Bell Ringer: The Great Depression Begins

Instructions: Examine the picture. Read the background information. Answer the Questions below.

Background: From 1929 to the 1940s, the USA faced an economic disaster. The economy became so weak that nearly 25% of the workforce became unemployed in what became called the era of the Great Depression. Above is an iconic picture taken during the Great Depression. The picture is of Florence Owens Thompson and her children in 1936. A journalist, Dorothea Lange, captured this photo as Florence and her children waited outside of a peepickers camp in California. Many at the camp had hoped to find work picking pees. Yet, freezing rain had recently destroyed the crops. Florence was at the area because her family’s car had broken down by the camp. This picture became widely circulated and many felt it captured the unfortunate circumstances of many in this era.

1. Who was Dorothea Lange?

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2. What emotions did Dorothea want the viewer to feel when examining this picture she took of Florence Owens Thompson?

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3. Why do you think this particular picture became so widespread and famous during the Great Depression?

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Answers:

1. Who was Dorothea Lange?
   She was the journalist that took this picture.

2. What emotions did Dorothea want the viewer to feel when examining this picture she took of Florence Owens Thompson?
   Dorothea wanted the viewer to feel empathy and sadness for this family. She was showing how desperate the economic conditions were in America.

3. Why do you think this particular picture became so widespread and famous during the Great Depression? The students’ answers may vary. In short, this picture put human face on the Great Depression. While statistic, such as the 25% unemployment, are alarming, this picture allowed the viewer to see the Great Depression’s impact on real people.