
Arthurdale

A New Deal Community



Cautionary Tale

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Introduction

Today's Arthurdale is a quaint community that peeks into the past thanks to the Arthurdale Heritage nonprofit museum. The community's history is well worth preserving since it not only represents an important part of the past, but also is based on principles from which we can learn for the future.

The actual town of Arthurdale began in 1933, but less than ten years later, in 1941, plans were underway to liquidate the community. By 1947, a mere 14 years after it started, all federal property had been sold to private owners, and the following four decades brought neglect and deterioration. By the 1970s and 1980s, the buildings were derelict and unused, and the private houses varied by owner.

In 1985, Arthurdale residents chartered a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving its history. Today, the nonprofit organization works tirelessly to restore the buildings and share the lessons of Arthurdale, a community that has much to teach.

Before taking your field trip to Arthurdale, take a bit of time to prepare. Ideas follow. Immersive learning (by actually going to a site) can be an effective educational experience!

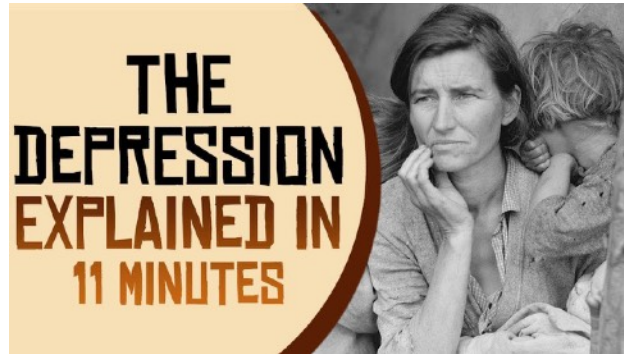
Prep for Young Elementary Students

1. Take a field trip to the family bank to learn how Mom and Dad's money is kept safely there. Briefly discuss how the paychecks are deposited and how bills are paid with the money in the bank. Explain how banks lost their money in 1929 when the stock market crashed. Discuss what would happen if all the family's money in the bank was suddenly gone and the family jobs/income was also lost.
2. Introduce the Stock Market crash of 1929. Find out the birth years of living grandparents or older family friends. Relate those dates to 1929 on a time line.
3. Explain that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was president during the Great Depression and tried several programs to help people, some of which are controversial. One such program, championed by his wife Eleanor, moved impoverished coal miners to government-provided houses and land. These government-provided towns were called New Deal Communities and the first was in West Virginia at Arthurdale.
4. Talk about how many people in the 1930's, especially in rural West Virginia, didn't have indoor plumbing, electricity, or automatic washing machines. Also, there were no interstate roads, TVs, computers, or internet. Goods produced in factories had to be taken by trains or ships to the cities where they could be sold. Unless the goods could be sold, it didn't help to make them. Prepare the children to notice the progressive nature (for the time period) of Arthurdale but to also notice the failure of Arthurdale's businesses and why that might have happened - and even been anticipated.
5. Look up the meaning of the suffix "dale." Then have the children guess why the town was named Arthurdale. Look up the meaning of the suffix "ville." Find a WV map with cities listed and see if other towns can be found with endings like "dale" and "ville." (Cities with "dale" include Arthurdale, Amherstdale, and Glen Dale. Towns ending in "ville" are much easier to find.)

Prep for Upper Middle School and Older

Choose the following activities to study over a few days and plan for both discussions as well as independent research:

1. Begin by watching [this short video](#) about the depression - which should provide context for Arthurdale.



2. Next, have your students research Arthurdale and answer the following questions:
 1. How did the town of Arthurdale get established?
 2. Who was chosen to populate the town?
 3. Why did these families get chosen? Were there others who were as deserving from other parts of the state or nation? Why did they not get chosen?
 4. Who paid for the houses, schools, community building, and other buildings of the community?
 5. Why was this location chosen?
 6. Was the location near to a railroad, waterway, trucking system, or any other way to get goods to market easily?
 7. Was there an interstate system back in the 1930's?
 8. How far is Arthurdale from the current interstates running through WV?
 9. What major American event had happened less than a decade earlier that was still affecting the American economy?

Note: Answers can easily be gleaned from

- <https://arthurdaleheritage.org/history-of-arthurdale/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthurdale,_West_Virginia

3. Have students research the basic tenets of capitalism.
 - Private property
 - Market competition
 - Profit is linked with work and effort

Was this New Deal community an example of capitalism at work?

4. Have students research the basic tenets of socialism.

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- Collective or public ownership
 - Collective decision-making in a planned economy
 - Government-controlled wealth distribution

Was this New Deal community an example of socialism at work?

5. Wikipedia states that “Roosevelt herself was ‘deeply disillusioned’ by a visit to the community in 1940, in which she observed that the community had become increasingly dependent on government and lacking in independent initiative.” Why might this have happened within only 7 years?

6. Read the children’s book, *The Little Red Hen*. Discuss the moral of the story. Then look up 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12. How does the book illustrate the principles of the verses? Do you think it’s fair that the animals are not allowed to eat at the end? Why or why not?

After Going to Arthurdale

Review the discussions from #4 and #5 above. Then discuss the following:

1. The families selected to move to Arthurdale were thrilled to be given land and houses! In what ways was it helpful to give them things that they had not worked for?
2. Had they instead been given jobs at Scott's Run and the ability to save to buy a house in Arthurdale, do you think that would have made any difference to the Arthurdale community? Why do you think Mrs. Roosevelt worked hard to make jobs for Arthurdale residents instead of working hard to make jobs for Scott's Run residents?
3. Coal miners usually live in houses owned by the mining company. How does this knowledge affect your answer to the questions above?
4. Why do you think there weren't companies and industries already near the site of Arthurdale? What makes companies choose a location for their business?
5. Why do you think that so many companies who brought work to Arthurdale closed down quickly thereafter and left the experiment?
6. Did Mrs. Roosevelt mean well? If she cared so much and meant so well, why didn't the community last?
7. Many of Arthurdale's residents worked hard at the provided jobs. Do you think it was disheartening when the businesses didn't flourish?

Bonus: Discuss that anyone can visit Arthurdale's museum or take the classes if they can pay the ticket price. People do not apply to come as they did in 1933. How is the current museum an example of capitalism in ways that the community itself was not?

Wrap-Up

Many ideas relating to Arthurdale are positive. In fact, much of the motivation was compassion for struggling, starving families. While there are no simple answers, principles are well worth discussing. When difficult situations arise, wisdom should take us to God's principles found in His Word.

For example, in Old Testament times farmers were required to leave some of their harvest in the fields and allow the needy to glean from what was left (Leviticus 23:22). It was how the Israelites showed compassion on the poor. if you'd like, discuss the difference between providing "work" for the poor versus giving them the crops after they are already harvested. (The "gleaning" principle is part of the context for the story of Ruth and Boaz as told in the Bible book of *Ruth*.)

Other Resources

- Extensive Arthurdale lesson plans are available from the National Parks Service at this link: https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/upload/TwHP-Lessons_157arthurdale.pdf At minimum, scrolling through the lesson plans for photographs is quite interesting.
- Another good resource: <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/298>
- Finally, ArthurdaleHeritage.org offers Arthurdale history along with other information and resources.

One Homeschool Family's Response to an Arthurdale Field Trip

10 years ago

After visiting, see if your family agrees or disagrees:

After a day studying the history of Ft. Necessity, George Washington, and the National Road, Thursday brought us to the 20th century and to the first socialistic community in America, birthed as part of the New Deal.

165 West Virginia families, most of the men unemployed coal miners from Scott's Run, were moved to the rural and beautiful Preston County community of Arthurdale. The federal government, under FDR, had bought the expansive Arthur farm and erected homes, community buildings, and progressive schools (including a nursery school) run completely by the federal government. Imagine taking poor families living in deplorable conditions because of unemployment and the great depression and placing them in new houses compliments of tax money, but still unemployed. Imagine the federal government providing all manner of programs and teachers and program managers to make the community succeed, but unable to attract any businesses for employment. Imagine the federal government realizing that the program is failing after just a few years and a vast amount of money spent. Imagine the federal government finally giving the schools to the county school board and selling the buildings to get out from under the failure. Imagine the families feeling abandoned. Then you will have a fair understanding of Arthurdale.

In a single day, desperate families were moved to their "utopia:" from dirty row houses with a coating of coal dust and hopelessness, to pretty white clapboard houses, each with enough acreage to subsistence farm, and a few outbuildings including root cellars. It was a dream for those families who had been carefully screened and selected. Their children, from nursery school age, attended progressive schools run by teachers tutored by John Dewey himself. High school graduations were attended by Eleanor Roosevelt, who also came frequently to attend community dances and give her time and money to support her brainchild.

But no one seemed to see that the original problem was the depression and resultant lack of income - as suffered by thousands of families at that time. Changing environments, but still without hope or vision of self-support, the families were doomed to eventually return to hopelessness after the federal government stopped playing provider.

Unfortunately, that realization still seems hidden in Arthurdale. They remember only the utopian dream they realized for a season and the frequent visits by Eleanor

Roosevelt, their heroine. We do concede that most of those families were better off after Arthurdale than they were before, at least materially. However, hundreds of families were rejected from the experiment, thousands more did not even live in the chosen pool of Scott's Run, and much federal money was spent for so little success for so few.

The lesson of Arthurdale is selection and advantage for a few by taking money from the many. Some call this redistribution of wealth while others call it robbery. The ruins are apparent.



At any rate, the answer has not been socialism since cooperative farming was tried and failed in Jamestown. The answer has not been socialism since God laid down His laws concerning provision and work. Would that we would listen to Him instead of Rousseau, Marx, or Dewey. Would that we would learn from history so that we would not repeat it.

Nevertheless, most of the original homes are still standing and many of the community buildings as well. We saw homes that were simply adorable. We really enjoyed the vintage gas station and the many vintage items on display.

While it's not a pleasant part of our nation's history, we're glad we visited Arthurdale. The lessons to be learned there are invaluable. Socialism has never been and will never be the answer. It fails every time.

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Christian Home Educators of West Virginia

If this study was helpful to your family, please let us know. Send a brief email to chewv@chewv.org. It's only worth our time if it's helpful to you!