

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**  
**Document Based Activity**  
**Part 5: California or Dust**  
**MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"**

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**Life in the CCC**

**A NOTE TO THE EDUCATOR**

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was one of the early New Deal programs enacted by Franklin D. Roosevelt after he became president in 1933. The CCC placed unemployed young men between the ages of 18 and 23 (later expanded to 17 and 28) in conservation and natural resource development jobs on government-owned land. Work projects ranged from building roads and dams, to cleaning parkland and planting trees. For each month of service, men received \$30, \$25 of which was sent home to the men's families. The program remained popular for the nine years it was in operation. Congress voted to end the program in 1942 because of the military draft.

In this activity, students examine primary source documents that present different experiences in and attitudes about the CCC. Students will analyze how experiences and attitudes differed based on a person's race or gender.

**Activity Components**

- Guiding Questions: Prompts to focus student exploration of each document
- Primary Sources:
  - Document 1: Photograph "'C.C.C. Boys Constructing Campground Table and Benches at Baker Lake"
  - Document 2: "A Negro in the CCC"
  - Document 3: Photograph "African-American CCCers Practice Radio Communications"
  - Document 4: "New York Girls Ask the President for a CCC of Their Own"
  - Document 5: "A Midwestern Runaway Remembers the CCC"

**Steps to Complete**

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

1. Assign groups of students one or more documents to analyze.
2. Select guiding questions to help the students investigate each source. You can give your students all of the guiding questions or choose a few for them to respond to.



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3. Ask each group to present their findings to the class or a fellow student and share what was learned.
  
4. Ask groups to write a script for and/or perform a radio news story about life in the CCC. In the news story, the host should interview one or more people about their experiences and attitudes. Encourage students to use details from the documents they reviewed. If students perform their scripts, considering recording their stories.



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**Life in the CCC**  
**Guiding Questions**

In Part 5 of "Up from the Dust," Frank Dunn learns what life in a New Deal program was like. The primary sources in this activity illustrate different viewpoints of what the Civilian Conservation Corps was like for those who participated, as well as the attitudes of those who were not allowed to participate. You will be assigned one or several of these sources to review. As you review each source, use these questions to analyze it.

**Document 1: Photograph "C.C.C. Boys Constructing Campground Table and Benches at Baker Lake"**

- Cover the caption below the photo and look at the image. What do you notice about the people and the setting?
- What do you think is happening? What are you unsure about?
- What sort of work do you think these people were doing? Why?
- Do you think life in the CCC was easy or difficult? Why?
- Now read the description. What information did you gain from the description?

**Document 2: "A Negro in the CCC"**

- What did the author think about the CCC before joining? Why?
- How did the experience of being in the CCC differ for people of different races?
- What details does the author provide about how the people treated the people in the corps?
- What were the living conditions like at Camp Dix and the camp where Luther later worked? Which details help you understand the situation?
- What questions does the document raise for you?

**Document 3: Photograph "African-American CCCers Practice Radio Communications"**

- Cover the caption and look at the photo. What do you notice about the people and the setting?
- What do you think is happening? What are you unsure about?
- Now read the description. What information did you gain from the description?



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**Document 4: "New York Girls Ask the President for a CCC of Their Own"**

- What is the purpose of this letter? What motivated the authors to write it?
- Identify the claims the authors make to support their argument.
- Why do you think the authors sent the letter anonymously (did not sign their names)?

**Document 5: "A Midwestern Runaway Remembers the CCC"**

- What did the author think about the CCC before joining? Why did he decide to join?
- What details let you know what work was like?
- What did the author gain from being in the CCC?



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**Document 1**

"C.C.C. boys constructing campground table and benches at Baker Lake Mt, Baker National Forest. Photo by Fromme." Department of Agriculture, 1936. National Archives: Records of the Forest Service, 1870-2008, Historic Photo Series. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/299010>



Description: By 1935, the Roosevelt Administration had sent over 150,000 members of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to conserve, improve, and expand public park sites. CCC workers cleared walking trails and campsites, built administrative buildings, and planted millions of trees at parks around the country. This image shows CCC members making a camping table and benches (as their supervisor watches close by) in the Mount Baker National Forest in Washington State. The table and benches are designed in the "National Park Service Rustic" architectural style, a style that used wood and stone materials to build structures that blended into a park's natural environment.

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**Document 2**

Luther C. Wandall, "A Negro in the CCC," *Crisis* 42 (August 1935): 244, 253-54; from the *New Deal Network*, "African Americans in the Civilian Conservation Corps,"  
<http://newdeal.feri.org/aacc/index.htm>.

Selections from "A Negro in the CCC"	Glossary Terms
<p>During the two years of its previous existence I had heard many conflicting reports <b>concerning</b> the Civilian Conservation Corps, President Roosevelt's <b>pet project</b>....Some said that the <b>colored</b> got all the leftovers. Others said that everything was all right. But my brother, who is a World War veteran, advised me <b>emphatically</b>: "I wouldn't be in anything connected with the Army."</p>	<p>concerning: about            pet project: project undertaken because it is someone's personal desire            emphatically: said with emphasis            colored: term used at the time meaning African-American people</p>
<p>So it was with some <b>apprehension</b> that....I was "<b>accepted for enrollment</b>," and should report the following Monday "to U. S. Army authorities for further registration"....</p>	<p>apprehension: fearing trouble in the future            accepted for enrollment: given a place in the CCC</p>
<p>So there I was, on a bus bound for Camp Dix, New Jersey, without having prepared or told anyone goodbye. Our bus was comfortable, and equipped with a radio, so the ride was a very enjoyable one.</p>	
<p>We reached Camp Dix about 7:30 that evening....And here it was that <b>Mr. James Crow</b> first <b>definitely put in his appearance</b>. When my record was taken at Pier I, a "C" was placed on it. When the busloads were made up at Whitehall Street an officer reported as follows: "35, 8 colored." But until now there had been no distinction made.</p>	<p>Mr. James Crow: refers to state and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the Southern United States, known as Jim Crow laws            put in his appearance: became visible</p>



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<p>But before we left the bus the officer shouted emphatically: "Colored boys <b>fall out</b> in the rear." The colored from several buses were herded together, and stood in line until after the white boys had been registered and taken to their tents. This seemed to be the established order of procedure at Camp Dix.</p> <p>This separation of the colored from the whites was completely and rigidly maintained at this camp....</p>	<p>fall out: leave one's place in a military formation</p>
<p>While we stood in line there, as well as afterwards, I was interested to observe these officers. They were contradictory, and by no means simple or uniform in type. Many of them were southerners, how many I could not tell. Out of their official character they were usually <b>courteous</b>, kindly, <b>refined</b>, and even <b>intimate</b>. They offered extra money to any of us who could sing or dance. On the other hand, some were <b>vicious</b> and ill-tempered, and apparently <b>restrained</b> only by fear....</p>	<p>courteous: polite  refined: well-mannered  intimate: acting like a close friend  vicious: severe or evil in nature  restrained: held back</p>
<p>Food at Camp Dix was poor in quality and variety, and barely <b>sufficient</b> in quantity. A typical breakfast: boiled eggs, corn flakes, milk, bread, coffee, butter. Lunch: frankfurters, sauerkraut, potatoes, gravy, bread, apple-butter, coffee. Dinner: bologna, applesauce, potato salad, bread, coffee, cake.</p>	<p>sufficient: enough</p>



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<p>We stayed at Camp Dix eight days. We were never told officially where we were going. Just before we boarded the train we were split into two companies. I was placed in Company Y....We were taken to permanent camp on a site rich in Colonial and Revolutionary history, in the upper South. This camp was a dream compared with Camp Dix. There plenty to eat, and we slept in <b>barracks</b> instead of tents. An excellent recreation hall, playground, and other facilities.</p>	<p>barracks: buildings used to house soldiers</p>
<p>...But the final result leaves much to be desired. Things are not always run efficiently, food is often poorly cooked.</p>	
<p>During the first week we did no work outside camp, but only hiked, <b>drilled</b>, and exercised. Since then we have worked five days a week, eight hours a day. Our bosses are local men, southerners, but on the whole I have found nothing to complain of. The work varies, but is always healthy, outdoor labor....</p>	<p>drilled: practiced military training exercises</p>
<p>Our officers, who, of course, are white, are a captain, a first lieutenant, a doctor, and several sergeants. Our athletic director is colored, as is our <b>vocational</b> teacher. Discipline is maintained by imposing extra duty and fines on offenders. The fines are taken only from the \$5 a month which the men receive directly.</p>	<p>vocational: related to occupations, jobs</p>
<p>On the whole, I was <b>gratified</b> rather than disappointed with the CCC. I had expected the worst. Of course it reflects, to some extent, all the practices and prejudices of the U. S. Army. But as a job and an experience, for a man who has no work, I can heartily recommend it.</p>	<p>gratified: pleased</p>



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**Document 3**

Civilian Conservation Corps, "African-American CCCers Practice Radio Communications,"  
*HERB: Resources for Teachers*, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1083>.



Description: In this 1933 photograph, young men study radio operations at a Civilian Conservation Corps camp for African-American men in Kane, Pennsylvania. After work hours, enrollees were encouraged to take educational and vocational (job skills) classes that might help them find employment after they were discharged from the CCC.

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**Document 4**

Anonymous, "New York Girls Ask the President for a CCC of Their Own," *HERB: Resources for Teachers*, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/729>.

*Note: original spelling has been preserved*

Homer, New York

[Acknowledged Feb. 11, 1935]

Mr. Roosevelt,

In Homer a lot of us girls think that seeing there is a CCC camp for boys that there should be one for girls. In a book we read about a military camp for girls, it told how in the morning the girls have to attend school for so long and in the afternoon too. They had to learn how to sew and nurse the sick. They had to make clothes for the poor. . . . A camp like that would give young girls a place to go. We are not very old ourselves from 13 on up but we get in a lot of trouble just the same. And we think you might try to do something about it so that girls in our age could do something like we mentioned and not have to wait until they are 17-18 or 19 years of age. We no how to sew and cook we use to belong to "4-H" and "Girl Scouts" and in school there are a lot of cranky old teachers, and the children think themselves so high above us girls. If you should care to give us your answer you can broadcast it over the Radio at noon between 5:00-5:30 at station B.E.N. Buffalo if you don't ans. before the 28th of February we will know you aren't going to help us. Why we are writing is because we want to get away from home get a change in life. And we thought maybe you would help us.

Don't put this in the papers. If you do leave out where the Letter came from.

Signed,

The Eight Secret X's

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**Document 5**

"A Midwestern Runaway Remembers the CCC," *HERB: Resources for Teachers*, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1010>.

*Note: In this interview, Jim Mitchell describes his experiences in the CCC. "Poke" refers to his friend Peter Lijinski.*

Poke and I ran into an army officer in Lake City, Iowa. We told him we were on the road and had taken up with a carnival. "That's not life for kids," he said. "Why don't you join the CCC?" Poke was easily persuaded. I balked at the idea of having some army guys push me around. But I was sick to my guts of being footloose and went back to Kenosha with Poke. My grandfather talked me into joining the CCC.

Company 2616 was stationed at Camp Norwood on the banks of the Wisconsin River....Little did we realize that this stark encampment was the haven thousands of boys like ourselves needed....

On the road you lived for yourself and to hell with everyone else. In the CCC you not only learned to live with other guys, you had to go out with a crew and haul logs together. You learned to work as a team.

You worked alongside state foresters who took no nonsense from you. They wanted a day's work and they got it. We had a thousand and one different jobs, from climbing trees to surveying parks. You learned to do a job and do it well. It gave you confidence when you started to become accepted by your peers and to fit in with them.

You had three square meals a day with good food and a good place to sleep. On the road, you spent all your time wondering about whether you were going to eat. If you worked it wasn't useful work but just for food. To this day I can go and see parks that we built in the CCC, I can see trees that we planted. It's a living legacy. You didn't have a living legacy on the road.

The CCC shaped my life, which had had no direction. Back home I'd had no role models to measure my life against. In the corps there were well-educated fellows whose goals had been interrupted. I wanted to be like them and knew I had to get an education to do so.



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I stayed in the CCC for two years getting thirty dollars a month. At last I could bring some help to my family. My first letter gave me a big boost:

"Dear son, I want you to know how grateful we are to you and proud, too. The \$25 we get each month goes a long way in holding us together. It's good to look Dimitri in the eye and plunk down cash for groceries, and not be obliged to Merriweather for the rent."

For the first time I felt good about myself.

