



### **Host a Depression Era meal with music:**

I often punctuate my historical narratives with songs of the day—they're such potent "reveals" of an era and the characters who choose to sing them. BEA AND THE NEW DEAL HORSE is no different. The Great Depression is rich with music filled with humor, hope, and empathy—stunning considering how dire the times.

Ralph, the old stable hand and country philosopher, is a favorite supporting character of mine. His presence in the novel is relatively small. But his natural kindness and easy affection—for horses, for "Miss Milly," for children—blooms large as he enters and leaves scenes, singing.

Just as music immerses me in an era and hands me themes to explore, so does lingo of the day. It provides authentic dialogue and character reveal, and often gifts me something really eye-opening or poignant.

For instance: the term "farm out." I always thought of it as giving a task to someone who knows how to do it better than I. But it comes from the Depression. Parents, desperate to feed their children—would "farm them out," sending them to relatives or friends who had farms— and therefore food, where they'd be safe. They did it out of love—but what a wrenching, hard choice. That term inspired the set-up and opening scene for my story.

Bea's father lost his job, their home. They take to the road, bedding down for the night in a Middleburg farm. He slips away, leaving her and her little sister sleeping in a hayloft. Bea wakes to find a note saying he thinks the farm's owner, a long-ago acquaintance named Mrs. Scott, will take the girls in.

It's clear, however, that Mrs. Scott's farm has fallen on hard times as well. There's also a palpable mystery about why her stable is only half full and why her high-level horses aren't being ridden.

The immediate crisis of the novel: How can Bea convince this formidable horse woman to take in two stray children? She decides to keep them hidden in the barn, observing Mrs. Scott to learn more about her before approaching her. And her first chore is figuring out how to feed her little sister.

Fortunately, Mrs. Scott's lawn is neglected and overgrown with dandelions—something that became a staple for Depression era families.

Open a unit on the Depression and reading *BEA AND THE NEW DEAL HORSE* by hosting a lunch with music and a reading of the first chapter plus pages 39 through 47. It immerses students in a visceral way (and amusing—the authentic recordings are delightful and quirky). The event also allows educators to initiate discussion about the ingenuity, resilience, and hope that helped people survive.

(If there's time, keep going through page 55, which can also prompt thoughts about sibling relations.)

For music selections: see the [Discussion Guide \(pg. 5\)](#) and [my Spotify playlist](#).

Have students research recipes for what became popular, cost-saving, use-what-you-have dishes:

Dandelion Salad  
Chipped Beef on Toast  
Pasta and Peas  
Potato Soup (NO cream or fancy ingredients!)  
“Hoover Stew”  
Roasted Onions stuffed with Peanut Butter  
Cabbage Soup  
Cornbread  
Pickle and PB sandwiches  
Milkorno

Desserts:

Prune Pudding (an Eleanor Roosevelt specialty)  
Oatmeal cookies  
Hot water pie