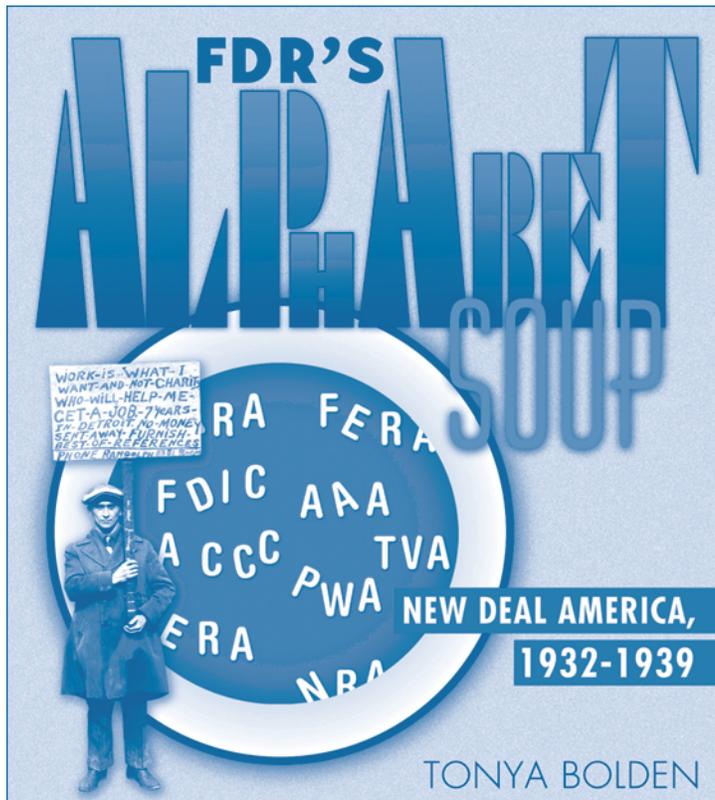


# BOOKNOTES

educators guide



Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-85214-5  
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## IN THE CLASSROOM

History & Social Studies  
Government & Politics  
Citizenship

GRADES 7 UP

## ABOUT THE BOOK

FERA. CCC. AAA. PWA. WPA. FDIC. What do all these letters call to mind? Why, alphabet soup of course! Actually, these initialisms, or acronyms, are just a few of the agencies created by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration to "kick out Depression" during the New Deal years. Spanning the years 1932 to 1939, Tonya Bolden uses the metaphor to present and explain the dizzying amount of legislation enacted in this seven-year period, while painting a very human picture of life during Depression-era America. Chock-full of photos, memorabilia, and reproductions of primary source documents, and with text peppered with words and phrases common to the period, this book offers readers an authentic and absorbing look at one of the most trying times in American history. Given the current domestic and global economic crisis, and the parallels between the two eras and presidential administrations, understanding the scope of the New Deal is just as relevant to Americans today as it was six decades ago.



An incredibly  
timely book about  
FDR's New Deal

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CHILDREN'S BOOKS

  
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## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Explain to students that FDR's "Alphabet Soup" is a metaphor for the New Deal: programs and legislation enacted between 1932 and 1939 and designed to move America out of the Great Depression. Engage students in a discussion about the current economic climate in the United States, focusing on its main causes. Many economists have referred to the crisis as another Depression, with many of the causes of today's economic downturn eerily similar to the meltdown that began with the stock market crash of 1929. Generate a list of programs that have been enacted since the tail end of the Bush Administration to the present, such as TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program), CARS (Car Allowance Rebate System, also known as "Cash for Clunkers"), and "shovel-ready" projects across the country being funded by President Obama's 2009 stimulus package. Encourage students to note the parallels between FDR's approach to economic recovery and the current president's plans.

## CONNECTING TO THE CURRICULUM



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### SOCIAL STUDIES

- *FDR's Alphabet Soup* is full of first-person accounts from the Depression era. Organize a field trip to a local nursing home or senior center so that students can interview people who can recall aspects of daily life during the Great Depression. Students can record the interviewees' responses and create a Web site to house the oral histories. For models of recorded oral histories, share selections from the nonprofit organization, Storycorps, at [www.storycorps.org](http://www.storycorps.org).
- While reading the text, students will discover a plethora of images that illustrate the state of the country during the New Deal years, including photographs, images from magazines and journals, propaganda such as election posters and buttons, and examples of photojournalism. In addition to the above images, the book contains many examples of political cartoons: some for and some against the New Deal. Challenge students to create political cartoons that represent various opinions about the Obama administration's programs and plans to bolster the economy.
- Embedded throughout the book is an abundance of information about economics and finance, such as supply and demand, interest rates, mortgages, and federal incentives designed to spur the economy. Students will recognize many of these subjects from today's headlines. Use *FDR's Alphabet Soup* to introduce the above terms and their meanings, and as a vehicle to compare the economic issues of the New Deal with the Obama administration's recovery plans for the current economic crisis.
- Lead students in a discussion about the evidence of racism and anti-semitism during the New Deal years. Begin by analyzing the image on page 97, which is shown on the next page of this guide. Challenge students to comment on the irony presented in the image. How does the image symbolize the inequality between the races during this period? Research politically prominent African American rights activists of this era, such

### LANGUAGE ARTS/LITERACY

- Throughout *FDR's Alphabet Soup*, the author sprinkles the text with words, phrases, and descriptions that give the reader an authentic sense of the period, such as *on the bum* (p. 25) or *ballyhoo* (p. 60). Have students highlight and discuss words and phrases that give the text its unique tone. Create a running list of the highlighted text as students proceed through the book.
- Provide students with the lyrics to a selection of Depression-era songs, such as "Happy Days Are Here Again" or a sampling of folk songs by Woody Guthrie. (An excellent Web resource, *Manufacturing Memory: American Popular Music in the 1930s*, can be found at [xroads.virginia.edu/~ug03/Jukebox/front.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug03/Jukebox/front.html).) Have students read and analyze the meanings of the lyrics in relation to the social climate of the country during the New Deal. Challenge students to describe how many of these songs are relevant today.



as Mary McLeod Bethune and economist Robert Weaver, and organizations that worked to advance the rights of people of color, such as the NAACP.

## THE ARTS

- Review the list of artists on page 77 who worked for the WPA. Some of the names will be familiar to students. Assign one artist to each student as a research subject. Students can demonstrate their knowledge by creating an original work of art.
- Share the image of *The New Deal* (1934), by Conrad Albrizio, found on page 66. Explain to students that this and hundreds of other murals were made in public buildings during the Depression. These commissions put artists to work at a time when there were few jobs, for anyone, to be had. Work with the art teacher to design a mural program in which students create murals that represent some of the public works projects that are being undertaken in their state and community as part of President Obama's recovery package.



## VOCABULARY | USE OF LANGUAGE

Ask students to identify unfamiliar words and write definitions taking clues from the context of the book.

Such words may include:

p. 9	<i>unprecedented</i>	p. 14	<i>leftist</i>	p. 28	<i>panaceas</i>	p. 45	<i>moxie</i>
p. 9	<i>vigor</i>	p. 16	<i>maladies</i>	p. 28	<i>novelties</i>	p. 49	<i>hoity-toity</i>
p. 11	<i>pitiable</i>	p. 23	<i>dillydallied</i>	p. 39	<i>radicalism</i>	p. 69	<i>deficit</i>
p. 12	<i>menaced</i>	p. 26	<i>hooliganism</i>	p. 39	<i>socialism</i>	p. 105	<i>rendezvous</i>



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Tonya Bolden** is the author of more than twenty books for young readers, including *Cause: Reconstruction America 1863–1877* and *Take-Off: American All-Girl Bands During World War II*. She received her BA from Princeton University in 1981 and her MA from Columbia University in 1985. She has written for numerous magazines and journals, including *Black Enterprise*, *Essence*, *The Amsterdam News*, and the *New York Times Book Review* and has received prestigious awards from the American Library Association and the New York Public Library.

For more information about Tonya Bolden, visit her Web site at [www.tonyaboldenbooks.com](http://www.tonyaboldenbooks.com)

## INTERNET RESOURCES

### Recovery.gov

[www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov)

### Biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt

[www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/franklinroosevelt](http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/franklinroosevelt)

### Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal

[memory.loc.gov/learn//features/timeline/depwwii/newdeal/newdeal.html](http://memory.loc.gov/learn//features/timeline/depwwii/newdeal/newdeal.html)

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