

John Campbell



A Migrant Child from Oklahoma
(composite)
1937

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Storybook Summary

Teacher Introduction

John Campbell is a “composite character” representing experiences that some children had growing up in the Hayward area during the Great Depression. His story is based on the recollections of several local residents who shared their childhood memories with Adriana Aguirre. Ms. Aguirre was graduate student intern from San Francisco State University’s Museum Studies Department who researched and wrote this Depression era story. We thank Sandy Serrano and Ed Silveira for sharing their memories with us.

The story of John Campbell reflects a typical Dust Bowl family migration. The fictitious Campbell family came from Oklahoma to California in 1935 due to the Dust Bowl that was sweeping the panhandle of Oklahoma and the southern United States. In order to seek a better life for his family, John’s father decided to gather up the few belongings the family could bring with them and move to California, where there was a promise of abundance. The family traveled along the “Mother Road” – Route 66 – and settled in the Central Valley where they faced unemployment, poverty, and discrimination. Still hopeful, the Campbell family once again moved, this time coming to the Bay Area where work was more plentiful.

In 1936, a California newspaper headline read “37,000 jobless enter state in 5-month period.” While some parts of California were being hit hard by the Depression, Hayward remained a very hopeful city. There were several federal and local programs that tried to help the unemployed. For example, in 1933 the Hunt’s Cannery added an additional shift in an effort to employ 500 more workers.

Under President Roosevelt’s New Deal, there were many programs that had positive impacts locally. An Alameda County committee was established in 1933 by the Federal Relief Administration to hire unemployed school staff. The teachers were hired to teach unemployed people new skills so they would be more competitive in the job market.

One of the most far-reaching of the New Deal programs was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which has lasting effects in the Hayward area today. The WPA provided jobs on several local building projects including the conversion of Lake Chabot road into a major boulevard and the construction of the Hayward Plunge. Other city projects included the opening of an employment office on C Street, the building of parks, and the creation of jobs to clean streets and gutters and build hiking trails.

John Campbell

Other WPA projects included the creation of public art. A painting by Tom E. Lewis was commissioned in 1938. Lewis had also painted a mural for the Placerville post office. The Hayward painting, which can still be seen today at the Bradford Post Office on C Street, depicts a scene of early Hayward when farmland stretched for miles. The WPA art often reflected themes of labor and local heritage. In the end, approximately 23,000 watercolors and drawings, 2,250 murals, 13,000 sculptures, 85,000 paintings, and over 1,000,000 easel pictures were created across the country. The San Francisco Bay Area has some excellent examples. See the Lesson Plans below for more on this topic.



"Rural Landscape" by Tom E. Lewis, 1938

Introduction



My name is John Campbell and I was born in Lenora, Oklahoma, on April 2, 1926. I lived in Oklahoma with my parents and two sisters.

My Father was a corn farmer. But growing corn was becoming hard. There were many people like my father who struggled to farm the land. A big problem was the **drought** of 1931. There had been very little rain in the **panhandle** of Oklahoma, where we lived. The earth was very dry. Then the wind started blowing and it just blew dust everywhere. All the dust was the reason they called where we lived the "**Dust Bowl**."

Without growing **crops**, people like my father were not making any money. This caused a big problem because eventually people couldn't pay the bank so they lost their land and homes. This was a hard time for people.

Sometimes we would wake up in the morning to find dust all over our hair, nose and mouth. We had to sleep with wet washcloths over our faces to keep from breathing in dust at night. We had to be very careful about breathing in all that dust, because we could get "dust **pneumonia**" and die. Everyone had to sweep out their house in the morning because if they didn't, there would be so much dust that they would have to scoop it out with shovels. It was the children's job to clean the nostrils of the cows two times a day so they could breathe.



(An Oklahoma farmer shoveling the sand from the fence in order to keep it from being buried.)

Farmers couldn't grow any **crops** under these conditions so they started moving away.

*"Children of the Dust Bowl" by Jerry Stanley.
Photo by Arthur Rothstein,
courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

The Great Move

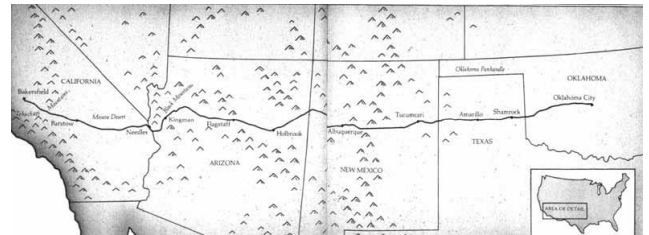
Many of the farmers began to make the move from Oklahoma to California because that's where the jobs were. They read the **handbills** that California growers sent to Oklahoma to advertise jobs and high **wages**.

Everyone was talking about moving to California!

Lots of **rumors** were heard about California. For example, people said that there was so much fruit growing on trees that no one went hungry. If you got hungry, you could just pick some fruit off the tree. But these were all rumors, as we would come to find out.

It was during this time that my parents decided to make the move as well. People would pack their trunks and cars with whatever they could fit in them. People packed up mattresses, tables, chairs, and even their farm animals. We had to make sure we were really prepared because it was about 2,000 miles to California and it would take us many weeks to get there.

Once we had everything packed in our 1922 Ford truck and were ready to go, we headed out on Route 66. This was the road that would take us all the way to California. Sometimes along the road we would meet up with other people who were also moving to California. We looked like a giant **caravan** of cars along the "Mother Road." This **saying** came from the famous book called *The Grapes of Wrath* written by John Steinbeck.



Map of the Mother Road (route 66).
Credit: "Children of the Dust Bowl" by Jerry Stanley.

The trip was not an easy one. We had to sleep outside on the open road. Lots of cars broke down along the way. There were a lot of struggles and unexpected events. A few times, when our car ran out of gas Father had to **hitchhike** to the next town and get an odd job to earn some money to buy gas. The next day he would hitchhike back to get us.

Everything was done along the side of the road. I mean everything. We would eat, sleep, bathe, and even go to the bathroom along the side of the road. We had to do whatever it took to get to California.



It was not so bad for us kids because we could always find things to play with like rocks, nails, and sometimes there were stray dogs to play with. We also made up games and sang songs. My dad made up songs about how great things would be once we got to California.

People on the "Mother Road" traveling west from Oklahoma.
Credit: "Children of the Dust Bowl" by Jerry Stanley. Photo by Dorothea Lange from the Library of Congress.

Life in a Squatter Camp

We reached California in the Spring of 1934. But the worst part of the trip was yet to come, because we still had to cross the Mojave Desert. Sometimes it would get so hot that my dad had us sleep during the day and then we would continue to drive at night.

California was not what we expected.

Father could not find a job anywhere. We had nowhere to go so we settled down at a **squatter camp** near Kern Lake in the San Joaquin Valley. A squatter camp was a place where people would set up camp since there wasn't anywhere else to go. My parents didn't like the camps because they said they were dirty and full of disease. But my sisters and I didn't mind it too much; we liked going to school and there were lots of kids to play with.

A squatter camp.



*"Children of the Dust Bowl" by Jerry Stanley
Photo by Dorothea Lange from the Library of Congress*

One of the first things my parents did when we got to the camp was put us in school. School was very important to my father, because he wanted us to learn how to read and write. Dad would say that reading and writing were very important in life. At school we didn't have much and we often had to share school supplies and books. If anything, we learned how to share in school.

Some of the text books I remember learning to read with were the Dick and Jane books. These books made learning how to read a lot more fun. I always liked the Dick and Jane books, because Dick was a lot like me. He was **confident** and **adventurous**. Jane reminded me of one of my sisters, since he always wanted to tag along wherever I went. Dick and Jane also had a dog named Spot. I would always ask my parents for a dog, but they would never let me have one, because they said it would be one more mouth to feed. But that was all right, because there were always dogs in the camps.

My parents didn't have money back then to buy toys so we had to make our own toys and made up our own games. It was fun to play with all the kids in the squatter camp. We played games like "Kick the Can" and "Red Rover."

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In order to play Red Rover you need a lot of kids. You divide up into two groups and each group stands in a straight line facing each other. One team yells out "Red Rover Red Rover send <John> right over." Then John (or the person they called out) breaks away from his team's line and tries to crash through the other team's line. The goal of the game is for the chosen person to break through the other team's line. If the kid does not break the line he has to join the other team until there is no one left on the losing team. I was always on the winning team, because I could break through the line. I was known as the Red Rover champ at the camp.

People living outside of the camps were not always nice to us. One day when I had to go with Mother to the grocery store someone yelled out "Oakies go home." This upset Mother, but I didn't know what an Oakie was so I didn't really care. Later, she told me that "Oakie" was a mean name given to people like us who had come from Oklahoma. Because we didn't have nice clothes and could not take baths all the time people thought that we were dirty and lazy. Really, we were just ordinary people who could not find jobs and could not afford to buy clothes, shelter, and sometimes even food.

Father went out everyday to try to find a job. Most days he came back with nothing. One day Mother told us to get ready, because we would be moving to a new place. Dad had received a letter from his brother who lived in a town called Hayward. My uncle let my Dad know that he was able to find a job in this town and that there were many more jobs available. This was good news!

The Move to Hayward

We moved to Hayward six months after arriving in California (in 1934). We had to live with Father's brother, Uncle Kenneth, until we could afford a home of our own. It was crowded at Uncle's house. Our family shared one bedroom and his family shared the other bedroom. We were very grateful to them for letting us stay.



Mission Street in Hayward

No matter how crowded it was, I knew my parents were happy to be out of the squatter camp. We agreed that it was good to be in Hayward.

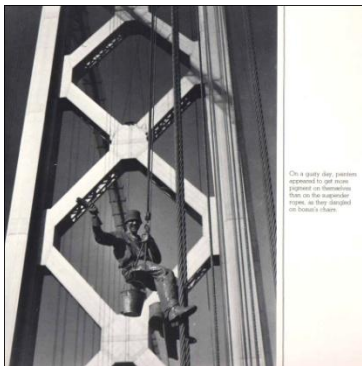
Hayward is unlike any city I have ever been to. It is a real modern city with lots of buildings and real roads. There is even the smell of tomatoes cooking in the air because of the **canneries!** It seems like we have moved to Hayward during a strange time. People are talking about the **Depression** which is a hard time for many. But they are also excited about new bridges and city buildings that are being built.

Building the Bridges

Two giant bridges were needed for automobiles to pass over the water of the San Francisco Bay. One stretches from Oakland to San Francisco. The other one is almost finished. It will stretch from San Francisco to Sausalito, going right over the Golden Gate. These are some of the biggest construction projects ever!

My uncle worked as a “bridge monkey” to help build the Golden Gate Bridge. A “bridge monkey” was someone who works on the bridge. They were **suspended** in the air attached to a wire. These workers looked like monkeys hanging on to the bridge. Although it was a very dangerous job, many men are up for the job, especially since it was very difficult to find jobs those days.

A Bridge Monkey high at work on the Bay Bridge.



On a daily they perform
work on the steel frame
of the bridge. The
workers are suspended
in the air by cables
and ropes.

Sometimes the “bridge monkeys” had to go on special diets in order to help them not be dizzy while they work up so high. My uncle did not like the diet very much.

Safety was a main concern for the building of the Golden Gate Bridge. For example, there were safety belts that men had attached to themselves in case they fell. Everyone wore a hard hat. A very expensive safety net hangs beneath the bridge in case men fall. Many men have been saved by this safety net. The Bay Bridge didn’t have one of these nets, so sadly many men died while building it.

*Credit: “High Steel Building the Bridges
Across San Francisco Bay” by Richard Dillon*

My uncle told us the story of an accident that happened just a few weeks ago on February 17, 1937 while building the Golden Gate Bridge. All of the workers went to work as usual, although on this warm and sunny Wednesday tragedy would strike. The working **platform** broke taking with it the safety net and all the men working on it. The men were **tangled** in the net that had fallen into the icy cold water. About ten men died that day. It was so sad!

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But mostly, working on the Golden Gate Bridge was safe and paid well. My uncle tried to get Father a job working on the bridge. But it didn't work out, because my Father wasn't a **steel** worker.

Nevertheless, both Father and Mother found jobs and started working at the Hunt's **Cannery**. This was good news for our family.

The Hunt's Cannery

Finally my parents got jobs! Father and Mother were hired on to work for the Hunt Brothers **Cannery** for the **canning season**. At the **cannery**, workers made ketchup and all sorts of canned fruits and vegetables.

Luckily, after the canning season was over, the **foreman** liked my Dad so much that he kept him on to work. Father now worked on the loading dock. Mother worked at the canneries for a few months during canning season. Sometimes she left my sisters and me at the Hunt's **day care**. I liked it there, because I had lots of other kids to play with.

It was also fun each year during the end-of-the-season parade. After the last box of canned goods was packed, a parade starts to celebrate. A queen and princess were chosen and they get to ride on a **forklift** in the parade. Everyone was happy during this time and we ate lots of good food – especially some of the Hunt's delicious canned fruit.

Hunt's Day Care in Los Gatos



Photo from the HAHS photo album "Industry - Canning"

Life in Hayward

My parents finally saved enough money to buy a little house in Hayward near the canneries. We lived on Filbert Street in a small 2 bedroom house, called a California **Bungalow**. It seemed like a mansion compared to the squatter camp and the one room we all had to share at my uncle's.

We had a back yard where Father and Mother were planning to plant a small garden. It was very different from the big farm we had in Oklahoma. Instead of just growing corn to sell, we had all sorts of vegetables to eat ourselves.

John Campbell

My sisters and I are now going to Burbank School. It is close enough to walk to. After school all the children in the neighborhood play games like Kick-the-Can and street baseball. Remember, I was the Red Rover Champ at the squatter camp, so I am good at these sports, too! My friend Robert is a good sport, too.

Sometimes when we have enough money, we go for a swim at the Hayward Plunge. This is one of my favorite places ever! Last year we got to be the first people to swim in the big pool.

The Hayward Plunge over in Memorial Park opened on August 21, 1936. The grand opening was a huge event with over 3,000 people attending. Everyone was there – the Mayor of Hayward and even some Olympic **athletes!** The local boy scouts were invited to be **ushers** for the evening dinner. Robert and I are both boy scouts, so we got to go to the opening, plus the next day we were allowed to go swimming all day without paying. I swam all day, and by the end of the day I looked like a prune, because I had been in the water so long. Opening night was very exciting, the dedication began promptly at 7:45 pm and there were many exhibitions going on throughout the night such as people diving and swimming.



The Hayward Plunge

Living in Hayward is good, even though times are hard for many people who can't find work. Father reads the newspaper every morning and says how thankful he is to have a job at Hunt's.

Today's newspaper is announcing a very exciting event – Opening Day of the Golden Gate Bridge! I hope we get to go! I want to be part of history!

Vocabulary

adventurous – when someone likes to do bold things

athlete – someone who plays sports

bungalow – a type of house

cannery – a place where fruits and vegetables are put into cans for selling in stores

canning season – the time of year when the fruits and vegetables are put in cans

caravan – a long line of cars or wagons traveling together

confident – to be sure of yourself

crops – the plants that farmers grow

day care – a place for children to go while their parents are at work

Depression – a time in history when people could not find jobs and many were very poor

drought – when there is very little rain and the earth gets dry

Dust Bowl – a time and place where there was a drought and the land was very dry and dusty

foreman – the boss at a factory

forklift – a machine that lifts heavy things

handbill – an advertisement you hold in your hand

hitchhike – to catch a ride with someone

Panhandle – the skinny part of the state of Oklahoma that people think looks like the handle on a pan

platform – where people stand to work on something

pneumonia – a disease that affects the lungs

rumor – a story that people pass on to each other

saying – something that people say

squatter camp – a place where people live when they don't have a house

steel – the metal used to build bridges and big buildings

suspended – to hang on something

tangled – to get all twisted up

usher – someone who takes you to your seat at a party or theater

wages – how much people get paid for work

John Campbell



Lesson Plans

People: John Campbell

Classroom Kit: Immigration Discovery Kit

1 – New Deal Art

Activity Goals

- To understand the effects of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression on California
- To understand the place of art in a historical context.

Setting the Context:

During the Great Depression, the New Deal had far-reaching effects on the country's economy, politics, culture, and even its public art. The Work Progress Administration's projects included the creation of public art throughout the nation. The art often reflected themes of labor and local heritage. In the end, approximately 23,000 watercolors and drawings, 2,250 murals, 13,000 sculptures, 85,000 paintings, and over 1,000,000 easel pictures were created across the country. The San Francisco Bay Area has some excellent examples.



Rural Landscape by Tom E. Lewis, 1938.

One local example is a painting by Tom E. Lewis which was commissioned in 1938 for the Bradford Post Office on C Street. The painting, which still hangs in the lobby there today, depicts a scene of early Hayward when farmland stretched for miles.

Tom E. Lewis (1909-1979) was raised in Pasadena, and became interested in watercolor painting while studying architecture. During the late 1920s, he developed a unique style of painting with watercolors and in 1931, became a member of the California Water Color Society.

Throughout the 1930s, he lived in Laguna Beach and was an active member of the art colony there. He also exhibited his watercolors regularly in Northern California museum shows, receiving several major awards and favorable reviews. After 1950, Lewis lived in the San Francisco area and continued to produce fine art paintings. *Biography provided courtesy of "California Watercolors 1850-1970" by Gordon T. McClelland and Jay T. Last.*

John Campbell

People:
Classroom Kit.

Lesson Plans
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Immigration Discovery Kit

1 – New Deal Art



For more information . . .

www.wpamurals.com

This website provides links to several good WPA Art curriculum sites for all grade levels and offers a tour of several California cities' WPA art. Nearby locations include dozens of sites in San Francisco (Coit Tower, Rincon Center, etc.) and Woodminster Theater in Oakland's Joaquin Miller Park.

Activity One Instructions

Describe how art plays a role in reflecting life

- Display a copy of the painting *Rural Landscape* by Tom E. Lewis in your room.
- Discuss what students see. Try utilizing the Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) by asking these questions:
 - What is going on in the painting?
 - What do you see that makes you say that?

The VTS method, developed by psychologist Abigail Housen and art educator Philip Yenawine, is a process of inquiry that leads to discovery for those viewing art. It begins with simple questions and, as more information about the artwork is revealed, more meaning is made. Personal associations and interpretations are also part of this discovery process.

- To deepen their perception of the painting, ask students to think about what life was like when the Hayward area was largely agricultural.
 - How was the landscape different?
 - How was going to school, getting around, having fun, etc. different?
 - What sounds could be heard in the rural setting?
 - What might you smell living on the farm?
- Finally, have them compare a rural farm life with their life today.



Rural Landscape by Tom E. Lewis

John Campbell

Lesson Plans

People:

John Campbell

Classroom Kit:

Immigration Discovery Kit

Additional Resource:

www.haywardareahistory.org/HuntsCannery



1 – New Deal Art

Activity Two Instructions

Compare two works of art that have a similar theme, but were created in different time periods.

Display Tom E. Lewis' *Rural Landscape* and *Home Sweet Home* by contemporary San Francisco artist Warner Williams in your classroom.

- Have students describe both paintings utilizing VTS (see Activity One).
 - What is going on in the painting?
 - What do you see that makes you say that?
- Next, compare life in these two very different homes.
 - How would you light the houses?
 - How would you heat the houses?
 - What chores would need to be done in each house?
 - What forms of entertainment could be found in each place?
 - What are the advantages of living on a farm? The disadvantages?
 - What are the advantages of living in a city? The disadvantages?
- Finally, have students decide which one they would want to live in and explain their choice.



Home Sweet Home by contemporary San Francisco artist Warner Williams

John Campbell



Lesson Plans

People: John Campbell

Classroom Kit: Immigration Discovery Kit

2 – Dust Bowl Ballads

Activity Goals

- To understand the characteristics of a ballad.
- To convey emotions, ideas and experiences in writing.

Setting the Context:

Folk singer and songwriter Woody Guthrie sung about American life. Born in Oklahoma in 1912, many of his songs addressed the hardships of the Depression and the Dust Bowl.

A ballad is a story told in a narrative song or poem. The narrative is usually simple, clear, and easy to understand. Most ballads are based on heroic, romantic or political actions.

Characteristics of a ballad include:

- A ballad tells a story.
- A ballad focuses on actions and dialogue.
- A ballad uses simple sentence structure to be easily understood.
- A ballad is sung to a simple melody.
- A ballad is an oral tradition, passed down by word of mouth.

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Lesson Plans

People: John Campbell

Classroom Kit: Immigration Discovery Kit

2 – Dust Bowl Ballads

Activity Instructions

Woody Guthrie wrote the following lyrics from *The Great Dust Storm (Dust Storm Disaster)* in the 1930s. Read the following stanzas from *Dust Bowl Ballads* to the students.

On the 14th day of April of 1935,

There struck the worst of dust storms that ever filled the sky. You could see that dust storm comin',

The cloud looked deathlike black,

And through our mighty nation, it left a dreadful track....

The storm took place at sundown, it lasted through the night,

When we looked out next morning, we saw a terrible sight.

We saw outside our window where wheat fields they had grown

Was now a rippling ocean of dust the wind had blown.

It covered up our fences, it covered up our barns,

It covered up our tractors in this wild and dusty storm.

We loaded our jalopies and piled our families in,

We rattled down that highway to never come back again.

Have the students write their own ballads. Select a popular melody to rewrite the lyrics (for example, “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”) or have the students make up their own melody. Topics for the ballad can be drawn from the Dust Bowl era or summarize John’s story or the storybook, *Dust for Dinner*.

John Campbell



Lesson Plans

People: John Campbell

Classroom Kit: Immigration Discovery Kit
Additional Resource: www.haywardareahistory.org/HuntsCannery

**3 – Photo letter
Scrapbook**

Activity Goals

- To understand the effects of severe weather during the Dust Bowl era.
- To understand that wind is an environmental change that can threaten life, agriculture and property.

Setting the Context:

Using historical photographs, ask the students to describe what they see and imagine being in the middle of a major dust storm. Discuss the effect these dust storms had on the health and economic vitality of southern families.

Show images of the Hayward Earthquake of 1868. What do they notice about the buildings? What does the land and ground look like? Discuss the effects of this major earthquake on family life, businesses and everyday activities.

If possible, tie to current extreme weather conditions (tsunami, hurricane, flood, tornado, El Niño). Compare the dust storm to environmental changes in this area (earthquake, fog) and discuss how both affect the environment and inhabitants.

Activity Instructions:

After hearing John’s story and discussing the photographs, ask students to select one of the photos and pretend they are living during the Dust Bowl era. Have them draw a picture of the dust clouds in their farm and write about the photograph as if this were a page in a scrapbook that they wanted to show to their new friends in California.

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Lesson Plans

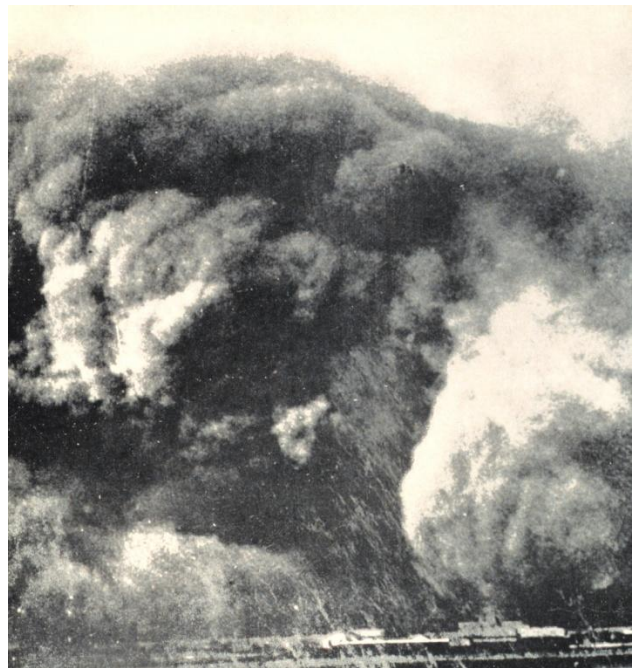
People: John Campbell

Classroom Kit: Immigration Discovery Kit
Additional Resource: www.haywardareahistory.org/HuntsCannery

**3 – Photo Letter
Scrapbook**



Dust Storm Texas, 1935



Dust Storm Over Texas



Haywards Earthquake, 1868

John Campbell



Lesson Plans

People: John Campbell

Classroom Kit: Immigration Discovery Kit

4 – Homemade Toys

Activity Goals

- To understand the hardships and lifestyle of children in the 1930s & 1940s.
- To create an original work using found and recycled objects.

Setting the Context:

Many children in the 1930s and 1940s had modest or homemade toys. Have your students examine the toys of Robert and John. Do they look like fancy, expensive toys?

Children oftentimes had to make their own toys. Dolls and puppets were made from old socks or towels. Robots could be made with tin cans. Look at some of the homemade toys from the other children.

Example: Francisco has a ball and cup game made out of a tin can and a stick.

Activity Instructions:

Have the children make their own toys, using the following instructions.

Sock Puppet

Materials:

- Sock
- Buttons, cotton balls, pom poms or jiggly eyes
- Felt or construction paper
- Yarn, ribbon or pipe cleaners
- Markers
- Glue and scissors
- Glitter Glue

1. Put the sock on your hand so that your fingers and thumb are in the toe and the back of your wrist is in the heel.
2. Glue buttons, cotton balls, pom poms or jiggly eyes to create eyes, a nose or mouth. Place them where your knuckles are.
3. For hair, put glue on short lengths of the ribbon or yarn over the back of their hand.
4. Decorate the body with markers, glitter glue, pipe cleaners or other art materials.

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Lesson Plans

People: John Campbell

Classroom Kit: Immigration Discovery Kit

**4 – Homemade
Toys**

Tissue Box Robot

Materials:

- Empty tissue box
- Four empty rolls of toilet paper
- Brass fasteners
- One-hole paper punch
- Markers
- Buttons, sequins, pompoms, jiggly eyes, pipe cleaners
- Scissors
- Glue

A tissue box is the body of the robot. Stand it on its side so that it is taller than it is wide. Arms and legs are made out of toilet paper dowels, and are attached by brass fasteners to the tissue box. Use the other materials to create the face and decorate the body.

1. To create arms and legs, punch one hole towards the edge of each of the four rolls.
2. Punch two holes about two inches apart on the bottom of tissue box.
3. To attach the legs, use brass fasteners through the hole of the dowel and the hole of the tissue box. Do the same to create the other leg.
4. Punch two holes on the sides of the tissue box, up towards the top.
5. To attach the arms, use brass fasteners through the hole of the dowel and the hole of the tissue box. Do the same for the arm on the other side.
6. Decorate the robot. Create eyes, ears, a mouth or a nose. You can also make switches and buttons to control him.
7. Stick your hand in the tissue box opening in the back to move your robot.

Options:

Be creative. Turn the tissue box around and make a kangaroo. Add a tail, feet to the bottom of the legs and stick a baby joey in the pouch (the tissue box opening).

Storybook Summary - John Campbell

Dust for Dinner

By Ann Turner, Illustrated by Robert Barrett
I Can Read Book, HarperCollins, 1995

This book is written for grades 2 – 4, although there are not too many illustrations and it contains text that may be too dense for younger readers. However, it is a good look at the move west during the Depression.

The story begins on a farm where the family experiences the effects of the Dust Bowl. They are forced to sell everything at auction except the radio and the dog. They hear that there is no dust in “Cal-i-for-ni-ay” and decide go west. The journey traces a typical move – struggles along the way where adults have a hard time finding work and the family faces prejudices. But the family eventually reaches California and settles into their new life.

Discussion Topics

- Why do people have to move away from their homes sometimes?
- What do people take when the move? What would you take?
- Discuss the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl and their impacts on California
- How is this story similar to that of the *Crossroads* child John Campbell?