

**READING CHECK**

What was the Federal Art Project?

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**VOCABULARY STRATEGY**

What does the word *episodes* mean in the underlined sentence? What clues can you find in the surrounding words, phrases, or sentences? Use these clues to help you determine the meaning of *episodes*.

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**READING SKILL**

**Identify Main Ideas and Details**  
In what ways were the 1930s a golden age for entertainment?

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Entertainment became big business during the 1930s, creating a golden age in American culture. Large radio networks dominated the airwaves, while a cluster of film companies ruled the silver screen. Radio ownership grew during the decade, and nearly two thirds of all Americans attended at least one movie a week.

The movies were a form of escapism during the Great Depression as Americans sought relief from their concerns. Movies like *The Wizard of Oz* promised weary audiences that their dreams really could come true. In the early 1930s, many films reflected the public’s distrust of big business and government. Others, such as the films of **Frank Capra**, celebrated American idealism and the triumph of the common man over adversity.

Radio brought news and entertainment into American homes. FDR used fireside radio chats to explain his New Deal programs. National radio networks broadcast dramas, comedies, soap operas, and variety shows. Episodes from *The Lone Ranger* began running in 1933 and lasted for more than 20 years. Sometimes the lines between news and entertainment were blurred. When the Mercury Theatre broadcast a drama called *War of the Worlds* on October 30, 1938, many people panicked, believing that Martians were actually invading.

Music also provided a diversion from hard times, whether on the radio at home or in nightclubs. Americans enjoyed “swing” music played by “big bands.” Blues singers focused on the harsh conditions faced by African Americans. Woody Guthrie wrote ballads about the Okies, farmers who fled the Dust Bowl.

The federal government funded the arts for the first time through programs such as the **Federal Art Project**. Artists painted huge **murals** on public buildings across the nation. **Dorothea Lange** and other photographers documented the plight of America’s farmers.

Many writers produced novels featuring working-class heroes. **John Steinbeck’s** *The Grapes of Wrath* traces the fictional Joad family from the Oklahoma Dust Bowl to California. **Lillian Hellman** wrote several plays featuring strong roles for women as well as screenplays for movies. Americans also enjoyed comic strips and comic books.

**Review Questions**

1. How did popular culture change during the 1930s?

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2. What were some of the major themes of literature in the 1930s?

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