



# ***Signature in the Schools: Here's the Deal***

## ***Exercise: People are People – Differing Support During the New Deal***

**Subject(s):** History, Theater

**Goals:** Students will be able to:

Use examples from their knowledge and experience to support the main ideas of their oral presentation.

Exercise their agency as members of the classroom community.

Use verbal techniques including, but not limited to, appropriate tone, diction, articulation, clarity, type and rate.

Apply civic virtues and democratic principles to make collaborative decisions.

Evaluate the evolving and changing role of government.

### **Show Connection:**

In *Here's the Deal*, students in a high school theater class are asked to create theatrical pieces that find contemporary relevance in the New Deal. One of the groups creates a piece exploring treatment of people of color during the New Deal. As they create these pieces, they strive to find ways to empathize with the people they are researching.

## **Additional Resources to Explore:**

[The Living New Deal](#)

[The Art of the New Deal](#)

## **Supplies:** Living New Deal Inclusion Links

[African Americans and the New Deal](#)

[Asian Americans and the New Deal](#)

[Disabled Americans and the New Deal](#)

[Indigenous People and the New Deal](#)

[Women and the New Deal](#)

[Older Americans and the New Deal](#)

[Hispanic Americans and the New Deal](#)

[Jewish Americans and the New Deal](#)

## **Set-Up:**

Divide the students into groups of equal sizes in breakout rooms that will take place later in the lesson. (We recommend dividing groups ahead of time for efficiency, an ability to focus on the exercise and to get to the fun as quickly as possible.)

Create a Padlet for use in the “Empathy” portion of the lesson. The Padlet should feature at least three questions / scenarios that the students will be encouraged to respond to regarding empathy. (If your students aren’t familiar with Padlet, you’ll be able to adapt to any other virtual brainstorming platform.) Possible questions could include:

Imagine you are a student and a friend in your class has just failed a major test or exam. Your friend is distraught because she studied a lot and still failed. Even though you got a good grade on this test, you remember what it is like to fail. How do you demonstrate empathy?

In the restroom at school, one student gets teased and pushed into a stall by other kids. Imagine you’re a kid watching this interaction. How do you demonstrate empathy?

Your co-worker has a mountain of work to do and will need to come in over the weekend to finish. You don’t do the same kind of work, and there’s no way for you to offer practical help. How do you demonstrate empathy?

## **Description:**

### **Part 1: Opening Discussion**

Ask students to pick one of the following questions and to free write a response. After a few minutes, discuss their thoughts and responses.

How does a society honor difference among its people, yet work, live, and thrive as one? What could unity look like?

How does a society care for its most fragile: the elderly, the very young, the people with disabilities, in effective and equitable ways?

What challenges arise when serving a large population with many different types of individuals making up said population?

#### **Teach and Discuss:**

There have been many different moments of crisis and tension throughout the history of the United States of America. (World War II, September 11 and the Cuban Missile Crisis to name just a few from the last hundred years.) Each crisis has generated numerous ways to respond. Reception to each response has been mixed.

The Great Depression, one of America's most harrowing periods, resulted in many different attempts by the government to ease the burdens set on Americans by it. Some of those attempts remain controversial today.

### **Part 2: Exploration**

Put students into their pre-assigned breakout rooms after giving them the following instructions:

Each group will be assigned one of the following resources to explore. Groups will unpack how their assigned group of Americans benefitted and/or were harmed (whether intentionally or unintentionally) by programs instituted as a part of the New Deal to combat the Great Depression.

African Americans and the New Deal

Asian Americans and the New Deal

Disabled Americans and the New Deal

Indigenous People and the New Deal

Women and the New Deal

Older Americans and the New Deal

Hispanic Americans and the New Deal

Jewish Americans and the New Deal

In breakout room groups, groups are given time to read, discuss and explore their

assigned materials. Ask them to discuss the following in their groups:

How were these people treated during the Great Depression/New Deal era?

What images come to mind as you read about the treatment of these people?

If you were in their situation, how would you have felt? What would have been difficult for you?  
What would have given you hope?

### Part 3: Empathy

Once students have been given sufficient time to read, discuss and explore, bring them back and ask for initial impressions. What surprised you? What did you learn?

Discuss and define empathy. A piece from University of California, Berkeley defines empathy as: *“the ability to sense other people’s emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling.”*

Share the Padlet created with the students. Encourage students to explore and respond to each of the questions asked.

Discuss why empathy matters. We cannot be helpful without imagination. We are limited until we recognize that others around us may be suffering. Empathy is an important part of everyday life but it’s also an important key to studying history. These were real people! We can come to better understand why people did what they did and how we can help rectify problems from the past if we take the time to imagine what others might be feeling. Conflicts at school and at home could be resolved in more satisfying ways if we cultivated moral imaginations that gave us permission to *try* to imagine what others might think or feel.

Obviously, empathy has limitations. No matter how hard we try, we can never fully imagine the experiences of others, but the trying will always pay off.

We’re now going to ask you to practice empathy with the groups of Americans you were studying. You will be tasked to create an artistic response that explores the question: “How would I have felt if I were in their situation?”

Groups will create an artistic response to their materials that teaches what they learned to the other groups. Suggested modes of presentation:

A series of poses (or tableau) with narration.

A piece (or pieces) of visual art.

A physical piece of theater with narration or musical accompaniment.

A piece of spoken poetry or other written word.

Feel free to create additional guidelines here that match the artistic goals you have for your students.

Whatever mode of presentation they select, the pieces must effectively explore the following:

How the assigned group of Americans were treated or viewed in America at the time of the New Deal.

How this group of Americans may have felt at the start of the Great Depression.

The successes this group of Americans may have experienced during this time period.

How this group of Americans may have felt about how New Deal legislation addressed (or didn't) their collective problems.

#### **Part 4: Rehearsal and Performance**

Send groups back to breakout rooms and give them sufficient time to discuss and prepare. Once groups have had sufficient time to create their performance pieces, bring the groups back together to present their pieces.

#### **Discussion:**

What are some equitable shortcomings you are aware of in your day-to-day life and those of people you care about?

Have any groups in particular that were explored in these pieces "progressed" any faster than the other? Have they received more attention than other groups?

What ways do you think diverse ranges of people can be better served by those in power?