

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Document Based Activity

Part 1: Boom to Bust

MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

A NOTE TO THE EDUCATOR

For farmers, everything hinges on the harvest. Will they have enough wheat to sell? What price will they get for their harvest? During the 1920s and 1930s, wheat farmers experienced both "boom periods" – times when sales of crops increased rapidly--and "bust periods" – when demand decreased and prices fell – as environmental and economic forces interacted. How farmers responded to conditions also affected the situation. For example, when wheat farmers responded to dropping prices by planting more acres, the additional wheat on the market further depressed prices.

In this activity, students will analyze data from the 1920s and 1930s to understand how wheat prices, rainfall, and acres of wheat planted were related. Analysis questions are provided to help students understand and interpret the data.

Activity Components

- Three figures based on historic data:
 - Figure 1: Average Price of Wheat, 1909-1940
 - This graph shows the average price of wheat per bushel paid to farmers in the United States. A bushel of wheat weighs 60 pounds. The large spike in wheat prices in the period 1917-1920 corresponds to high demand for wheat during World War I.
 - Figure 2: Annual Rainfall in Wheat-Producing States, 1910-1940
 - This graph shows the annual rainfall in wheat-producing states. The average for the period, 26.9 inches, is included as a red line so individual years can be compared to the average for the time period.
 - Figure 3: Acres of Wheat Harvested in Texas, 1910-1940
 - This graph shows the total acres of wheat harvested in Texas. Note that units are 1,000 acres, so 500 on the graph corresponds to 500,000 acres.
- Data Analysis Guide: Questions students can use to analyze each graph.

Steps to Complete:

The following procedure is recommended for this activity and can be adapted based on your curricular goals and timing constraints.

1. Discuss "boom periods" and "bust periods" with your students. Explain that for farmers, a boom period would mean that they made a good profit from their harvest. A bust period would mean that they made a very low profit or no profit.
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2. Distribute all three figures and the "Data Analysis Guide" to students.
3. Have students work in small groups to analyze the data using the guide. Divide the class in half. One half of the class should focus on analyzing data from the period 1925-1928. The other half of the class should focus on analyzing data from the period on 1930-1933. Give students 20-25 minutes to analyze their assigned data.
4. After students have had an opportunity to analyze their assigned data, pair groups that analyzed 1925-1928 data with groups that analyzed 1930-1933 data. Ask students to compare the time periods.
5. Ask students to imagine they live on a wheat farm in Texas in 1928 or in 1933. Then ask students to write a paragraph describing what the last three years have been like for their family. Have students include predictions for the wheat harvest in the following year based on the data from previous years. What actions could farmers take based on the prediction?

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Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Data Analysis Guide

1. Circle the time period your group is analyzing: 1925-1928 or 1930-1933

Figure 1: Average Price of Wheat

2. Look at the wheat prices during the period you circled in question 1. During this period, what was the minimum (lowest) price and maximum (highest) price per bushel?
3. How do the wheat prices in your assigned period compare to the three years before the period began?

Figure 2: Annual Rainfall

4. What was the minimum and maximum amount of rainfall during the period you circled in question 1?
5. How does your time period compare to the average amount of rainfall? Are most years in the time period above or below the average?

Figure 3: Acres of Wheat Harvested

6. Identify the highest and lowest numbers of acres of wheat harvested during your period. Describe any patterns or trends for your period.
7. How does your assigned time period compare to the three years immediately before your period began?



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Summary

8. Summarize your findings. Complete the phrases below with the following descriptions: much higher, higher, the same, lower, much lower

Time Period (circle one): 1925-1928 or 1930-1933

- During this time period, the price per bushel of wheat was _____ than other times from 1909-1940.
- Annual rainfall was _____ compared to the average?
- Overall, the number of acres being harvested was _____ compared to other times.
- Explain whether this was a boom period or bust period for farmers.

9. Now, focus on the other time period. Complete the phrases below with the following descriptions: much higher, higher, the same, lower, much lower

Time Period (circle one): 1925-1928 or 1930-1933

- During this time period, the price per bushel of wheat was _____ than other times from 1909-1940.
- Annual rainfall was _____ compared to other times.
- Overall, the number of acres being harvested was _____ compared to other times.
- Explain whether this was a boom period or bust period for farmers.

10. Did farmers plant more or less wheat after prices dropped? Why?



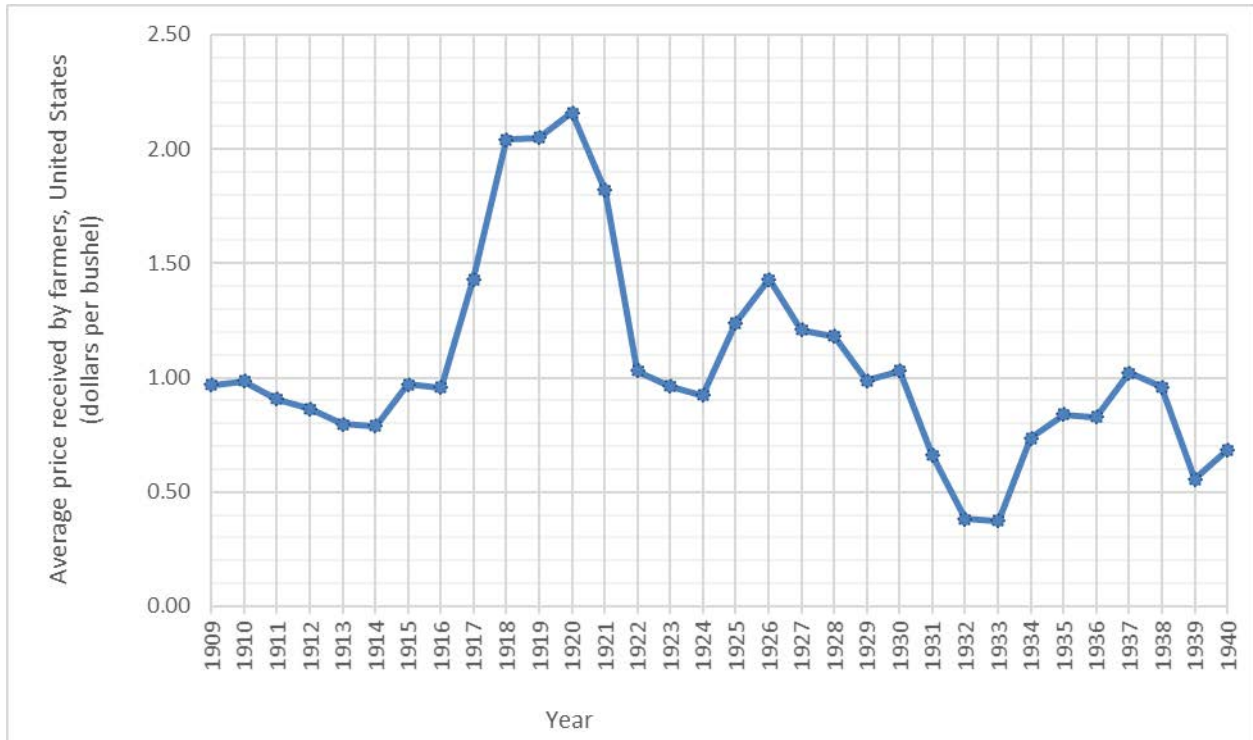
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Figure 1: Average Price of Wheat (1909-1940)



Source: The Wheat Year Book



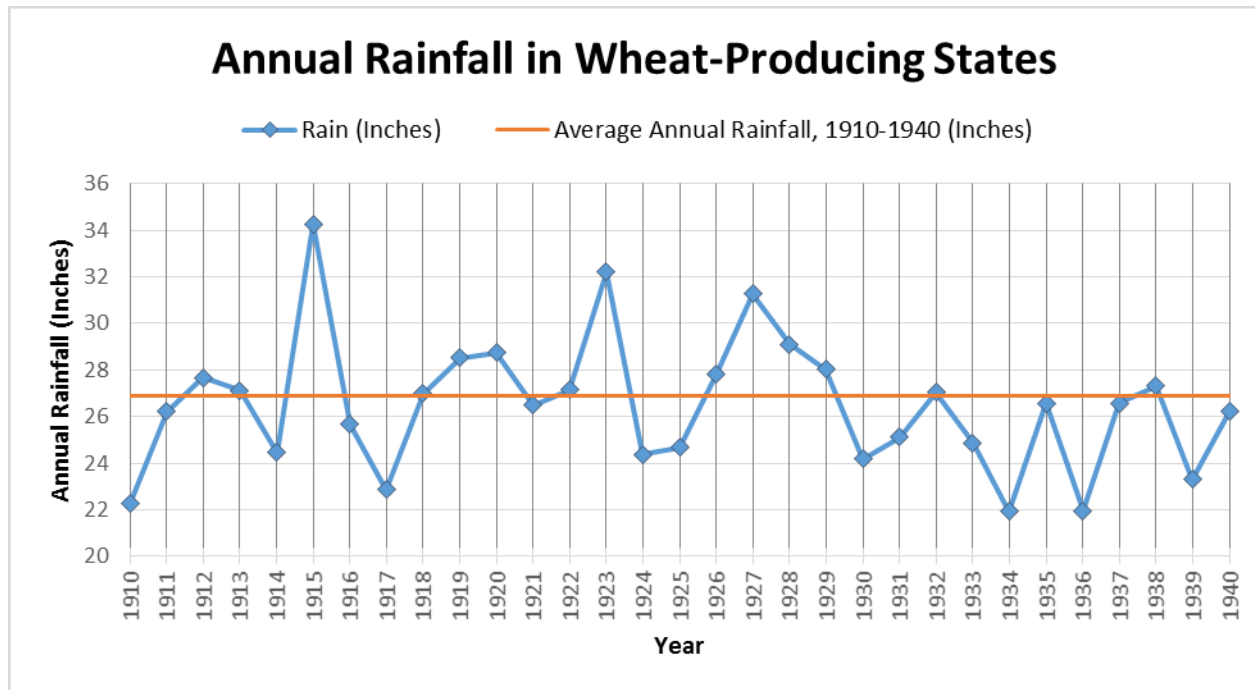
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Figure 2: Annual Rainfall in Wheat-Producing States (1910-1940)

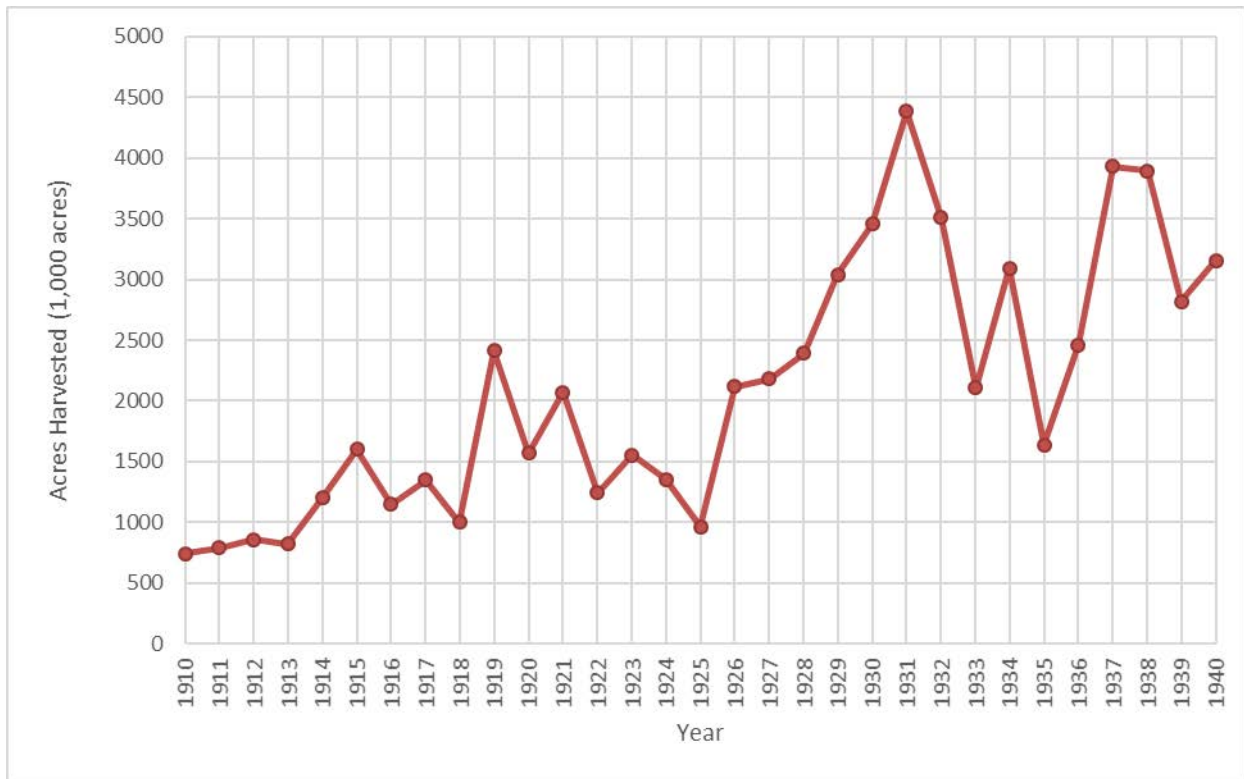


Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Centers for Environmental Information. (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cag/time-series/us/>)



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Figure 3: Acres of Wheat Harvested in Texas (1910-1940)



Source: The Texas Wheat History

