

## Eleanor Roosevelt

*“A woman is like a tea bag- you never know how strong she is until she gets in hot water.”~Eleanor Roosevelt*

### Overview

Students will learn about the work of Eleanor Roosevelt and read letters written to her by children living during the Great Depression. Students will apply their acquired knowledge creatively by assuming the role of Eleanor Roosevelt and responding to a letter of their choice.

### Grade

8

### North Carolina Essential Standards for 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies

- 8.H.1.1 - Construct charts, graphs, and historical narratives to explain particular events or issues.
- 8.H.1.2 - Summarize the literal meaning of historical documents in order to establish context.
- 8.H.1.3 - Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives.
- 8.H.1.4 - Use historical inquiry to evaluate the validity of sources used to construct historical narratives (e.g. formulate historical questions, gather data from a variety of sources, evaluate and interpret data and support interpretations with historical evidence).
- 8.H.1.5 - Analyze the relationship between historical context and decision-making.
- 8.H.2.1 - Explain the impact of economic, political, social, and military conflicts (e.g. war, slavery, states' rights and citizenship and immigration policies) on the development of North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.3.3 - Explain how individuals and groups have influenced economic, political and social change in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.C&G.1.4 -Analyze access to democratic rights and freedoms among various groups in North Carolina and the United States (e.g. enslaved people, women, wage earners, landless farmers, American Indians, African Americans and other ethnic groups).

### Essential Questions

- What are the responsibilities of the First Lady (or First Man)?
- Who was Eleanor Roosevelt and how did she use her position as First Lady to advocate for her beliefs?
- What contributions did Eleanor Roosevelt make to society?
- What was life like during the Great Depression?
- How does governmental responsibility balance with citizen responsibility in alleviating societal problems?

### Materials

- Eleanor Roosevelt handout, attached
- Letters to Eleanor Roosevelt, attached

### Duration

60 minutes

## Procedure

### The Role of the “First Lady”

1. As a warm-up, ask students to respond to:
  - What do you think the responsibilities of the first lady (or first spouse) should be? How much responsibility should this unelected husband or wife have?
2. Allow students to share their answers then ask them to name first ladies they can think off. Let students know that in today’s lesson, they will be learning about Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Project the following quote for students to read:
  - "What other single human being has touched and transformed the existence of so many? She walked in the slums and ghettos of the world, not on a tour of inspection, but as one who could not feel contentment when others were hungry." ~*Adlai Stevenson on Eleanor Roosevelt*
  - Discuss:
    - Based on this quote, what impression do you get regarding Eleanor Roosevelt? What evidence makes you think this?
    - What do you think Stevenson means when she says that Eleanor Roosevelt “walked in the slums and ghettos” but was not on a “tour of inspection”?
    - What do you predict you will learn about Eleanor Roosevelt’s character based on this quote?

### Introduction to Anna Eleanor Roosevelt

3. Tell students that Anna Eleanor Roosevelt was not only the First Lady of the United States from 1933-1945, but she was also a civil rights activist, a suffragist and women’s rights advocate, a leader in supporting the United Nations, and a fighter for general human rights. In a time period when women were not granted equality nor viewed as strong leaders, Eleanor Roosevelt stood up and spoke out for what she believed in.
4. Tell students that many Americans in need viewed Eleanor Roosevelt as someone they could turn to for help, and she often received letters for all types of requests from people young and old. Give students the attached Eleanor Roosevelt handout and have them read it individually or in partners. Tell students that once they read the background information on Eleanor Roosevelt, they should see you to receive copies of letters that were written to her by children during the Great Depression (see the attached *Letters to Eleanor Roosevelt*). Give each student 2-3 of the letters to read, trying to ensure that all of the letters get covered throughout the class. After students read several of the letters, they will then answer the questions on the handout.
5. Once students are finished, discuss as a class:
  - Many of you read different letters. Of the letters you read, which struck you the most and why?
  - What did the letters you all read have in common?
  - How would you characterize the young people writing these letters? What was their purpose in writing?
  - What can we learn about life during the Great Depression from primary sources such as these letters?
  - What can we learn about Eleanor Roosevelt from these letters?
  - Why do you think these children wrote to her in particular?
6. Point out to students that these children wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt about issues that they were very concerned about. Ask students to identify issues in their community or in the world at large that worry them personally (poverty, homelessness, environmental problems, terrorism, disease, hunger, etc.) List responses on the board, then ask each student to identify one issue that they are most concerned about. Tell students to write this issue at the top of a sheet of notebook paper, and underneath to brainstorm who is responsible for solving this issue.

7. After a few moments, ask students to share their ideas out loud. Answers might include the government, the President, the First Lady, Senators, Congress members, police, lawyers, court system, movie stars, athletes, individual citizens, the media, etc. Discuss:
- How does governmental responsibility balance with individual citizen responsibility in terms of dealing with social issues such as the ones we listed?
  - What are the characteristics of a responsible citizen? How does a citizen's irresponsibility or apathy towards social issues affect a society and community?
  - How have the needs of children been considered by agencies of the local, state, and federal government throughout history?

### **"Love, Eleanor Roosevelt"**

8. In closing, tell students to consider all they have learned about Eleanor Roosevelt and explain that they will assume her role as First Lady and human rights activist and choose one child's letter to respond to. Project/explain the following assignment:
- You will assume the role of Eleanor Roosevelt and respond to one of the letters that have been written to you by young people living in the Great Depression. Your letter should:
    - Be one page in length
    - Offer advice to the child writing you
    - Represent a realistic response Eleanor Roosevelt may give
    - Exhibit your interpretation of Eleanor's personality and character
    - Be signed, "Love, Eleanor Roosevelt"
9. If time permits, allow students to begin brainstorming and creating their first draft in class. Teachers may wish to set aside class time the following day for students to share their letters in small groups.

### **Additional Resources**

- See videos of Eleanor Roosevelt: <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-roosevelts/classroom/lesson-plans/>
- TIME article on Eleanor Roosevelt: <http://www.time.com/time/time100/leaders/profile/eleanor.html>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Eleanor Roosevelt

*“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams”.*

How do you interpret the above quote from Eleanor Roosevelt?

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**Eleanor Roosevelt**, wife to Franklin D. Roosevelt (America’s thirty-second President, 1933-1945), was very active as the nation’s First Lady during her husband’s presidency. When America entered World War I, she became active in the American Red Cross and in volunteer work in Navy hospitals. After Franklin Roosevelt was stricken with polio in 1921, Mrs. Roosevelt became increasingly active in politics both to help him maintain his interests and to assert her own personality and goals. She participated in the League of Women Voters, joined the Women’s Trade Union League, and worked for the Women’s Division of the New York State Democratic Committee. She helped to found Val-Kill Industries, a nonprofit furniture factory in Hyde Park, New York, and taught at the Todhunter School, a private girls’ school in New York City.

During Franklin D. Roosevelt’s presidency, Eleanor Roosevelt was an active First Lady who traveled extensively around the nation, visiting relief projects, surveying working and living conditions, and then reporting her observations to the President. She also exercised her own political and social influence; she became an advocate of the rights and needs of the poor, of minorities, and of the disadvantaged. In World War II, she visited England and the South Pacific to foster good will among the Allies and boost the morale of US servicemen overseas.

After President Roosevelt’s death in 1953, Mrs. Roosevelt resigned from the United States Delegation to the United Nations and volunteered her services to the American Association for the United Nations. She was an American representative to the World Federation of the United Nations Associations, and later became the chairman of the Associations’ Board of Directors. She was reappointed to the United States Delegation to the United Nations by President Kennedy in 1961. Kennedy also appointed her as a member of the National Advisory Committee of the Peace Corps and chairman of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women. Mrs. Roosevelt received many awards for her humanitarian efforts.

### **Eleanor Roosevelt’s Concern for Children During the Great Depression**

What was it like growing up during the Great Depression? For many people, life was a daily struggle. At the peak of the Depression, 25% of the nation’s workers -- one out of four -- were unemployed. No job meant no money to pay the bills or buy food and clothes for the family.

Times were hard whether you lived in a city or on a farm, whether you were an adult or a child. Families unable to pay the mortgage lost their homes and farms. As a result, about 250,000 young people were homeless in the early years of the Depression. Many became nomads, traveling the highways and railways.

20% of America’s children were hungry and without proper clothing. In some coal mining regions, the percentage of malnourished children reached as high as 90%. Children went without shoes and warm clothes for the winter.



## Letters to Eleanor Roosevelt



My dearest President and Mrs Roosevelt;

Just a few lines to let you know, I am in good health, wishing this letter will find you all well.

Mrs and Pres. Roosevelt, in the first place I must tell you my name, O.C. - 14 years old.

I am writing to you Pres. and Mrs Roosevelt, to ask if I may ask one question, but I must first tell you my story.

Well you see Pres. and Mrs Roosevelt, I was doctoring for a while, with out my Mother and Dad knowing it, in fact they don't know it yet, & I owe Dr. Forney, \$7.50. I haven't any idea how to earn this amount, I was doctoring for an infected arm. Every time I went the Dr. charged me \$1.50, & I went 5 times.

Could you kindly please help me Pres. and Mrs Roosevelt. Please don't write to my parents about me owing this money. But if you will kindly help me I will greatly, & certainly appreciate it. If you help me Pres. and Mrs Roosevelt, send my note or your letter, to this address.

Pres. and Mrs Roosevelt, could you please send this amount by April 5. I'd like to pay this out, before my parents receive a bill from the Doctors office. O.K. Please.

Sincerely, yours,  
O. C.



Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

I am a poor colored girl who thinks quite a lot of you and your family, and I know you have done a lot for my race and we appreciate it immensely.

Now I am going to ask you two personal favors which I hope you can do. The first is: *will you find my daddy a job* as caretaker and gardener on an estate or as a janitor of a club or theater? He can't find one and we can't afford to put an advertisement in the papers. He has sixteen years experience.

Sincerely,

A.D.

Granette, Ark.  
Nov. 6, 1936

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt

I am writing to you for some of your old soiled dresses if you have any. As I am a poor girl who has to stay out of school. On account of dresses & slips and a coat. I am in the seventh grade but I have to stay out of school because I have no books or clothes to ware. I am in need of dresses & slips and a coat very bad. If you have any soiled clothes that you don't want to ware I would be very glad to get them. But please do not let the news paper reporters get hold of this in any way and I will keep it from getting out here so there will be no one else to get hold of it. But do not let my name get out in the paper. I am thirteen years old.

Yours Truly,  
Miss L. H.  
Gravette, Ark.

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Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

I am a senior in high school this year and expect to graduate may the thirty-first. My daddy is sixty-five years old, a poor farmer and isn't able to supply the necessary articles which graduation calls for. I am determined to get an education, so that I can help him in the very near future. I am asking you to send me, out of your personal funds thirty-five dollars (\$35) to purchase these things such as invitations, class ring, graduation dress and shoes and other small articles.

In September I'll be prepared for College and will need some help in financial conditions as well as suggestions as to which college a poor girl should attend. Send only enough in September for my freshman year in College, and maybe the next year times will be better.

If you will take notice of my letter and answer as soon as possible, it will be highly appreciated, for without help I can go no further into the step of education, nor can I reach the requirements of a high school graduate. I thank you.

For reference you may refer to Rev. J. Knight, pastor of the Indian Bayou Methodist Church, Indian Bayou, Louisiana,

Sincerely yours,  
J. R. D.

March 29 - 1935

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt. I am writing you a little letter this morning. Are you glad it is spring I am. For so many poor people can raise some more to eat. You no what I am writing this letter for. Mother said Mrs. Roosevelt is a God mother to the world and I though mabe you had some old clothes You no Mother is a good sewer and all the little girls are getting Easter dresses. And I though you had some you no. papa could wear Mr. Roosevelt shirts and cloth I no. My papa like Mr. Roosevelt and Mother said Mr. Roosevelt carry his worries with a smile You no he is always happy. You no we are not living on the relief we live on a little farm. papa did have a job And got laid on 5 yrs ago so we save and got two horses and 2 cows and a hog so we can all the food stuff we can ever thing to eat some time we don't have eni thing but we live. But you no it so hard to get cloth. So I though mabe you had some. You no what you though was no good Mother can make over for me I am 11 yr old. I have 2 brother and a sister 14 yr old. I wish I could see you. I no I would like you both. And shoes Mother wears 6 or 6 1/2. And papa wear 9. We have no car or no phone or Radio papa he would like to have a radio but he said there is other thing he need more. papa is worried about his seed oats. And one horse is not very good. But ever one has't to worrie, I am send this letter with the pennie I get to take to Sunday school Mother give me one So it took 3 week. Cause mother would think I better not ask for things from the the first Lady. But mother said you was an angle for doing so much for the poor. And I though that would be all rite this is some paper my teacher gave for Xmas. My add is

C.V.B.  
Rushsyhania, Ohio

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Dear President and Mrs. Roosevelt.

The favor I am about to ask you is one which I consider a great one. I am asking if you could possibly send me a girl's bicycle. The school which I attend is very far and I am not very healthy I often get pains in my sides. My father only works two days a week and there are six in my family, it is impossible in almost every way that I can get a bicycle! I am in the eighth grade and am very fond of school. Sometimes I have to miss school on account of the walk so far. I have often thought things would pick up and father might be able to get me a bicycle, but instead they have grown worse. I assure you that the bicycle shall not be used as a pleasure but as a necessity.

I shall be waiting patiently, for my greatest wish to be granted, as I feel sure that you cannot and will not turn me down. Please try to send it to me.

I shall remain

Sincerely yours,  
M. B.

Greensboro N.C.  
February 12, 1938

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt

On January 1st I was laid off from my work leaving my father the whole support of our family. just recently he was cut down to three days a week with a cut in salary. With seven of us in the family it is just about impossible for us to live on this amount.

My mother has been sick for over two months having had a nervous breakdown and we are unable to buy or furnish her with the medicine required for her recovery.

I am 18 years of age the oldest girl in the family, and it just seems impossible for me to get a job any where. I have been to Mills, Stores and Firms of all sorts. I am willing and able to work. Can furnish excellent references but at this time of the year it just seems impossible to find work. We are so in debt and each week the bills are piling higher and higher that it just seems as if there was no way out.

We must make a pay ment on our furniture bill. And if it isn't paid soon they will be out any day for our furniture. And on top of this we are behind in our rent. It would be a big help if we could get some of our bills paid on as they are already impatient for their money. If you could help us out with from \$35.00 to \$50.00 I believe we would be the happiest family in the world.

We have a good respectable family, none of us have ever been in any trouble, and our characters are above reproach.

Just as soon as I get back to work and the family on their feet again I will pay you back as much a week as possible until your kind favor has been fully repaid.

My father's work has been very poor for the past year. He is an advertising salesman, and his work right now is practically nothing; and as he has had kidney trouble for some time, taking more than he could make, for medicine. He has been improving recently, since he had his teeth extracted, and is looking forward to a job but which will not be available for a month or more. We went through the depression without asking for relief. I registered January 14th for unemployment compensation, and although promised \$6.25 a week, have not received a cent as yet.

Won't you please grant me the afore mentioned favor, please make it a personal favor, Mrs. Roosevelt, for if you would refer it to a local agency, I would suffer untold delay and embarrassment.

Although we are poor, we try to hold off embarrassment, for you know it is "hard to be broke, and harder to admit it."

Please grant me this favor and I will ever be

Gratefully yours,  
D.B.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

I am writing this letter in hopes that you will answer in my favor.

My father H. C. has been in bed from a stroke for almost a year. We have no money and my brother works but makes \$3.00 a week and there are eight in our family.

My step-mother is very good to me and I try to help her. She takes in washings and I have to walk for six or eight blocks and then carry the washings home. I have to go of a morning before school and it has been very cold here. If you could send me a bicycle to ride when I go after washings for her I shall appreciate it. I am in eighth grade at school and work very hard to make passing grades. The Principal of the school bought two of my sisters and me a pair of slippers so we would not have to stay at home. If you would do this for me I shall be able to help my step-mother more. If you send me one I would like a girls bicycle. I am about 4 feet 3 inches tall so if you send me one you can judge as to what size.

Loving and appreciating-  
A. L. C.

*Source: All letters taken from: <http://newdeal.feri.org/eleanor/er3a.htm>*