

CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

Historical Literacy Guide:



Political Science and Citizenship



Wisconsin Historical
MUSEUM

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Object Literacy: *Learning from Objects*

The Wisconsin Historical Museum, as part of the Wisconsin Historical Society, has developed the following guide to assist in the teaching of standards for social studies. By focusing on objects, artifacts, maps, photographs and other primary sources from its collection, students will be able to redefine how they learn from objects and from history.

Object-based learning is

- Using a variety of objects as central to the development of lesson concepts
- Utilizing objects through posing and investigating questions
- Utilizing well-thought-out initial questions to stimulate further critical thinking
- Using students' natural interest and inclination for question-posing to guide instruction in all subjects
- Leading students to their own answers by responding to open ended questions and/or returning the students' focus to the object
- Student-directed learning following paths created by the students

Thinking Like a Historian: Rethinking History Instruction and Common Core State Standards Initiative

Thinking Like a Historian: Rethinking History Instruction by Nikki Mandell and Bobbie Malone is a teaching and learning framework that explains the essential elements of history and provides “how-to” examples for building historical literacy in classrooms at all grade levels. With practical examples, engaging and effective lessons and classroom activities that tie to essential questions, *Thinking Like a Historian* provides a framework to enhance and improve teaching and learning history.

Thinking Like a Historian: Rethinking History Instruction

(TLH) **inquiry-based educational theory** provides a common language for educators and students. The theory allows for the educational process to be combined with categories of inquiry which promote historical literacy.

It is the intent of the Wisconsin Historical Museum that this guide serves educators and students in providing object-based lessons to be used after visiting and experiencing the museum on a field trip. Our field trips support *Common Core English Language Arts Standards* for Reading: Informational Text and Speaking & Listening standards as well as CCSS for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies.

Educators should use this guide as a post-museum visit activity. It will continue to challenge students to “Think Like a Historian” by encouraging them to think critically, make personal connections with history, and to evaluate information by asking “why”, “how”, and most importantly, “How do you know?”

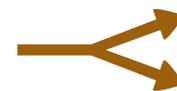
TLH CATEGORIES



CAUSE AND EFFECT



CHANGE AND CONTINUITY



TURNING POINTS



USING THE PAST



THROUGH THEIR EYES

Background Information

During the Depression of the 1930s, many young, unmarried and unemployed men jumped at the opportunity to join the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). President Franklin Roosevelt created this New Deal agency in March 1933 to combat the destruction and erosion of the country's national resources and to put men to work. One such man, Werner Brunner of Monticello, Wisconsin, joined the CCC the very next year. The agency gave him this trunk, which he had stenciled with "Werner F. Brunner/Monticello, Wis./D.R." The trunk was made in Stanley (Chippewa County), Wisconsin by the Tronck-McKenzie Company, which specialized at the time in "CCC and Army Lockers."

Born in Green County, Wisconsin in 1915, Brunner was the son of Swiss immigrants. In 1914, his parents Arnold and Ida Brunner and their five children moved to Green County to farm, living first in Sylvester and then in Washington Township. Monticello, the town name mentioned on his trunk, is also located in Green County.

Brunner joined the CCC during August 1934, a few months after graduating high school, when he realized "a kid out of high school had no chance of getting a job." The agency sent Brunner to Fort Sheridan, Illinois for training. Once trained, the CCC assigned him to Company #601, a racially-integrated unit, and dispatched him to West Salem in La Crosse County during May 1934, to work on drought relief (the "D.R." on his trunk refers to "Drought Relief"). His company worked on project PE-96, which focused on preventing erosion on private land. In retrospect, Brunner called the members of his company "nature's surgeons." They "helped nature heal gashes in the landscape [i.e. deep gullies], the result of poor stewardship of the land and torrential rain." Their job was to build an earthen dam made of trucked-in soil at the deepest end of each gully.

Brunner wrote about his experience with these words, "The loose soil...needed to be tamped into a hard and stable surface. This is where we came into the picture. Dozens of us were the tampers. The tamping tool...was a 10" diameter piece of tree trunk about 18" long, to which two boards were nailed for handles. You picked it up and dropped it hundreds of times to pack the soil. If you diligently worked at the job and didn't do a lot of 'gold bricking' (loafing), you would be promoted to a more interesting job." Brunner was quickly promoted and spent the rest of his time planting trees "up the walls of the

gully.” His company planted nut trees, primarily hickory and walnut, and what Brunner calls “weed trees,” anything that would “grow fast, establish roots, and stabilize the soil.”

Brunner remembers the government paying him \$30 a month, of which he received five dollars. The other \$25 was sent home. In the description of his CCC adventures, Brunner recalled making extra money on the side: “With one of my \$5 I bought an ironing board and an electric iron. I pressed shirts and pants for 25 cents. The shirts had to have a sharp crease down the middle of the pocket. After accumulating enough money, I paid someone to letter [stencil] my footlocker.”

Many consider the Civilian Conservation Corps President Roosevelt’s most successful initiative. A Chicago judge praised the agency by noting that crimes committed by young men in his city had dropped fifty-five percent by the CCC putting idle men to work. Most people, however, were more impressed with the CCC’s tangible accomplishments. During its nine-year existence the Corps built 3,470 fire towers; 97,000 miles of fire roads; devoted over four million man-days to fighting fires; performed erosion control; developed recreational facilities in national, state, county, and metropolitan parks; and planted more than three billion trees. Not surprisingly, some affectionately referred to the CCC as “Roosevelt’s Tree Army.”

Beginning in 1940, however, the Corps began to suffer. In many ways the agency remained as popular as ever, but the possibility of the United States entering World War II and the election of anti-New Deal congressmen threatened the CCC’s existence. By late summer 1941, the Corps was in serious trouble. With a general economic upturn and its associated increase in jobs, the CCC no longer filled one of its main purposes. Once America entered the war, Congress declared the CCC a non-essential agency and recommended it be abolished on July 1, 1942 (technically the CCC was never formally abolished, but Congress eliminated its funding).

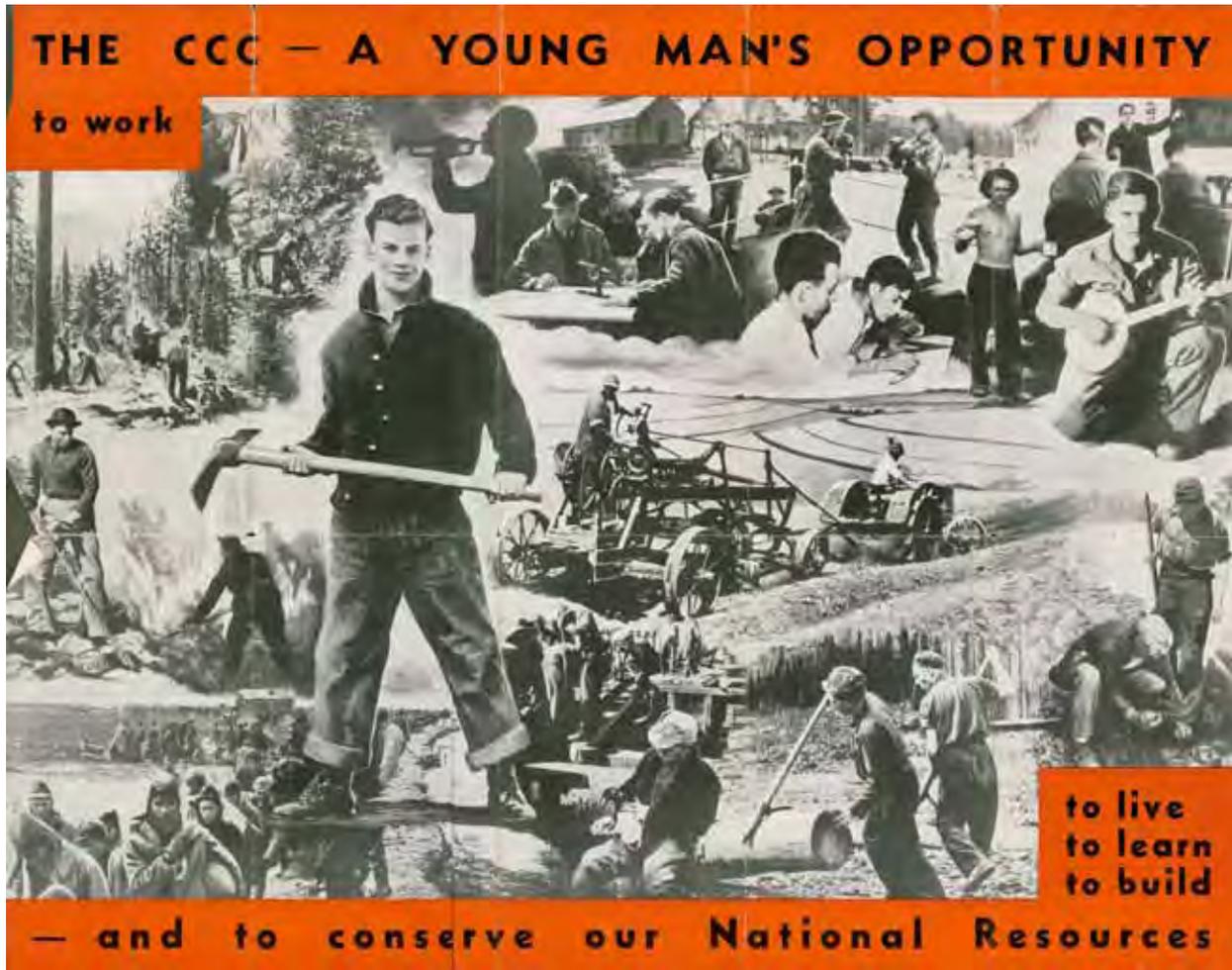
Brunner left the CCC late in the spring of 1935 when his sister’s neighboring farmer offered him a position as a hired hand. Several decades later Brunner returned with his wife to the dam site he worked on. He found the area “truly beautiful.” In his words, “I saw several acres of level land and again experienced the sweet smell of a newly-mown hay field.”

Images for the Classroom



A CCC Trunk, 1934—1935 (WHi Museum Object: 1990.165.26).

Images for the Classroom



Civilian Conservation Corps Poster, 1939 (WHi Image ID: 5762). Poster used by the CCC to recruit enrollees, 1939.

Student Activity

Resources:

Dictionary of Wisconsin History: Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in Wisconsin

http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=14890

Introduce students to the CCC by using the teacher background information. Share with students the definition of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in Wisconsin from the Dictionary of Wisconsin History. Then project or share a photocopy with students of **Museum Object CCC Trunk** (WHi Museum Object:1990.165.26) and **Civilian Conservation Corps Poster** (WHi Image ID: 5762). Ask students to review the images, brainstorm, and write a response. Give students plenty of time to respond before introducing the discussion questions.

Dictionary Entry

Term: Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in Wisconsin

Definition: This New Deal work program established by the federal government on May 5, 1933, employed more than two million men aged 18-25 to conserve natural resources. In Wisconsin, they cleaned forests of slashings left by lumber companies, planted new trees, controlled forest fires, and helped build state parks. The program officially ended on July 30, 1942, by which time most of its participants had enlisted to fight in World War II or had found other wartime employments.

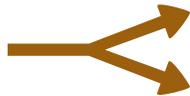
Teacher-led Student Inquiry and Analysis Questions



1. After reviewing the background information, why did Brunner decide to join the CCC? Aside from a steady job, what other benefits did he get out of working for the CCC? How does his trunk preserve these memories?



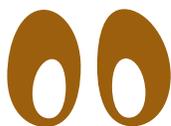
2. How does Brunner's story reflect the larger CCC experience in Wisconsin? What opportunities exist today for young people to participate in service-learning programs like the CCC?



3. With the information from *The Dictionary of Wisconsin History: Civilian Conservation Corps in Wisconsin*, how did the United States government action of creating agencies like the CCC transform the lives of individuals? Describe how states and communities where CCC projects took place were transformed?



4. How was Brunner's experience in the 1930s similar or different to the economic downturn since 2008? Why were many programs like the CCC eliminated? Do you think they may be reinstated some day? How?



5. Review the **Civilian Conservation Corps Poster** (WHi Image ID: 5762). What do young graduates do today? Why were programs like the CCC so important?

Bibliography and Additional Resources

Images and objects shared in this document can be found on the following Wisconsin Historical Society webpages:

Wisconsin Historical Images www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/

Curators' Favorites www.wisconsinhistory.org/museum/artifacts/

Additional information can be found at:

The History of Wisconsin Volume V: War, a New Era, and Depression, 1914-1940

by Paul W. Glad

Reflection

The Wisconsin Historical Museum is interested in hearing memories of favorite experiences or exhibits. Have students use the next page to illustrate and describe what they enjoyed most. Please return to:

Museum Education

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