groups must if possible be made interchangeable. No city child should grow up without knowing the beauty of the spring in the country or where milk comes from, how vegetables grow and what it is like to play in a field instead of on a city street. No country child who knows these things should be deprived, however, of museums, books, music, and better teachers because it is easier to find them and to pay for them in big cities than it is in rural districts.

With more leisure time, we are discovering that the arts are a necessity in our lives, not only as a method of self expression, but because of the need for employment and occupation which requires appreciation of many things which we could never hope to understand when we toiled from dawn until dark and had no time for aspirations.

The arts are no longer a luxury but a necessity to the average human being and they should be included in any department which includes health, social security, and education. It seems to me also that crafts and recreation should come under this department.

All these things belong together, they deal with the daily loves of the people.

We are entering a period when there are vast possibilities for the creation of a new way of living. It only requires sufficient imagination and sufficient actual knowledge on the part of those who are considering this reorganization of government to bring into the government picture today one of the objectives laid down by our forefathers for government, but which seemed in the past too impossible of achievement to receive consideration.

The attainment of life and liberty required most of our energy in the past, so the pursuit of happiness and the consideration of the lives of human beings remained in the background. Now is the time to reorganize the possibilities which lie before us in the taking up and developing of this part of our forefather's vision. Therefore, I hope that the parents in this country will take enough interest in the new reorganization plans to realize that the interests of youth which lie close to their hearts can best be served by a federal department which will include such things as I have suggested and which touch primarily the homes of the youth of America.

Remembering Eleanor Roosevelt: A most accessible first lady

By Hazel Guyol

Daily Siftings Herald: September 22, 2000

Document 2: Hazel Guyol was a former English teacher at the Norris Community School who wrote this article for the *Daily Siftings Herald* in 2000 as part of a tribute to the late and former First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. The article is a reflection of the author's experience at the Norris School while living in Tennessee in the planned community of Norris, Tennessee. Norris was a community built in conjunction with the Tennessee Valley Authority, and Mrs. Roosevelt visited the area several times during its construction and early years of operation.

I met Eleanor Roosevelt in 1939 during one of her many trips about the country. It was certainly not an unusual thing for an ordinary citizen like me to shake hands with Mrs. Roosevelt. She was our most accessible First Lady. During her tour of the Tennessee Valley Authority, she stopped briefly in my classroom in Norris, Tenn.

As perhaps everyone knows, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was severely handicapped, and she served as his eyes, ears, and feet—traveling about the country and meeting with individuals and groups of people of every description. During his presidency, 1933-1945, she traveled thousands of miles by automobile, train, and in plane, even to military bases in the Pacific during World War II. She seemed to have boundless energy and a deep reservoir of good will which communicated itself to audiences everywhere.

During the late '30s, I was living in Norris, a *model town*, and teaching in Norris Community School, a *model school*. We have to italicize the work model now in these cynical times, but 60 years ago when we were young and idealistic, we really thought we could have a model community.

And in its own way, Norris was a charmed enclave. It had no crime, no judge, no jail. The nearest thing to a police force was an elite group of uniformed men called Guards and Guides, who served as guides for the hundreds of visitors who came to see Norris Dam and the other works of the Tennessee Valley Authority. In Norris, also, there were no rich (the rich lived in Knoxville, 20 miles south) and no poor (the poor lived in Knoxville and also in the hills and "hollers" of East Tennessee). There were no bums, no protesters, no unemployed, and no homeless.

The town of Norris and Norris Dam were both named to honor Senator George Norris of Nebraska, one of the great statesmen of the country. His vision, "the use of the earth for the good of the man," was given form and substance in the massive TVA project which he piloted through Congress in 1933, in the face of considerable opposition from several groups, especially utilities companies. The project affected an area three-fourths the size of Great Britain, and had three major aims: flood control, commercial navigation of the Tennessee River and its tributaries, and the production of cheap electric power. TVA also promoted land reclamation, reforestation, and manufacture of fertilizers.

But the over-riding aim was the betterment of the lives of the people in the area and in the nation. Certainly the nation was fortunate to have the resources of TVA during World War II when the Manhattan Project used TVA power.

Norris Dam had been completed in 1936. The town of Norris, with about 1,000 population, had been constructed about six miles away. It was built from the ground up, not only to house workers on the dam, but to accommodate professional and clerical staff, as well as certain laboratories. Officials experimented with housing, cinder-block houses painted pastel colors, dogtrot designs, and hillside houses. All homes and public

buildings were totally electrified. Electric heat was clean and maintenance-free, but more expensive than heating with coal, widely used in the area at that time.

The school was a real community school and drew visitors from far and wide, some from abroad who had come to see TVA. All community activities were centered in the school: arts and craft classes for adults, woodworking, little theater, garden club, music club, town meetings, town council meetings, dances, concerts, movies, and even church services and weddings. I was always amazed to see the bare, utilitarian gymnasium-cum-auditorium transformed into a bowery of greenery for Christmas celebrations.

All classes, from kindergarten through 12th grade, were housed in the two-story building. The upper grades were divided into a junior high school--grades seven, eight, and nine—and a senior high—grades 10, 11, and 12. Students in the first nine grades were all sons and daughters of Norris residents, but only about one-fourth of the senior high students were from the town: sons and daughters of engineers, town planners, geographers, foresters, and other professionals. The remaining students were bussed in from the surrounding hill country. They were a sturdy lot from proud mountain people. Some were great athletes. A good day came when our Norris basketball team played a visiting New York City team and won. Some of the mountain people, "hillbillies" they were called, were as handsome as any students I've known. And some were strong-man types already determined to make their marks in local politics.

In spite of the cultural gap, the two groups got along very well. There was even a romance between a county boy and a town girl, one of the most popular girls in her class.

The townies were more academically-oriented, whereas some of the county students were questioners, even rebels.

I had three English classes of about 40 students each. English had not been a popular subject; I was the fourth English teacher in four years. So teaching English was uphill work. Certainly the standard survey of literature courses could not be followed. Students participated in planning many of their academic activities. An interesting thing happened. After I told the students that they were not required to study Shakespeare, which was a bugbear to many at that time, some of the rebels became curious as asked for the study.

One indication of the independent spirit of the hill people was their attitude toward the visit of Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt in 1939. Her itinerary had been worked out to the last minute. The town manager was conducting Mrs. Roosevelt's party, and when he realized that they would be late in reaching the woodcrafters and carvers workshop in Gatlinburg, he telephoned, asking the men to stay for an additional 15 minutes after quitting time. They refused. They were not in awe of celebrity, even a President's wife.

Even though probably every resident of Norris was a Roosevelt supporter, there was, along with admiration for Eleanor, much joking about her: her constant travels, her "My Day" column (she once wrote, "Where we will sleep tonight is in the lap of the gods"), and her lack of glamour. In briefing us before her visit, the town manager referred to her and her "ground-gripper girls." Old slang sounds odd now, but "ground-gripper" was the derogatory term for sturdy walking shoes, totally without style. She needed ground-grippers because she was the "walkingest" First Lady we ever had.

On the big day when she walked in Norris Community School, the town manager escorted her to each of the eight classrooms. When she came to my room, she walked in and smiled cordially, and said, "Good morning, boys and girls." Many of the "boys" were over six feet tall. But none resented her greeting. In fact, they responded as I did when she shook hands with me. We were charmed by her genuine pleasure in meeting us.

Like many people, she was much more attractive in person than in photographs. I was struck by her graceful bearing, her elegant hands and feet, and her face which, without beauty and form, radiated warmth.

She stayed in Norris for a whole day, visiting the dam, laboratories, and workshops. She spoke in the auditorium that evening and all of us attended. As was said of one of Theodore Roosevelt's short speeches, "The speech was nothing. The man was everything." Her speech was certainly not memorable, but her presence was.

Hazel Guyol of Arkadelphia is a freelance writer and columnist.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: letters from children of the Great Depression

Edited by Robert Cohen

Documents 3, 4, and 5: Following are three letters from children living in Tennessee during the Great Depression that wrote to Mrs. Roosevelt seeking some financial assistance. These letters were later published in "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters From Children of the Great Depression." The grammar and spelling errors were left intact.

Big Rock, Tennessee
[acknowledged Aug. 3, 1934]
Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt,

Don't cast this away unread. It is not a sob story though it does sound pretty sobby.

Whether writing you is the thing I should, or should not do, I don't know, but I feel as if you'll not be offended because you were a school teacher once—were you not?

My trouble is this—I am eighteen years of age and ready to enter school as a sophomore this term which begins Sept. 3. But the main thing is I cant attend. With me life has always been just a day to day existence, but I've managed (or Dad has) to be in school this far. As a studious girl I've always made good. My grades in my final exams last term were 97-98-99-100. My friends and teachers encourage me to finish school, and, oh, I do want to—but it seems impossible, and is impossible with us. I thought perhaps you'd understand and help me, well I'm ashamed to ask it but if I have to fall out of school it means the last of my hopes, for my one ambition is to be a writer.

I've always wanted to write and have tried both poetry and short stories. I have a collection of these on hand but writers are not made overnight and I know the road to authorship is a hard one. With an education it would be hard for a poor country girl like me but without even a high school education it means "you're just a flop." My English

teacher said that I had talent and if I would keep on I could reach success but how can I "keep on keeping on" with no backing?

I hope you understand, I hope you help me, yet do you understand, how could you? You've never been a farm girl like me. Can you imagine getting up before "Sun-up" and going to work in the tobacco patch and all the time be thinking of school days coming when there'll be no school for you, thinking of the hundreds of old memories and things that happened in school life, thinking of the old pals you've been separated from so long, thinking of the gossips that will wag their tongues when you drop from the school gang and thinking last, What will I ever amount to? No, you can't imagine it, who could unless they've had experience as I have?

Can you imagine how hard it is to be eighteen—just in the morning of womanhood when life should be at its highest, to have all your plans and hopes crushed, To have to refuse all the gaiety and pleasure that a young girl should have just because your clothing is not sufficient? Well that's how it is with me. Last week a friend asked me why I had to quit coming to church—it embarrassed me but I told the truth. My shoes were not fit to be seen in public!

Dad can't buy for me. He can't get the necessary things for home life—Why? He and I have all that we can do to keep our crop worked, Mother's pregnant, and Dad would have to desert his crop if he could find work.

I hope you don't think me a crank for I really am not. It hurts me to ask but could you—would you, help me personally, to attend school? Surely a woman like you can understand.

Respectfully, R. C. T.

St. Antonville Tenn
[acknowledged June 27, 1938]

Dear Mrs. President

I am a little girl 5 years old I have a little brother he calls me Sistie I call him Buzzie after your little grandchildren. I wish I had a Shirley Temple doll. Daddy cant buy one

I love you

P. A. C.

University of Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee
December 30, 1937

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

What would you do: If you had a $60. note due today? If you were expecting to register for the second quarter at the university next week and had to have $40. to do so? If already you owed $300. for past schooling expenses? If you owed $100. for clothing and maintenance? If you couldn't pay your voice teacher and she wouldn't let you give up your lessons? If the job you were expecting hadn't materialized because you were not quite prepared? If you hadn't any money and no one to fall back on? What would you do?

I've asked myself that question until I'm sick. I didn't want to appeal to you or to anyone, but I was impelled to. By all the rules of finesse, etc. my pride shouldn't allow me to write to you, but after all isn't that false pride?

It is my real pride that prompts me to such presumption. I can't let down the friends who signed my notes, the stores who gave me credit, and my parents who can give me only a home.

You probably wonder how a young girl can be in such a mess. I hardly know myself. I'm sure I've made some mistakes, but not intentionally. When I have obligated myself I've always looked ahead and believed that I would work things out, but "the best laid plans o' mice and men gang aft agley."

I swept floors, washed dishes, took care of babies, and ironed shirts in a small junior college in order to have an education. However, I had to make notes for part of my expenses.

I graduated in the middle of the depression. No work was available but school teaching, for which I was not very well suited. However, I was glad to get a position. One would suppose that I would have paid off my notes immediately. I had thought I would, but there was rent, groceries, and upkeep of a family of eight, four of which were in school. My father had three small country churches that hardly paid for the gasoline required to reach them. There was no other work for him. My debts had to wait awhile.

At the end of three years of school teaching I knew I would have to quit. My nerves wouldn't stand the strain any longer. No one but myself realizes how necessary it was for me to resign last summer.

My family was now in better circumstances and agreed to help me get a new start in the school of commerce at the University of Tennessee this fall and help me take care of my debts. However, in their generosity, they overestimated. (But we've always lived on hope—there was never quite enough to be entirely practical. We've had to put up a

respectable front. Our position in the community demanded it.) Anyway, their help just barely covered carfare and lunch money. I paid my maintenance fee at school with an N.Y.A. job. (I worked in an office when not in classes.)

So here I am at the threshold of a new year, eager and hopeful, but feeling somewhat like a spider tangled up in his own web. I would rather have a job than anything, but I can't get one until I have had a little more training and I don't see how I can go to school, owing as much as I do.

I'm not asking for the future. I can take care of that, if only I can have respite from the past for just a little while.

I am not writing you merely as Mrs. Roosevelt, First Lady of the Land but as Mrs. R., "friend of the people." You will understand and hold in confidence what I have told you; you will not laugh at my seriousness, nor ignore my request. Everything you do and write speaks kindness. You have shown your appreciation for human worth regardless of rank. That is why I can appeal to you.

You have every reason to doubt my word and question the sincerity of my need, but I am asking you to pay me the greatest compliment—just by believing in me. I could send you references, but investigation would mean delay and publicity. And can't you see how desperately I am trying to keep my chin up. My friends and family would be shocked at my audacity in appealing to you but I'd feel myself a coward if I saw a way out and had not the courage to venture.

Mrs. Roosevelt, I do not ask you for a gift. I merely need a loan that will enable me to go on and keep my self respect. It will be a pleasure to repay you when I am able.

Neither do I ask for sympathy. I couldn't stand to be pitied. If I were hungry and in rags someone would give me a pittance. If I were a genius someone would invest in me, but as Mrs. L., Citizen, I cannot promise anything except to contribute my share to the world's happiness.

This letter is already too long and now I hesitate to finish. Perhaps it sounds presumptuous, mercenary, begging—but it is sincere with no complaint or blame intended. I have shown you my heart. Please believe in me and forgive my mistakes and audacity.

I read these lines a few days ago: "There is one thing stronger than fear, dear. Faith. Fear is the chasm between our prayer and its answer, and faith is the bridge that crosses it. Until I hear from you my faith will keep me strong.

And may you and yours have the happiest, most satisfying New Year ever.

Very respectfully,

The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt

Part II: *This I Remember*
The First Year: 1933
Pages 182-183

Document 6: The *This I Remember* section of Eleanor Roosevelt's autobiography dealt with her opinions and activities in conjunction with her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and his political life during a dramatic and eventful time in history (Roosevelt, xviii.)

Perhaps the most far-reaching project was the Tennessee Valley Authority. That was Senator George Norris' greatest dream and no one who witnessed the development of the Authority will ever forget the fight he put up for something that many people ridiculed. The development been begun during WWI, but at the end of that war most of the work was stopped. Nothing further was done until my husband, who understood Senator Norris' vision, supplied the impetus at a time when it could accomplish the maximum results for the country. With the demands of a possible war in mind, Franklin insisted on pushing work on the TVA as rapidly as possible. He believed even then that under certain circumstances war might come soon, and he knew if that happened we would need everything the TVA could make available.

In the campaign of 1932 my husband and I had gone through some of the TVA area, and he had been deeply impressed by the crowds at the stations. They were so poor; their houses were unpainted, their cars were dilapidated, and many grown-ups as well as children were without shoes or adequate garments. Scarcely eight years later, after the housing and educational and agricultural experiments had had time to take effect, I went through the same area, and a more prosperous region would have been hard to find. I have always wished that those who oppose authorities to create similar benefits in the valleys of other great rivers could have seen the contrast as I saw it. I realize that such

changes must come gradually, but I hate to see nothing done. I wish, as my husband always wished, that year by year we might be making a start on the Missouri River and the headwaters of the Mississippi. Such experiments, changing for the better the life of the people, would be a mighty bulwark against attacks on our democracy.

I Want You to Write to Me

By Eleanor Roosevelt

Woman's Home Companion (August 1933): 4

[See also Speech and Article File, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt Papers,
Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York]

Document 7: Eleanor Roosevelt wrote the following article in *Woman's Home Companion* as a forum to invite the public to write letters to her for publication in her column at that magazine regarding their personal situations during the Great Depression. As a result, she received over 300,000 responses, mainly from women and children. The majority of these letters were requests for money, but some were requests for jobs or loans. Mrs. Roosevelt discussed these correspondences sympathetically during her radio addresses and in her newspaper and magazine columns.

The invitation which forms the title of this page comes from my heart, in the hope that we can establish here a clearing house, a discussion room, for the millions of men, women, and young people who read the *Companion* every month.

For years I have been receiving letters from all sorts of persons living in every part of the country. Always I have wished that I could reach these correspondents and many more with messages which perhaps might help them, their families, their neighbors and friends to solve the problems which are forever rising in our person, family and community lives, not only with my ideas but with ideas of others.

And now I have a department in this magazine which I can use in this way. The editor of the *Woman's Home Companion* has given me this page to do with exactly as I will; but you must help me. I want you to tell me about the particular problems which puzzle or sadden you, but I also want you to write me about what has brought joy into you life, and how you are adjusting yourself to the new conditions in this amazing changing world.

I want you to write to me freely. Your confidence will not be betrayed. Your name will not be printed unless you give permission. Do not hesitate to write to me even if your views clash with what you believe to be my views.

We are passing through a time which perhaps presents to us more serious difficulties than the days immediately after the war, but my own experience has been that all times have their own problems. Times of great material prosperity bring their own spiritual problems, for our characters are apt to suffer more in such periods than in times when the narrowed circumstances of life bring out our sturdier qualities; so whatever happens to us in our lives, we find questions constantly recurring that we would gladly discuss with some friend. Yet it is hard to find just the friend we should like to talk to. Often it is easier to write to someone whom we do not expect ever to see. We can say things which we cannot say to the average individual we meet in our daily lives.

To illustrate the changing nature of our problems it is interesting to remember that less that twenty years ago the outstanding problem of the American homemaker was food conservation, or how to supply proper nourishment for her family with one hand while helping to feed an army with the other! Ten years ago the same mothers were facing the problem of the post-war extravagance and recklessness; how to control the luxurious tastes of their children, the craving for gayety, pleasure, speed which always follows a great war. Today in millions of homes parents are wrestling with the problem of providing the necessities of life for their children and honest work for the boys and girls who are leaving school.

At almost stated intervals the pendulum swings, and so far the American people have each time solved their problems. And solve them we will again, but not without

earnest consultation and reasoning together. Which is exactly where this page enters the national picture.

Let us first consider on or two typical problems. You all know that in May the entire nation celebrated Child Health Week. I was among those who spoke on the basic foundations on which the health of a child is built. A few days after I gave this radio talk I received a letter from a mother who wanted to know how she could supply nourishing food and proper clothing for her three children when her husband was earning exactly fifty-four dollars a month!

Again, a couple who had read something I had said about modern methods in education wrote asking what trades and professions would offer the best opportunities for young people in the next few years.

You will note that both of these earnest letters came from parents. This is encouraging, for there never was a time when the sympathy and tolerance of older people were more needed to help the younger people adjust themselves to a very difficult world.

In the hands of the young people lies the future of this country, perhaps the future of the world and our civilization. They need what help they can get from the older generation and yet it must be sympathetically given with a knowledge that in the last analysis the young people themselves must make their own decisions.

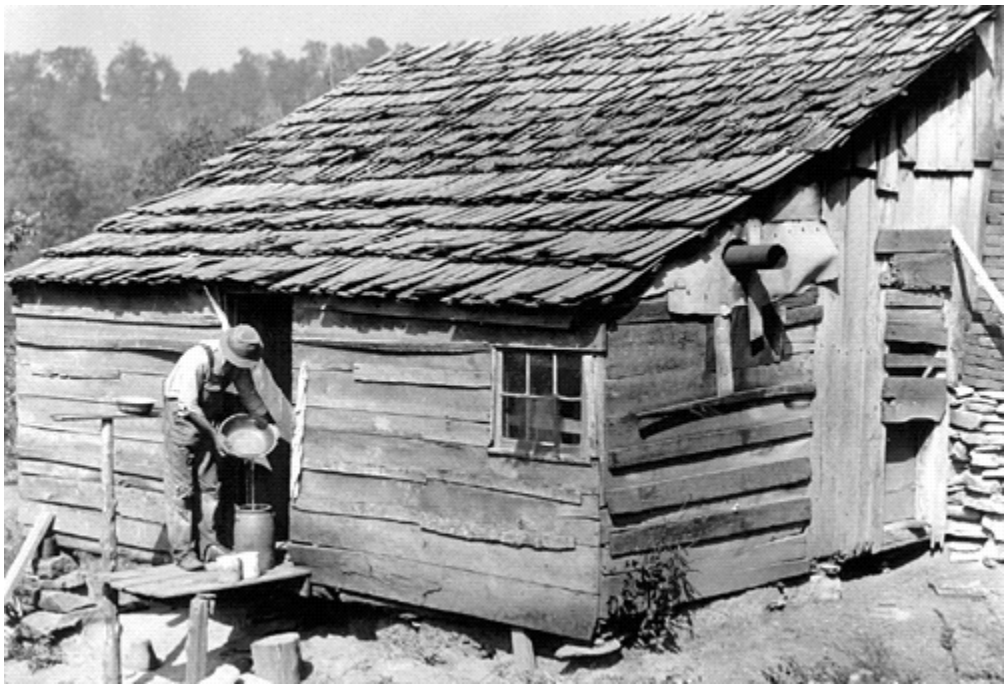
Please do not imagine that I am planning to give you advice that will eventually solve all your problems. We all know that no human being is infallible, and on this page I am not setting myself up as an oracle. But it may be that in the varied life I have had there have been certain experiences which other people will find useful, and it may be

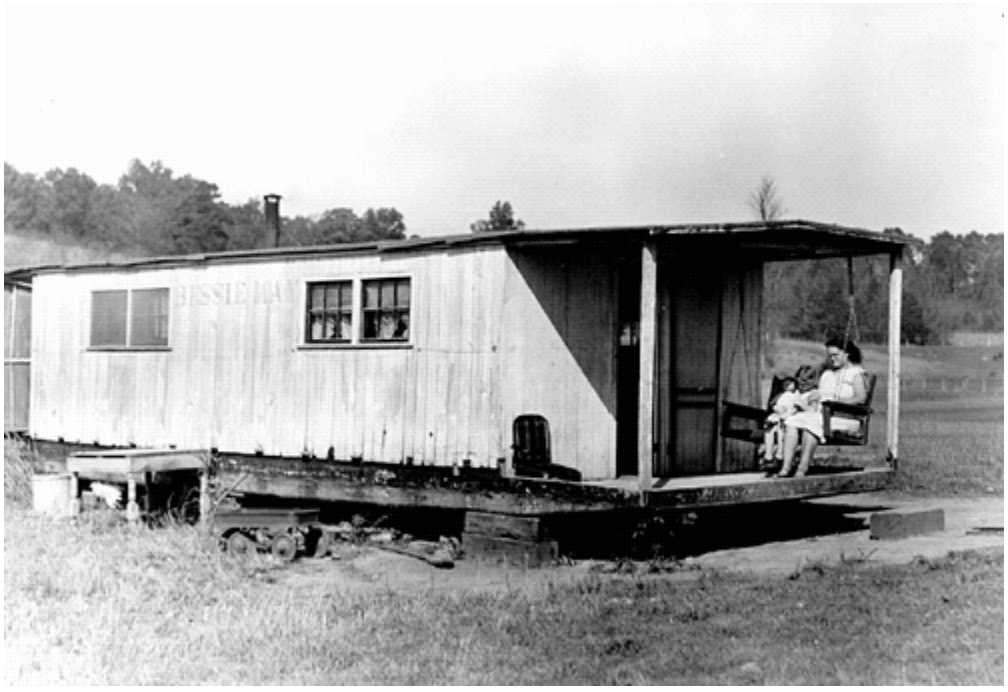
that out of the letters which come to me I shall learn of experiences which will prove helpful to others.

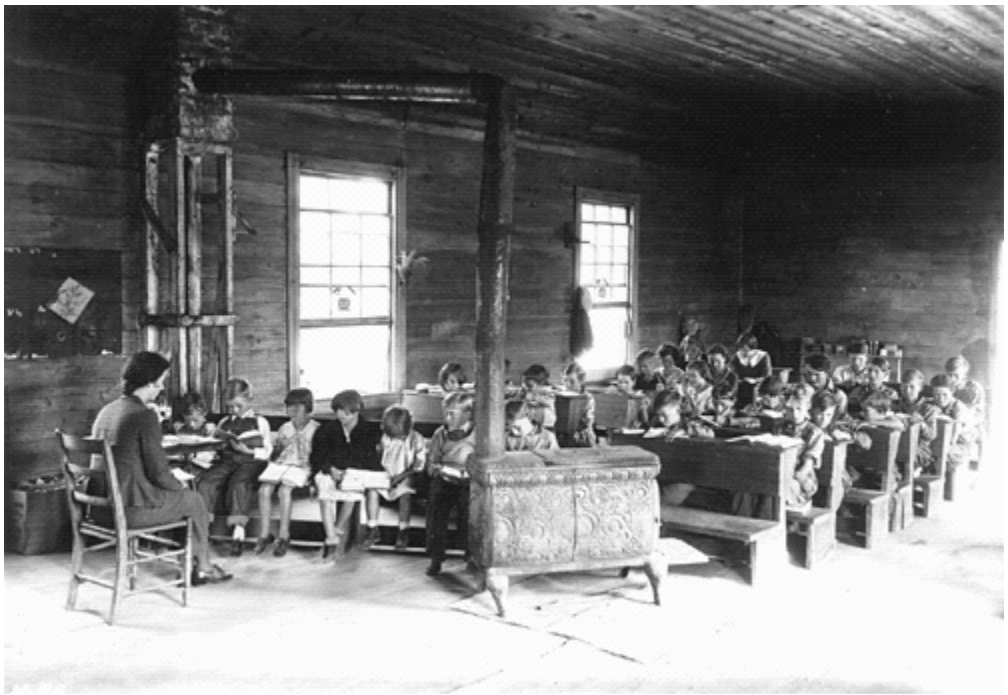
And so I close my first page to and for you, as I opened it, with a cordial invitation—I want you to write to me.

Depression Era Photographs

[Documents 8: The following are photographs taken in East Tennessee by Mr. Lewis Hine in 1933 that depict the impoverished living conditions that existed during the Depression before the Tennessee Valley Authority lead to economic and social improvements in this area. President and Mrs. Roosevelt visited this area on several occasions, before and after the TVA was built.]







Letters to Mrs. Roosevelt

Submitted by Teri Blair
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Unit: Eleanor Roosevelt

Lesson Title: Letters to Mrs. Roosevelt: Request and Responses

Grade Level: Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement Students

Essential Question Related to Vital Theme: Can students compare Eleanor Roosevelt's request for letters from people during the Great Depression with some of the responses she received from children in Tennessee and evaluate the economic situation that existed here?

Lesson Time: one fifty-five minute class period

Curriculum Standards: Advanced Placement U.S. History Course Description Outline

Materials: Copy of "I Want You To Write To Me" article, by Eleanor Roosevelt
Copies of three letters from children in Tennessee
Copy of questions for interpreting primary source documents

Activity Description: Students will be given a copy of Mrs. Roosevelt's article requesting letters from people from every part of the country during the Great Depression. After reading this article, the students will be given the three letters from children in Tennessee to read and discuss. Next, the students will receive a set of questions for interpreting primary source documents and will be asked to write down the answers to those questions. After interpreting the information provided in the documents, the students will write a 250-word essay comparing the information that Mrs. Roosevelt requested to receive in the article with the information that the children provided in their letters and then relating the economic conditions that existed in Tennessee based on what was described by the children writing the letters.

Assessment: The students will be assigned a grade based on the quality of information provided in the answers to the questions and in the essay.

Letters to Mrs. Roosevelt: Request and Responses

After reading Mrs. Roosevelt's "*I Want You To Write To Me*" article and the three letters from the children in Tennessee, answer the following questions to help you interpret the information provided in the documents. After answering these questions, write a 250-word essay comparing Mrs. Roosevelt's request for information with the information she received from the children, then describe the economic conditions that existed in Tennessee based on the information provided by the children in their letters. This assignment is due at the end of class today.

1. What kind of document is each source, and what type of historical evidence can each source provide?

2. How great is the distance between the author of each source and the event he or she is describing? Are the sources firsthand accounts, written by witnesses or participants? Were they written at the time of the event or later?

3. What are the possible biases of each of the sources? (Every document is biased, whether deliberately or unconsciously, by the point of view of the person who wrote it.)

4. For whom were the documents created? Were the authors writing for a specific audience? Did the authors have an outcome they wanted their words to bring about?

A Picture is Worth A Thousand Words

Submitted by Teri Blair
jtjrblair@comcast.net

Unit: Eleanor Roosevelt

Lesson Title: A Picture is Worth A Thousand Words

Grade Level: Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement U.S. History Students

Essential Question related to Vital Theme: Can students examine photographs of the impoverished conditions that existed in East Tennessee during the Great Depression and compare it to other primary source documents revealing Mrs. Roosevelt's concern for social improvements and understand why this area qualified for her personal interest?

Lesson Time: One fifty-five minute class period

Curriculum Standards: Advanced Placement U.S. History Course Description Outline

Materials: Copies of six photographs of East Tennessee during the 1930s
Copy of questions for interpreting historical photographs
Copy of Eleanor Roosevelt's article, *"*Are We Overlooking the Pursuit Of Happiness*"*
Copy of Hazel Guyol's article, "Remembering Eleanor Roosevelt: A Most Accessible First Lady.*"*
Copy of excerpt from Eleanor Roosevelt's book, "This I Remember"

Activity Description: Students will be given copies of the six photographs of the impoverished conditions that existed in East Tennessee during the 1930's and a set of questions to guide them through the interpretation of the photographs. After answering those questions, the students will receive three primary source articles that reveal Mrs. Roosevelt's interest in social improvements, education, and children in poverty. After reading the three articles, the students will be asked to re-interpret the photographs and look for evidence as to why East Tennessee would be of particular interest to Mrs. Roosevelt. The students will be required to summarize a response on this topic using all the primary source documents in a 250-word essay. The essays will be due at the beginning of the next class period.

Assessment: The students will be assigned a grade based on the quality of information provided in the answers to the questions and in the essay.

Interpreting Historical Photographs

Answer the following questions while observing the six photographs that were taken in East Tennessee during the Great Depression.

1. Who do you think might have taken this photograph? How might the photographer's point of view about the subject influenced to final product?

2. For whom and why do you think this photograph was taken? What was the purpose or the message of the photograph?

3. How was this photograph taken? Was it posed or candid?

4. How was this photograph presented? Was it part of a public exhibition or a government project? Was it published in a newspaper or a book?

5. What questions does the photograph raise? Where could you find answers to these questions?

6. How is looking at a photograph different from other types of historical evidence?

Bibliography

Cohen, Robert. *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depr*ession. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Cohen edited the letters sent to Eleanor Roosevelt from children during the Great Depression. These letters depict the desperation of some of these poor children as they request financial assistance from Mrs. Roosevelt just so they can have some of the bare necessities or have the opportunity to stay in school. Mrs. Roosevelt actually requested that people write to her during the Great Depression to talk about their problems and situations. These letters are a few of the over 300,000 pieces of mail that she received while First Lady.

Roosevelt, Eleanor. *The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1992.

This is an abbreviated and augmented edition of Eleanor Roosevelt's original autobiography of which some information has been eliminated and other information has been added. This book provides a good depiction of the affluent lifestyle that Mrs. Roosevelt was born into in the 1880s and the personal experiences and hardships that she endured until young adulthood which prepared her for her tenure as First Lady during the Great Depression. The reader can witness the changes that Mrs. Roosevelt goes through on her way to develop her opinions and ideas regarding social issues.

Roosevelt, Eleanor. *This I Remember*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1949.

In this book, Eleanor Roosevelt provides an analysis of her experiences as First Lady during one of the most tumultuous times in our nation's history and explains why she came to support the causes of poverty, education, and social improvement. She also takes this opportunity to comment on President Roosevelt's contribution to history in an attempt to explain his character and objectives during the complicated years that he served.

Roosevelt, Eleanor. *You Learn By Living: Eleven Keys for a More Fulfilling Life.* New York: Harper & Rowe Publishing, 1960.

Eleanor Roosevelt believed that there was is no experience from which you cannot learn something about life. In this book she reflected on the problems and suggestions that she received from the countless letters sent to her while she served as First Lady and tried to respond with some answers based on what she had learned from simply living. This book was helpful because it contained many excerpts from her speeches and articles that offer tiny little pieces of wisdom and advice, all of which provide a good description of Mrs. Roosevelt as a person.

West, Carroll Van. *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001.

West identifies and characterizes over 250 historic sites and buildings throughout the state of Tennessee that were associated with various agencies during the New Deal. For the reader, it puts a face on many of the alphabet agencies' projects that are a part of New Deal history. East Tennessee is represented well throughout the book, specifically the Tennessee Valley Authority and Norris.

Wigal, Donald, Ph.D. *The Wisdom of Eleanor Roosevelt.* New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2003.

Wigal composed a collection of Eleanor Roosevelt's most famous quotes taken from her speeches, newspaper and magazine articles, and letters. From this book the reader gets a condensed lesson about Mrs. Roosevelt's wisdom, humor, and opinions regarding several topics.