



Ribbon, U.S., for Veterans' Bonus March on Washington D.C., 1932; marked for the state of Ohio; the silk ribbon has a view of the Capitol in the center; there are remnants of red, white and blue fabric at the top; attached to box bottom marked: H. Sammartino, Jeweler, 365 E. Federal St., Youngstown, Ohio; Quote from Abraham Lincoln at bottom

Online Collections Database, 2013.24.1, [www.theworldwar.org/research/database](http://www.theworldwar.org/research/database). National WWI Museum and Memorial. Online.

## The Bonus Army: How Did the Great Depression Affect World War I Veterans?

Recommended Grade Levels: 8-12

Course/Content Area(s): U.S. History

Authored by: Mary Kate Lonergan, National WWI Museum and Memorial Teacher Advisor

<b>LESSON OVERVIEW:</b>	<p>In this inquiry-based lesson, students examine how the Great Depression affected World War I veterans through the story of the Bonus Army—a group of veterans who marched on Washington, D.C. in 1932.</p> <p>Students first read a National Park Service article to build background, then analyze a set of historical sources (artifact, photographs, and newsreel transcript) using a consistent analytical lens.</p> <p>By lesson’s end, students will synthesize evidence to answer the essential question: <i>How did the Great Depression affect World War I veterans?</i></p>
<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<i>Students will:</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● explain who the Bonus Army was and describe why World War I veterans marched on Washington, D.C.</li> <li>● analyze multiple primary and secondary sources to investigate how the Great Depression affected World War I veterans’ lives and opportunities</li> <li>● evaluate the government’s response to the Bonus Army protest and assess what it reveals about the challenges veterans faced during the Great Depression</li> <li>● construct an evidence-based response to the essential question</li> </ul>
<b>STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:</b>	<p><b>National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) C3 Framework Standards:</b></p> <p><b>D2.His.1.9-12.</b> Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances.</p> <p><b>D2.His.16.9-12.</b> Integrate evidence from multiple sources into a coherent understanding of the past.</p> <p><b>D3.3.9-12.</b> Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to support claims.</p>
<b>TIME NEEDED:</b>	~40 minutes
<b>INTERDISCIPLINARY:</b>	English Language Arts, Media Literacy
<b>PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Basic conditions of the <b>Great Depression</b> (unemployment, poverty, and hardship).</li> <li>● The experience of <b>World War I veterans</b> returning to civilian life after 1918.</li> </ul>
<b>MATERIALS NEEDED:</b>	<b>Background Text:</b> <i>“Bonus Expeditionary Forces March on Washington”</i> (National Park Service)

**Primary Sources:**

1. *Bonus Expeditionary Force Ribbon (1932, Ohio)* – National WWI Museum and Memorial
2. *Photograph – Bonus Expeditionary Forces Camp on Anacostia Flats* – Library of Congress
3. *Photograph – Shacks Burning after the Battle with the Military* – National Archives
4. *Newsreel Transcript – “Removal of the Bonus Army” (1932)*

**Student Handouts:**

- [See / Think / Wonder Chart](#)
- [Bonus Army Primary Source Analysis Organizer and Synthesis Handout](#)

Projector or digital slides for images and excerpts

# LESSON

## PRE-ASSESSMENT/INTRODUCTION/HOOK:

### Visual Inquiry Prompt:

Display two contrasting photographs—the organized [Bonus Army camp on Anacostia Flats](#) and the [burning shacks after the eviction](#).

Ask:

- What do you notice?
- What might have caused this destruction?
- What questions do these images raise about veterans and their government?

Record ideas in a [See / Think / Wonder Chart](#).

### Transition:

“These images show the Bonus Army. The Bonus Army was a group of World War I veterans who marched to Washington during the Great Depression. Today we’ll explore who they were, what they wanted, and how their experience helps us answer our essential question: How did the Great Depression affect World War I veterans?”

## DIRECTIONS:

### STEP 1 – BUILDING BACKGROUND (10 min)

- **Read together:** “[Bonus Expeditionary Forces March on Washington](#)” (NPS).
- Model close reading and annotation. Pause to discuss key points.
- Guiding questions (projected or handout):
  - Who were the Bonus Army veterans?
  - Why did they march on Washington?
  - How did the government respond?
  - What does this tell us about life for veterans during the Great Depression?
- If needed, clarify terms such as *bonus*, *expeditionary*, and *encampment* as needed.

### STEP 2 – PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS (15 min)

- Students analyze four historical sources using the [Bonus Army Primary Source Analysis Organizer and Synthesis Handout](#).
- Teacher may project or distribute copies and think aloud with the first source. Students can work independently, in groups, or conduct a jigsaw activity for this portion of the lesson.

### Guiding Questions (used for each source):

1. **Observe:** What do you notice or read?

2. **Contextualize:** Who created this source, and when?  
**Infer:** What does this source suggest about how veterans were affected by the Great Depression?
3. **Evaluate:** How is the government or public shown responding to veterans?
4. **Connect:** What evidence from this source helps answer our essential question?

**Sources**

1. [Bonus Expeditionary Force Ribbon 1932, Ohio \(National WWI Museum and Memorial\)](#)
2. [The Bonus Expeditionary Forces Camp on Anacostia Flats, Washington, D.C.](#) (Library of Congress)
3. [Shacks Put Up by the Bonus Army on the Anacostia Flats, Washington, D.C., Burning After the Battle with the Military](#) (National Archives)
4. ["Removal of the Bonus Army" 1932 Newsreel](#) (Paramount News)

**Scaffolds:**

- Model analyzing the ribbon first to show how symbols communicate pride and expectation.
- Provide vocabulary support for visual analysis (e.g., *symbolism, contrast, tone*).
- For the newsreel, play or read key lines aloud and discuss tone/bias.

**STEP 3 – SYNTHESIS & REFLECTION (6–8 min)**

- Students review their notes and respond in writing on the [Bonus Army Primary Source Analysis Organizer and Synthesis Handout](#).
- **Essential Question:** *How did the Great Depression affect World War I veterans?*
- **Prompt:**  
Use evidence from at least two different sources in your response.  
Write a short paragraph (3–5 sentences) explaining your reasoning.
- **Debrief Option:** Invite a few students to share and highlight differing perspectives or common themes.

**POST-ASSESSMENT:**

- Collect exit tickets or written responses.
- Return to the **See / Think / Wonder** chart and ask students to revise one statement with new evidence.

**MODIFICATIONS/ACCOMMODATIONS**

- Provide simplified reading excerpts or text-to-speech support.
- Offer image captions and vocabulary scaffolds.
- Allow oral or recorded responses instead of written.
- Use color-coded highlights for evidence.
- For enrichment, students may compare the Bonus Army protest to a modern veteran or labor demonstration.

# Appendix A

## Bibliography:

1. **National Park Service.** *“Bonus Expeditionary Forces March on Washington.”* National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.  
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/bonus-expeditionary-forces-march-on-washington.htm>
2. **National WWI Museum and Memorial.** *Bonus Expeditionary Force Ribbon (1932, Ohio).* Object ID 2013.24.1. Accessed November 3, 2025.  
<https://collections.theworldwar.org/>
3. **Library of Congress.** *The Bonus Expeditionary Forces Camp on Anacostia Flats, Washington, D.C.* LC-DIG-hec-36887. Washington, D.C.: 1932.  
<https://www.loc.gov/>
4. **National Archives and Records Administration.** *Shacks Put Up by the Bonus Army on the Anacostia Flats, Washington, D.C., Burning After the Battle with the Military.* NAID 531102; Local ID 111-SC-97532. Washington, D.C.: 1932. <https://catalog.archives.gov/>
5. **Historic Newsreel Footage.** *“Removal of the Bonus Army.”* 1932. Public domain film