



MACARONI BOY Teacher Guide

*Prepared with assistance from Barbara Murphy,
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PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Discuss the Great Depression with students. Include other books such as *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse and *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis. Gather collections of photographs from the 1930s to display in class. Encourage students to consider the differences between urban and rural experiences during such economic difficulties.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Bullies and Conflict — There's an old saying, "It takes two to tango." Encourage students to think about both Mike and Simms and how they behave. Which boy is more responsible for their conflict? Can students make a case for Simms and his side of the arguments? For Mike? What about the conflict between various ethnic groups in Mike's neighborhood? In his family? How does this show up today?

Hard Times — During the Great Depression most people in America experienced hard times. What sort of hard times do today's children face? How is this different from life in the 1930s? What sort of worries did Mike have? And what sort of worries do children think about today? Which do you think are harder to deal with?

Family — Mike lives in a large, extended Italian family and he worries about the family being split up when Tony leaves to work in West Virginia. His neighborhood is filled with people he has known all his life. Today many people move around a lot. Is your family more like the Costa family, all living together? Or is it spread across the miles?

Dementia — In past times, people spoke of older people experiencing second childhoods or becoming senile. Today this problem is called dementia. What does that word mean and what language does it come from? How has the treatment of this illness changed over time? What must it be like to see someone you love lose touch with reality?

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Language Arts — During the 1930s unemployed writers and artists were hired by the government to work on several projects. Artists created public sculptures and murals in governmental buildings. Writers interviewed former slaves and wrote down their life histories. Such collections of oral history are a rich resource for those who study the past. Is there someone in your family or neighborhood whose history you might write down? An older person who lived in a time or a place very different from yours? How could you document their life? [Think scrapbooks, video and audiotaping, written histories, collections of treasured objects or clothing.]

Social Studies — During periods of economic depression much of ordinary life is disrupted. Problems in one region or in one industry can lead to problems elsewhere, in an ever widening circle. What caused the Great Depression of the 1930s? What factors made it worse? How and when did it finally end? In the book, Mike is nervous about the hobos. Who were they and how did they move about the country? How were they like the homeless people that live in many regions today? How were they different?

Science — Environmental pollution was a serious problem in cities and towns for much of human history. Rivers were the dumping places for industrial wastes and sewage. When and how did this start to change? When was the Environmental Protection Agency started and how does it work to help keep our land, air and water clean? What can individuals or small groups of people do about this issue? What dangers still threaten us?

Art — The hobos play a significant part in *Macaroni Boy*. What is “tramp art?” How was it made and sold? Many photographers chronicled the Great Depression. Can you find collections of their pictures? How do you feel about the faces you see? What faces would you photograph to show what life is like during your growing-up years today?