



# The Great Depression: A Migrant Mother's Story

## Characters

Joshua Owens  
Florence Owens  
Leroy Owens

Bill Ganzel  
Dorothea Lange  
Isaac Wilkes

## Setting

This reader's theater takes place between 1965 and 1983, at Florence Owen's trailer home and author Bill Ganzel's office. Florence's trailer is small but comfortable, and it contains a number of personal items accumulated in the years following the Great Depression. Bill Ganzel's office is professional and spacious, but less of a treasure trove.



## Act 1

- Joshua Owens:** It all started in 1965. My dad, Leroy, and I were visiting my grandma, Florence Owens. Grandma lived in a trailer park in Modesto, California. I was looking through a box of old photos when I found a newspaper from 1936. It had a picture of my grandma and an article, too. I couldn't wait to show it to her.
- Florence Owens:** What do you have there, Joshua?
- Joshua Owens:** Look, Grandma! I found an article about you! The headline says, "Ragged, Hungry, Broke Harvest Workers Live in Squalor." There's a picture of you when you were young. You look very sad. What's this about?
- Florence Owens:** I can't talk about it, Joshua. I feel sick whenever I look at that photograph. The lady who took it and wrote that article had some nerve! It makes my blood boil to think about it!
- Leroy Owens:** Mama, I know this makes you angry, but I think you should tell Joshua about it.
- Florence Owens:** I don't want to talk about it. I don't even like to think about it.



**Leroy Owens:** I know you don't, Mama, but Joshua needs to know what happened.

**Florence Owens:** Then you tell him, Leroy, because I just can't.

**Leroy Owens:** I don't remember a lot about when we were kids. I hardly remember Papa.

**Florence Owens:** But, you do know you were born in Oklahoma.

**Leroy Owens:** Yes, although I was young when we left. I remember we moved to California. At one time, eight of us lived in one small tent. There wasn't always enough to eat. Mama, Joshua should know our history. Let's tell him together.

**Florence Owens:** All right, Leroy, all right!

**Joshua Owens:** Can you tell me about Grandpa? I want to know what happened to him.

**Florence Owens:** It's a long story. I met Cleo Owens when I was a young girl, and we fell in love. We got married on Valentine's Day when I was just 17.



**Joshua Owens:** Yikes, that's really young!

**Florence Owens:** Yes, it was, and your grandpa's parents were dead set against it.

**Leroy Owens:** They said that your grandma was headstrong. They thought that she wouldn't obey Grandpa.

**Florence Owens:** They were certain our marriage would fail. A failed marriage was a terrible sin in those days because it disgraced both you and your parents.

**Leroy Owens:** I thought you two were happy together, Mama.

**Florence Owens:** We were happy. We loved each other very much. But even though Cleo was a hard worker and did his best to provide for us, he was also sickly.

**Leroy Owens:** Papa had pneumonia when he was 21, and the illness left his lungs weak.

**Florence Owens:** The demanding physical labor and poor air quality quickly exhausted your grandpa and sometimes made him ill. Still, life was good. We had three children before we left Oklahoma.