CAPITOLO

# 11

# The Jazz Age and the Depression: America 1918–1941

*"...that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement." — James Truslow Adams, The Epic of America (1931)*

**OBIETTIVI**

1. I can describe the United States from 1918 to 1941: the boom of the 1920s, Prohibition and immigration laws, the Crash, the Depression and the New Deal.
2. I can explain the terms Jazz Age, Lost Generation, American Dream and Harlem Renaissance, and outline the work of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Steinbeck and McKay.
3. I can analyse the green light in *The Great Gatsby* and the form of McKay's sonnet "If We Must Die".
4. I can describe data and trends accurately, with the right verbs, nouns, prepositions and tenses.
5. I can interpret a graph orally, write a data commentary and manage my time in a computer-based INVALSI test.

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Capitolo 11: The Jazz Age and the Depression: America 1918–1941 · pagine 349–378 del volume completo · estratto per lo studio

In the spring of 1925 a young writer from Minnesota published a short novel about a man who throws enormous parties on Long Island for a woman who lives across the bay. Four and a half years later the parties of the whole decade stopped: in October 1929 the New York stock market collapsed, and within four years about one American worker in four had no job. In the same years the wind lifted the soil of the southern Plains into black clouds, and thousands of farming families packed what they had and drove west.

This chapter follows the United States from the end of the First World War to Pearl Harbor: the noisy prosperity of the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance, the Crash, the Depression and the New Deal. You will read Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Claude McKay's sonnet "If We Must Die", and meet Hemingway and Steinbeck, whose books are still protected by copyright and are therefore summarised. In Language you will learn to describe data and trends — the skill behind every graph in an INVALSI text, a physics report or a newspaper — and in Skills you will sit a mock INVALSI test with Giulia.

## 11.1 History and Society: the United States, 1918–1941

When the Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, the United States had been at war for only nineteen months, and it came out of the conflict as the world's richest nation. Its factories had supplied the Allies, European governments owed it money, and New York was becoming a financial centre to rival London. The next twenty-three years were a story of extremes: a decade of boom, a decade of crisis, and then a second world war. Figura 11.1 sets out the main events.

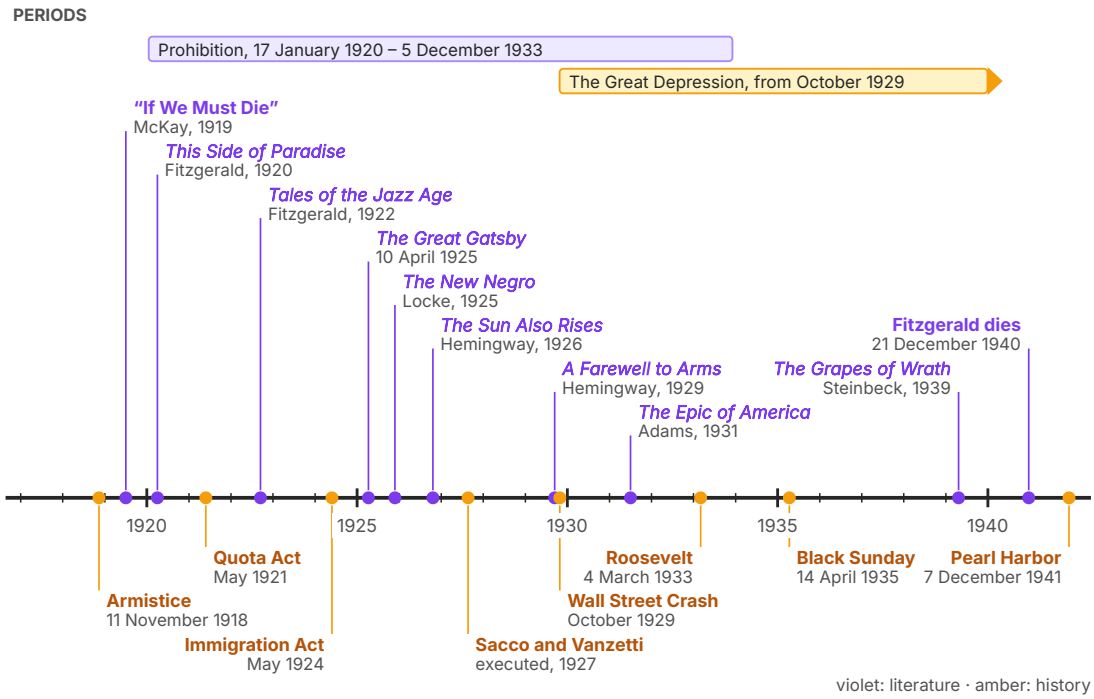



**Figura 11.1** The United States from the Armistice to Pearl Harbor (1917–1942): works of literature above the axis (violet), historical events below (amber), and two periods as bands. Dates as in the text.

### 11.1.1 Prosperity: cars, radio and credit

In the 1920s millions of Americans bought things their parents had never owned. Henry Ford's moving assembly line (1913) had made the Model T cheap enough for farmers and factory workers; cars changed where people lived, how young people met and what towns looked like. In November 1920 the first commercial radio station, KDKA in Pittsburgh, began broadcasting, and by the end of the decade radio had brought the same music, advertising and news into homes across the continent. Electric refrigerators, vacuum cleaners and telephones spread in the cities. Much of this was bought on **credit** (*a rate*): a small first payment and instalments every month. Advertising, a growing industry, taught people to want what they could not yet afford.

Shares were bought on credit too. In **buying on margin** (*acquisto a margine*) an investor paid only part of the price of a share and borrowed the rest from a broker, hoping to repay the loan when the price went up. As long as prices kept rising, everybody seemed to win.

### 11.1.2 Prohibition and the closing door

Two laws of these years tried to protect an older idea of America. The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, in force from 17 January 1920, began **Prohibition** (*proibizionismo*): the making, transport and sale of alcoholic drinks became illegal across the country. Drinking did not stop; it moved into secret bars called **speakeasies** (*locali clandestini*), and supplying them made fortunes for **bootleggers** (smugglers of alcohol) and for organised crime. Prohibition ended with the Twenty-first Amendment on 5 December 1933. In the same spirit, Congress limited immigration: the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924 set yearly **quotas** (*quote*) for each nationality, calculated to favour northern and western Europeans. Italian immigration, which before the war had brought hundreds of thousands of people a year (English 2, Unit 9), was reduced to a small fraction. The decade also began with one great extension of democracy: the Nineteenth Amendment (1920) forbade any state to deny citizens the vote on account of sex (English 2, Unit 8).

### 11.1.3 The Great Migration and Harlem

From about 1910, hundreds of thousands of African Americans left the rural South, where segregation laws and racist violence ruled their lives, for the industrial cities of the North — Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, New York. Historians call this movement the **Great Migration** (*Grande migrazione*) — not to be confused with the Puritan Great Migration of the 1630s (English 4, chapter 1). The North was not free of racism: in the "Red Summer" of 1919, white mobs attacked Black neighbourhoods in many cities, and in Chicago the riot of July 1919 left 38 people dead. But in New York the district of Harlem became the largest Black community in the country, with its own newspapers, churches, theatres and clubs, and the centre of an artistic movement you will study in the next section.

### 11.1.4 Sacco and Vanzetti

Fear of radicals and of foreigners marked the early 1920s. In 1920 two Italian immigrants and anarchists, Nicola Sacco, a shoe-factory worker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fish seller, were arrested for a robbery in South Braintree, Massachusetts, in which a guard and a paymaster had been killed. Their trial in 1921 was widely criticised: the evidence was disputed, and the judge's hostility to them was well known. After years of appeals and international protests they were executed on 23 August 1927. Whether either man was guilty is still debated; that they did not receive a fair trial is the view that Massachusetts itself officially adopted fifty years later, in 1977.

### 11.1.5 The Crash and the Great Depression

The stock market reached its highest point in early September 1929. In October it collapsed: on "Black Thursday", 24 October, and on "Black Tuesday", 29 October, panic selling destroyed bil-

lions of dollars of paper wealth in a few hours. The Dow Jones index, which had closed at 381 at its 1929 peak, fell to 41 by July 1932 — a loss of about 89 per cent. The **Wall Street Crash** (*il crollo di Wall Street*) did not cause the crisis on its own, but it set off a chain reaction. Investors who had bought on margin could not repay their loans; banks that had lent to them, or had invested their customers' savings, failed in thousands; people who lost their savings stopped buying; factories cut production and dismissed workers, who then bought even less. World trade shrank, and the crisis spread to Europe (chapter 12).

The result was the **Great Depression** (*Grande depressione*), the deepest economic crisis in the history of the industrial world. Figura 11.2 shows the unemployment rate: from 3.2 per cent of the labour force in 1929 it rose to 24.9 per cent in 1933 — about 12.8 million people. Unemployed workers queued at soup kitchens and in bread lines; families who could not pay their rent or their mortgage lost their homes; the shanty towns built by homeless people on the edge of cities were nicknamed "Hoovervilles", after President Herbert Hoover, whom many blamed for doing too little.

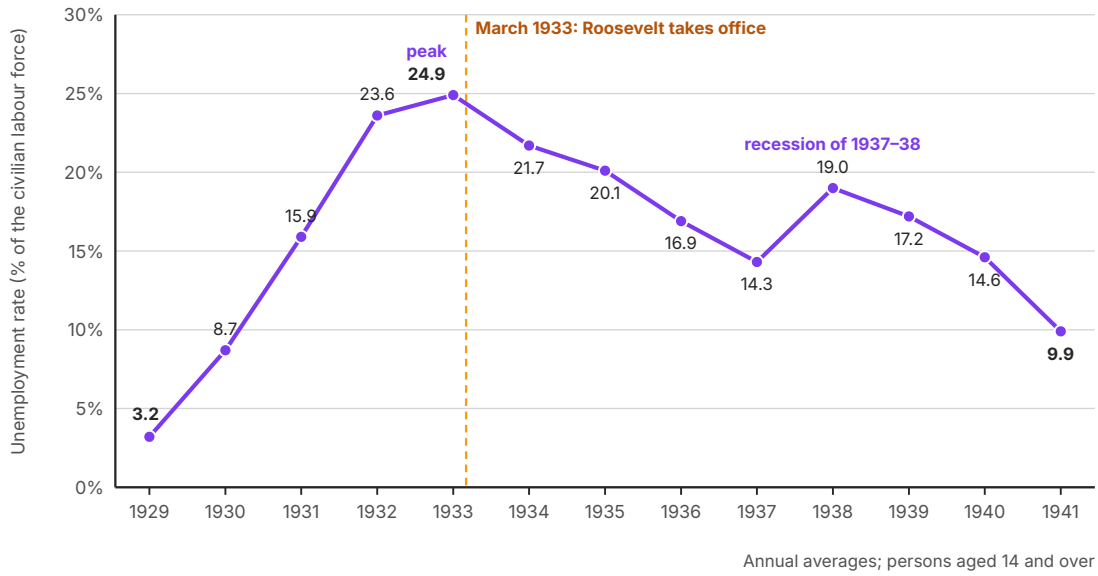



**Figura 11.2** Unemployment in the United States, 1929–1941, as a percentage of the civilian labour force (annual averages, persons aged 14 and over). Data: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (1975), series D 86.

Nature added a disaster of its own. In the 1930s a long drought struck the southern Great Plains, where in the previous decades farmers had ploughed up millions of acres of grassland to grow wheat. Without the grass, the dry soil was carried away by the wind in enormous dust storms. The region and the disaster were soon called the **Dust Bowl** (*Dust Bowl*); you will read about it in Skills and see it on the map in Figura 11.5. Thousands of ruined families left for California.

### 11.1.6 Roosevelt and the New Deal

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Democrat, defeated Hoover in November 1932 and was inaugurated on 4 March 1933, when the banking system was close to collapse. His inaugural address contained the most quoted sentence of the decade: “So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.” In his first hundred days Congress passed a stream of laws, and the programmes that followed are known together as the **New Deal** (*New Deal*): emergency rules to reopen the banks; public works that employed millions of people on roads, bridges, schools and dams (the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933; the Works Progress Administration, 1935); the Tennessee Valley Authority (1933), which brought electricity and flood control to one of the poorest regions; and the Social Security Act (1935), which created old-age pensions and unemployment insurance. The New Deal did not end unemployment — as Figura 11.2 shows, it fell slowly, and rose again in the recession of 1937–38 — but it changed for ever what Americans expected from their federal government.

The decade ended in war. Europe went to war in September 1939; the United States stayed officially neutral but sent supplies to Britain. On 7 December 1941 Japanese aircraft attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii, and the next day the United States entered the Second World War. War production finally brought back full employment.

> **ERRORE FREQUENTE**
>
> ✗ «Il crollo di Wall Street causò da solo la Grande depressione.» → ✓ Il crollo dell’ottobre 1929 fu l’**innesco** di una crisi che aveva molte cause: il debito, i fallimenti bancari, il calo dei consumi, la contrazione del commercio mondiale. Gli storici discutono ancora quanto pesò ciascuna.
>
> ✗ «Con il proibizionismo gli americani smisero di bere.» → ✓ Il consumo continuò negli *speakeasies*, e il contrabbando arricchì la criminalità organizzata. La legge fu abrogata nel dicembre 1933.

## 11.2 Literature: the Jazz Age and the Lost Generation

American writers of the 1920s were the first generation to make American literature famous all over the world. Many of them had seen the war in Europe; many lived for years in Paris, where life was cheap and the dollar strong; almost all of them wrote about the gap between the promises of modern America and what it actually gave.

### 11.2.1 Two names for one generation

The **Jazz Age** (*l’età del jazz*) is the name usually given to the American 1920s: the years of jazz music and new dances, of short skirts and short hair for women (the “flappers”), of cars, cine-

ma, illegal alcohol and easy money. The phrase was not invented by Fitzgerald, but he made it famous with his collection of stories *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), and he later looked back on the decade as a party that ended with the Crash.

The **Lost Generation** (*generazione perduta*) is the group of American writers who came of age during the First World War and spent much of the 1920s in Europe: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos and others. The phrase comes from the American writer Gertrude Stein, who lived in Paris, as Hemingway reported it: he used her remark that his friends were "a lost generation" as an epigraph to his novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), and in a memoir published after his death he said that Stein had heard it from a French garage owner. "Lost" meant disoriented, without values to believe in after the war, rather than missing.

### 11.2.2 F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940)

Francis Scott Fitzgerald was born in St Paul, Minnesota, studied at Princeton and joined the army in 1917, but the war ended before he was sent to France. His first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), was an immediate success, and in the same year he married Zelda Sayre; the glamorous young couple seemed to embody the Jazz Age they lived in, between New York, Paris and the French Riviera. *The Great Gatsby*, published on 10 April 1925, was praised by some critics but was a commercial disappointment: it sold fewer than 20,000 copies by October, far fewer than Fitzgerald had hoped. In the 1930s Zelda's mental illness, debts and alcohol darkened his life; *Tender Is the Night* (1934) sold poorly, and he went to Hollywood to write scripts. He died there of a heart attack on 21 December 1940, believing himself a failure. Only in the 1940s — partly thanks to free copies printed for American soldiers during the Second World War — did *Gatsby* become the classic it is today.

*The Great Gatsby* is set in the summer of 1922. Its narrator, Nick Carraway, a young man from the Midwest who works in New York selling bonds, rents a small house at West Egg, on Long Island, next to the mansion of the mysterious Jay Gatsby, famous for his parties. Across the bay, at East Egg, lives Nick's cousin Daisy with her rich, brutal husband Tom Buchanan. Nick discovers that Gatsby, born James Gatz to poor farmers, had loved Daisy five years earlier, before the war, and has made a fortune — partly through bootlegging and other crimes — only to win her back. The dream fails: Daisy will not leave Tom; driving Gatsby's car, she kills Tom's lover, Myrtle Wilson; Myrtle's husband, believing Gatsby was the driver, shoots him and then himself. Almost nobody comes to Gatsby's funeral, and Nick goes back to the Midwest.

Fitzgerald's technique is as important as the story. Nick is a first-person narrator (English 4, chapter 6) who is also a character, but not the hero: he watches, judges and remembers, and we see Gatsby only through his eyes and through the gossip of others. The novel is short and carefully built around a few recurring symbols: the green light at the end of Daisy's dock, the "valley of ashes" between Long Island and New York, the eyes of an advertisement for an oculist watching over it.

Gatsby's story is the most famous version of the **American Dream** (*il sogno americano*): the belief that in America anyone, whatever their birth, can rise through their own effort to wealth and happiness. The phrase existed before, but the historian James Truslow Adams made it popular in *The Epic of America* (1931), where he insisted that the dream was about a fairer social order, not only about money and cars. Gatsby reinvents himself completely, but his dream is fixed on the past — on Daisy as she was in 1917 — and the money he makes cannot buy what he wants.

### 11.2.3 Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) and John Steinbeck (1902–1968)

Hemingway and Steinbeck died after 1955, and their texts are still protected by copyright: here they are summarised. Ernest Hemingway, born near Chicago, volunteered as an ambulance driver for the American Red Cross on the Italian front and was badly wounded at Fossalta di Piave on 8 July 1918 (chapter 8). *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) draws on that experience: Frederic Henry, an American lieutenant in the Italian ambulance service, lives through the retreat after Caporetto and falls in love with an English nurse, Catherine Barkley. In *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) Hemingway compared good prose to an iceberg: a writer who knows his subject can leave most of it unsaid, and the reader will feel what is under the surface — the so-called **iceberg theory** (*teoria dell'iceberg*). His short, plain sentences, his dialogue and his silences influenced writers all over the world. He received the Nobel Prize in 1954.

John Steinbeck, from Salinas, California, wrote the great novel of the Depression. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) follows the Joad family, tenant farmers from Oklahoma who lose their land to the banks and the tractors and drive along Route 66 to California, where they find not a promised land but hunger, low wages and hostility. Chapters about the Joads alternate with short general chapters about the migrants, the road and the land. The novel won the Pulitzer Prize and became a film in 1940; Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize in 1962.

### 11.2.4 The Harlem Renaissance

The **Harlem Renaissance** (*Rinascimento di Harlem*) was the flowering of African American literature, music and art centred in Harlem in the 1920s and early 1930s. Its writers wanted to represent Black life with dignity and complexity, in place of the stereotypes of white popular culture; the philosopher Alain Locke collected many of them in the anthology *The New Negro* (1925). Two of its best-known writers, the poet Langston Hughes and the novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, are not yet in the public domain in Italy. Claude McKay (1889–1948), born in Jamaica, came to the United States in 1912. His sonnet "If We Must Die", written in answer to the violence of the Red Summer, appeared in the magazine *The Liberator* in July 1919 and is often seen as one of the starting points of the movement; his collection *Harlem Shadows* (1922) and his novel *Home to Harlem* (1928) followed.

**ERRORE FREQUENTE**

✗ «Gatsby racconta la propria storia.» → ✓ Il narratore è **Nick Carraway**, vicino di casa e testimone: vediamo Gatsby solo attraverso di lui.

✗ «*Il grande Gatsby* fu subito un bestseller.» → ✓ Nel 1925 vendette **meno di 20 000 copie** entro ottobre; divenne un classico solo dopo la morte di Fitzgerald (1940).

✗ «Hemingway inventò l'espressione *Lost Generation*.» → ✓ L'espressione è di **Gertrude Stein**; Hemingway la rese famosa citandola nell'epigrafe di *The Sun Also Rises*.

## 11.3 Texts: a Green Light and a Sonnet

Two extracts from the beginning and the end of *The Great Gatsby*, and a complete sonnet by Claude McKay. Fitzgerald's text is printed from the first edition (1925), with its American spelling and punctuation; McKay's from the magazine where it first appeared (1919).

### 11.3.1 T1 · F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, ch. 1: the green light

**Context.** Nick has just come home from a dinner at the Buchanans' house, across the bay, where Daisy and her friend Jordan Baker have mentioned his neighbour. It is a warm night, and Nick sees Gatsby for the first time.

**Tabella 11.1** T1 — *The Great Gatsby*, ch. 1, last paragraph (first edition, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925; text as transcribed on Wikisource)

> I decided to call to him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness.

**Glosses.** *would do for*: would be enough as · *intimation*: a sign, a hint · *far as I was from him*: although I was far from him · *involuntarily*: without meaning to · *seaward*: towards the sea · *distinguished*: managed to see · *minute* (/maɪˈnjuːt/): very small · *dock*: a wooden platform where boats are tied up.

#### Analysis

**A first meeting that does not happen.** Nick decides to speak to Gatsby, then does not; Gatsby disappears. The scene introduces the hero as a figure seen from a distance, silent and alone — exactly how the reader will know him for most of the novel.

**An uncertain witness.** Look at Nick's verbs: he *could have sworn*, the light *might have been* the end of a dock. Nick is honest about the limits of what he sees, and this makes us trust him — but it also reminds us that everything we learn about Gatsby is filtered through one person.

**The symbol.** The green light is the novel's central symbol. Only later do we learn that it marks the end of Daisy's dock, so that Gatsby's gesture towards the water is a gesture towards her. Green suggests hope, spring, the go signal of a traffic light — and the colour of dollar bills.

1. Find the two phrases that tell us Nick is not sure of what he sees.
2. What does Gatsby do with his arms? What feeling does Nick read in his body?
3. Why is it important that the light is "minute and far away"?
4. The paragraph ends with Nick "alone again". Who else in this scene is alone?
5. List three things that the colour green may suggest. Which one fits best here, and why?

### 11.3.2 T2 · F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, ch. 9: "boats against the current"

**Context.** Gatsby is dead and buried. On his last night on Long Island Nick walks to Gatsby's empty house and down to the beach. As the lights of the big houses go out, he imagines the island as the first Dutch sailors saw it three centuries earlier — a fresh, green new world. Then he thinks of Gatsby.

**Tabella 11.2** T2 — *The Great Gatsby*, ch. 9, the last three paragraphs (first edition, 1925; text as transcribed on Wikisource)

> And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.
>
> Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning ———
>
> So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

**Glosses.** *brooding on*: thinking deeply and sadly about · *grasp*: take hold of · *obscurity*: darkness · *the republic*: the United States · *orgastic*: ecstatic (see the box) · *recedes*: moves away · *eluded*: escaped · *beat on*: keep moving forward with effort, especially against wind or water · *borne back*: carried back (*bear, bore, borne*) · *ceaselessly*: without stopping.

#### Analysis

**From one man to a nation.** The first paragraph is about Gatsby (*he*); the second moves from Gatsby to *us* and *we*. Gatsby's dream of Daisy becomes the dream of every American — and of every human being — who believes that the future will finally give what the past promised.

**Time.** Gatsby believes his dream is ahead of him, but Nick tells us it was "already behind him". The final image explains the paradox: we row towards the future, but the current carries us back into the past. Effort and failure, hope and memory exist in the same sentence.

**Form.** The sentences break off with dots and dashes, as if Nick could not finish them; then the last sentence is short, rhythmical and complete. Many readers hear in it the rhythm of verse.

1. Which pronouns does Nick use in each of the three paragraphs? What changes?
2. Find the words that place Gatsby's dream in the past, and those that place it in the future.
3. What did the green light mean in T1? What does it mean now?
4. Paraphrase the last sentence in simple English.
5. Is this ending hopeful, hopeless, or both? Give reasons from the text.

> **APPROFONDIMENTO**
>
> **"Orgastic" or "orgiastic"?** The first edition prints *orgastic*, the adjective of *orgasm*, here in the general sense of intense excitement or ecstasy. Many later editions changed it to *orgiastic* (from *orgy*), assuming it was a mistake, and you will still find that word in some popular editions and online texts — together with *tomorrow* for *to-morrow* and *further* for *farther*. Fitzgerald himself defended *orgastic* in a letter to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, and modern scholarly editions have restored it. Even a classic of 1925 has textual variants: always say which edition you are quoting.

### 11.3.3 T3 · Claude McKay, "If We Must Die" (1919)

**Context.** In the summer of 1919 white mobs attacked African American communities in many American cities, from Washington to Chicago. McKay, then working as a waiter on the railways, wrote this sonnet in response; it was published in *The Liberator*, a New York socialist magazine, in July 1919.

**Tabella 11.3** T3 — McKay, "If We Must Die", complete; text and layout of *The Liberator*, vol. 2, no. 7 (July 1919), p. 21 (Internet Archive scan)

| | |
|---|---|
| If we must die—let it not be like hogs | |
| Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot, | |
| While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs, | |
| Making their mock at our accursed lot. | |
| If we must die—oh, let us nobly die, | 5 |
| So that our precious blood may not be shed | |
| In vain; then even the monsters we defy | |
| Shall be constrained to honor us though dead! | |
| | |
| Oh, kinsmen! We must meet the common foe; | |
| Though far outnumbered, let us still be brave, | 10 |
| And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow! | |
| What though before us lies the open grave? | |
| Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack, | |
| Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting back! | |

**Glosses.** *hogs*: pigs · *penned*: shut in a small enclosure · *inglorious*: shameful · *making their mock at*: laughing cruelly at · *accursed lot*: unlucky fate · *constrained*: forced · *kinsmen*: people of one's own family or people · *foe*: enemy · *What though*: what does it matter if · *pressed to the wall*: with no way of escape.

### Analysis

**The form.** The magazine prints the poem as eight lines plus six, like an Italian sonnet, but the rhymes follow the English (Shakespearean) pattern: *abab cdcd efef gg*, in iambic pentameter, closed by a rhyming couplet. McKay chose the most traditional form of English poetry — the form of Shakespeare and Keats — to say something new and urgent.

**Animals and men.** The poem opens with hunted animals (*hogs*) and their hunters (*dogs*, *monsters*, *pack*), and closes with *men*. The speaker cannot choose whether to die, but he can choose how: dying "like men", fighting, turns victims back into human beings.

**A poem without names.** The poem never names a race, a city or a year. Written for one terrible summer, it could therefore be read later by many other people facing violence and oppression.

1. Count the syllables of line 1 and mark the stresses in CAPITALS. What metre is it?
2. Write out the rhyme scheme. Where is the couplet, and what does it add?
3. Find the words used for the attackers. What do they have in common?
4. Which line contains the poem's turn from despair to action?
5. Why might the absence of names make the poem stronger?

**APPROFONDIMENTO**

**Two texts of one sonnet.** When McKay reprinted the poem in *Harlem Shadows* (1922), he revised it. In the 1922 text the dash after the opening words of lines 1 and 5 becomes a comma, *accursed* becomes *accursèd* with a grave accent (to show that the word has three syllables), *Oh* becomes *O* in lines 5 and 9, line 10 changes the words after *let us*, and the dash before the last two words disappears. Most anthologies print the 1922 text; this book prints the first version, the one readers met in the summer of 1919. Compare the two: which changes are about sound, which about meaning?

**ESEMPIO SVOLTO**

**From a question to a PEE paragraph.** Question: *How does Fitzgerald present Gatsby's dream in T1 and T2?*

1. **Point** — make one clear claim: *Fitzgerald presents Gatsby's dream as something distant and out of reach, which the end of the novel reveals to belong to the past.*
2. **Evidence** — quote a few words from each text: in T1 the light is "minute and far away"; in T2 the dream is "already behind him".
3. **Explanation** — say how the language works: *In T1 the distance is physical, across the water; in T2 it becomes a distance in time. The symbol is the same, but its meaning changes: what looked like a future goal turns out to be a lost past.*

**Model sentence to link back:** *The green light, which opens and closes the novel, thus measures the whole distance between Gatsby's hope and Nick's final understanding.*

## 11.4 Language: Describing Data and Trends

In an INVALSI reading, a physics report, a history essay or a newspaper article, you often have to put a graph into words. English has a precise set of verbs, nouns, adverbs and prepositions for this, and a few traps that Italian speakers fall into. The examples here come from Figura 11.2 and from the history of this chapter.

### 11.4.1 Verbs and nouns of change

Most verbs of change have a noun of the same form, so you can say the same thing in two ways: *Unemployment **rose** sharply* or *There was a sharp **rise** in unemployment*. The second structure is more formal and very common in written reports. Tabella 11.4 lists the key words and Figura 11.3 shows the shapes they describe.

**Tabella 11.4** Verbs and nouns of change

| Movement | Verb | Noun | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| up | *rise (rose, risen), increase, go up, climb, grow* | *a rise, an increase, growth* | Unemployment rose from 3.2% to 24.9%. |
| up, fast | *soar, rocket, shoot up, jump* | *a jump, a surge* | In 1938 unemployment jumped to 19%. |
| down | *fall (fell, fallen), decrease, decline, drop, go down* | *a fall, a decrease, a decline, a drop* | The rate declined steadily after 1933. |
| down, fast | *plunge, plummet, collapse, crash* | *a plunge, a collapse, a crash* | Share prices plunged in October 1929. |
| highest / lowest point | *peak (at), reach a peak / a low, bottom out* | *a peak, a high, a low* | Unemployment peaked at 24.9% in 1933. |
| no change | *remain stable, stay the same, level off, stand at* | *a levelling-off, stability* | In 1929 the rate stood at 3.2%. |
| up and down | *fluctuate* | *fluctuations* | Wheat prices fluctuated in the 1920s. |
| back up after a fall | *recover, pick up* | *a recovery* | The economy recovered only slowly. |

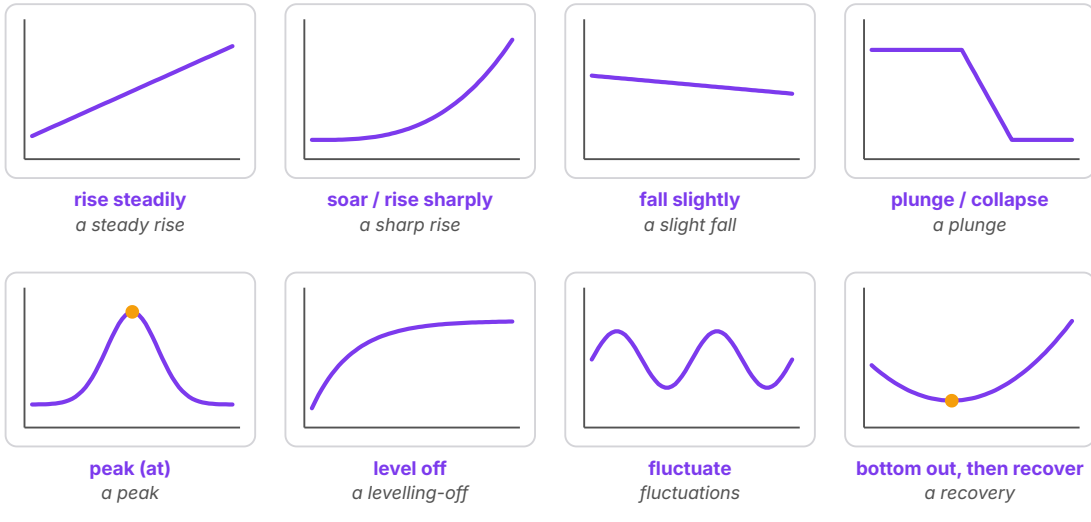



**Figura 11.3** Eight trend shapes and the words that describe them (schematic). The violet word is the verb, the grey phrase the matching noun phrase.

### 11.4.2 How much and how fast: adverbs and adjectives

The size and speed of a change are expressed with an adverb after the verb, or an adjective before the noun: *rose **sharply** → a **sharp** rise*. Big changes: *dramatically, sharply, steeply, significantly, substantially*. Regular changes: *steadily, gradually, consistently*. Small changes: *slightly, marginally*. Speed: *rapidly, quickly, slowly*. Do not overdo them: a data commentary with "dramatically" in every sentence sounds like an advertisement. *Dramatic* is for 3.2% → 24.9% in four years, not for a change of half a point.

### 11.4.3 Prepositions: by, to, from … to, at, of, in

Prepositions carry the numbers, and they are where most mistakes are made. Study Figura 11.4:

- **to** + the new value: *Unemployment rose **to** 24.9%.*
- **by** + the size of the change: *It rose **by** 21.7 percentage points.*
- **from … to** + both ends: *It fell **from** 19.0% **to** 9.9% between 1938 and 1941.*
- **at** after *stand, peak, remain*: *It peaked **at** 24.9%; in 1929 it stood **at** 3.2%.*
- **of** + number after a noun: *a rise **of** 4.7 points*; **in** + the thing that changes: *a rise **in** unemployment.*

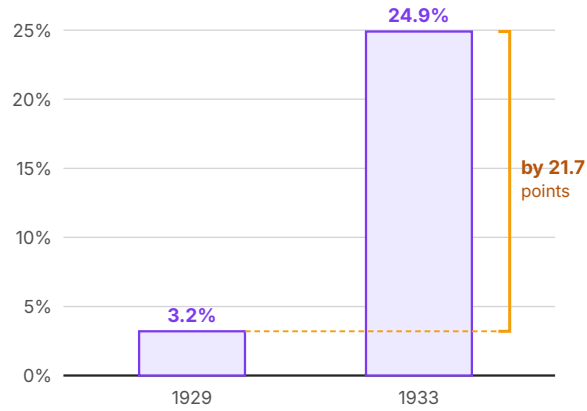



**Figura 11.4** Rose *to*, rose *by*, rose *from … to*: US unemployment in 1929 and 1933 (data as in Figura 11.2). The difference between the two rates is 21.7 percentage points; the 1933 rate is about 7.8 times the 1929 rate.

### 11.4.4 Numbers, percentages and approximation

English writes a decimal **point** (*3.2*, read "three point two") and separates thousands with a **comma** (*12,830,000*) — the opposite of Italian. British English writes *per cent* as two words, American English *percent*; both use the symbol %. *Percentage* is a noun used without a number: *the percentage of workers without a job*. When a rate changes, distinguish the change in **percentage points** (*punti percentuali*) (24.9 − 3.2 = 21.7 points) from the change in per cent (the rate became about 680% higher). Fractions are often clearer than numbers: *a quarter*, *one worker in four*, *a third*, *nearly half*, *two-thirds*.

Approximation is honest when the reader does not need every decimal: *roughly, approximately, about, around* (≈); *just under / just over* (a little less / more); *well under / well over* (much less / more); *almost, nearly* (not quite). So 24.9% is *almost a quarter*, and 9.9% is *just under 10%*. Finally, *data* was originally a Latin plural, and in scientific English *the data show* is still preferred; *the data shows* is now normal in general use. Choose one and be consistent.

### 11.4.5 Tense choice

Use the **present simple** for what the graph shows (*The graph **shows**…; Unemployment **is** highest in 1933*) and the **past simple** for what happened at a past date (*Unemployment **rose** to 24.9% in 1933*). The past perfect looks back from a past point (*By 1933 unemployment **had risen** to a quarter of the labour force*), and the present perfect is used only for a change that reaches the present (*Unemployment **has fallen** since last year*). In the description of a historical graph, the present perfect is almost always wrong.

**IN SINTESI**

**Describing a trend in one sentence:** subject (*the rate of unemployment*) + verb of change (*fell*) + adverb (*steadily*) + *from* X *to* Y / *by* Z + time (*between 1933 and 1937*). Or: *There was a* + adjective + noun (*a steady fall*) + *in* + subject + *of* Z + time.

**GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO**

**Descrivere dati in inglese.** Le preposizioni sono la trappola principale: *aumentare* ***del*** *10%* = *rise* ***by*** *10%* (la variazione); *aumentare* ***al*** *10%* = *rise* ***to*** *10%* (il valore raggiunto); *un aumento* ***della*** *disoccupazione* = *a rise* ***in*** *unemployment*; *un aumento* ***del*** *5%* = *a rise* ***of*** *5%* oppure *a 5% rise*.

**Confronto con l'italiano.** L'inglese usa il punto decimale e la virgola delle migliaia (*3.2*, *12,830*), l'italiano il contrario (*3,2*, *12.830*). Davanti a una percentuale l'inglese non mette l'articolo: *il 25% dei lavoratori* → *25% of workers*. *Punti percentuali* si dice *percentage points*. *La disoccupazione* (*unemployment*) è un nome non numerabile; *i disoccupati* si dice *the unemployed*, con il verbo al plurale.

**ERRORE FREQUENTE**

✗ *Unemployment increased* ***of*** *5%.* → ✓ *increased* ***by*** *5%* (o *an increase* ***of*** *5%*).

✗ ***The*** *25% of workers were unemployed.* → ✓ *25% of workers were unemployed.*

✗ *There was a sharp rise* ***of*** *unemployment.* → ✓ *a sharp rise* ***in*** *unemployment.*

✗ *The rate rose from 3,2% to 24,9%.* → ✓ *from 3.2% to 24.9%* (punto decimale).

✗ *Between 1929 and 1933 unemployment* ***has risen***. → ✓ *unemployment* ***rose***: il periodo è concluso.

**COLLEGAMENTI**

**Mathematics: absolute and relative change.** Between 1929 and 1933 the number of unemployed Americans rose from about 1.55 million to about 12.83 million: an absolute increase of about 11.3 million, and a relative increase of (12.83 − 1.55) ÷ 1.55 ≈ 7.3, that is about 730%. The *rate* rose from 3.2% to 24.9%, which is 21.7 percentage points, or about 680%. The two relative increases differ because the labour force itself changed. Whenever you read "unemployment rose by X%", ask: X per cent of what — of the number of people, or of the rate?

## 11.5 Skills: Interpreting a Graph

### 11.5.1 Vocabulary: money, crisis and dreams

The language of the 1920s and 1930s is still the language of economic news today. Tabella 11.5 collects the key words of this chapter.

**Tabella 11.5** Money, crisis and dreams: key words

| Word | Meaning | Example |
|---|---|---|
| *the stock market / stock exchange* | where shares are bought and sold | The stock market collapsed in October 1929. |
| *a share* (AmE also *a stock*) | one of the equal parts into which a company's value is divided | He bought shares in a radio company. |
| *a (stock)broker* | a person who buys and sells shares for others | Brokers lent money to small investors. |
| *speculation* | buying in the hope of selling quickly at a higher price | Speculation pushed prices far above real values. |
| *a boom* | a period of fast economic growth | the boom of the 1920s |
| *a crash* | a sudden, large fall in prices | the Wall Street Crash |
| *bankrupt* (adj.) | unable to pay one's debts | Thousands of banks went bankrupt. |
| *a run on a bank* | many customers withdrawing their money at the same time | Rumours caused a run on the bank. |
| *unemployment / the unemployed* | the state of having no job / people without a job | The unemployed queued for soup. |
| *debt* | money that is owed | Farmers were deep in debt. |
| *a mortgage* | a loan to buy a house or land, guaranteed by it | They could not pay the mortgage. |
| *prosperity* | the state of being rich and successful | Prosperity seemed permanent in 1928. |
| *drought* (/draʊt/) | a long period without rain | A drought hit the Plains in the 1930s. |
| *relief* | help given by the state to people in need | Millions depended on federal relief. |

### Collocations: the language of the economy

Economic English is full of fixed combinations; learning them as units makes your writing sound natural (Tabella 11.6). One of them, *boom and bust*, is a binomial (English 4, chapter 6): two words always in the same order.

**Tabella 11.6** Economic collocations

| Collocation | Meaning | Example |
|---|---|---|
| *go bankrupt* | fail as a business, unable to pay debts | His bank went bankrupt in 1931. |
| *make / lose a fortune* | become very rich / lose a lot of money | Gatsby made a fortune by mysterious means. |
| *run up debts / pay off a debt* | accumulate debts / repay them completely | Fitzgerald ran up debts in the 1930s. |
| *hit rock bottom* | reach the lowest possible level | Share prices hit rock bottom in 1932. |
| *lay off workers* | dismiss them because there is no work | Factories laid off thousands of workers. |
| *cut wages / prices* | reduce them | Employers cut wages again and again. |
| *take out a loan / a mortgage* | borrow money from a bank | They took out a loan to buy a tractor. |
| *boom and bust* | a cycle of rapid growth followed by collapse | The 1920s ended in boom and bust. |

## 11.5.2 Reading: Black Sunday

On Tuesday 4 March Giulia's class sat a mock INVALSI test in the school's computer room, three weeks before the real one. Prof.ssa Rossi had chosen the texts from different subjects, as the real test does, and one of them happened to be about the subject of this chapter. "Of course," Marta whispered at the end, "the one day I didn't revise the Dust Bowl." Read the text and do the INVALSI-style tasks in the exercises (Towards INVALSI).

**Tabella 11.7** Reading text — "Black Sunday" (original text written for this book)

**1** Sunday 14 April 1935 began as a fine spring day in the Oklahoma Panhandle, the narrow strip of land at the north-western corner of the state. After weeks of wind and dust, the sky was clear and the air was warm, and many families went to church or out for a drive. In the afternoon, people noticed a dark wall moving towards them from the north. It was a cloud of dust hundreds of metres high, pushed by a cold wind. When it arrived, day turned into night. Witnesses later said they could not see their own hands in front of their faces. The day became known as Black Sunday.

**2** An Associated Press reporter, Robert Geiger, was in Boise City, Oklahoma, that day. In the reports that followed, a phrase appeared for the first time: "dust bowl". It had been added by an editor who rewrote

Geiger's story in Kansas City, and it was soon used for the whole region that the storms had hit: the panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas and the nearby parts of Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico.

**3** The Dust Bowl was not simply a natural disaster. In the 1910s and 1920s, high wheat prices and new tractors had encouraged farmers to plough millions of acres of the southern Great Plains. For thousands of years the deep roots of the native grasses had held the soil in place, even in dry years. Without them, the land was protected only by the crops — and when a long drought began in the early 1930s, the crops failed, and nothing held the soil any more.

**4** The wind did the rest. Storms that people called "**black blizzards**" carried away the fertile topsoil and buried fences, machines and houses. Dust entered homes through every crack; families hung wet sheets over doors and windows, and many people, especially children and the old, suffered from lung diseases. In May 1934 one great storm carried dust from the Plains as far as Chicago and the cities of the East Coast.

**5** Black Sunday helped to change the government's policy. Less than two weeks later, on 27 April 1935, Congress created the Soil Conservation Service, led by the soil scientist Hugh Hammond Bennett. Its experts taught farmers to plough along the contours of the land, to grow strips of different crops, to leave stubble in the fields and to plant lines of trees as windbreaks. When the rains returned at the end of the decade, these methods helped to keep the soil in place.

**6** Not everyone waited for the rain. Many families who had lost their farms headed west to California, where they hoped to find work in the fruit and vegetable fields. Historians point out that many of these migrants did not come from the Dust Bowl itself, but from a wider area hit by drought, debt, falling prices and farm machines. In California they were often given insulting names, paid very little and treated as outsiders. Their story reached millions of readers in 1939, in John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.

**After reading.** Find the region of the text on Figura 11.5. Then find in the text one verb that describes a fast change and one phrase that explains a cause.

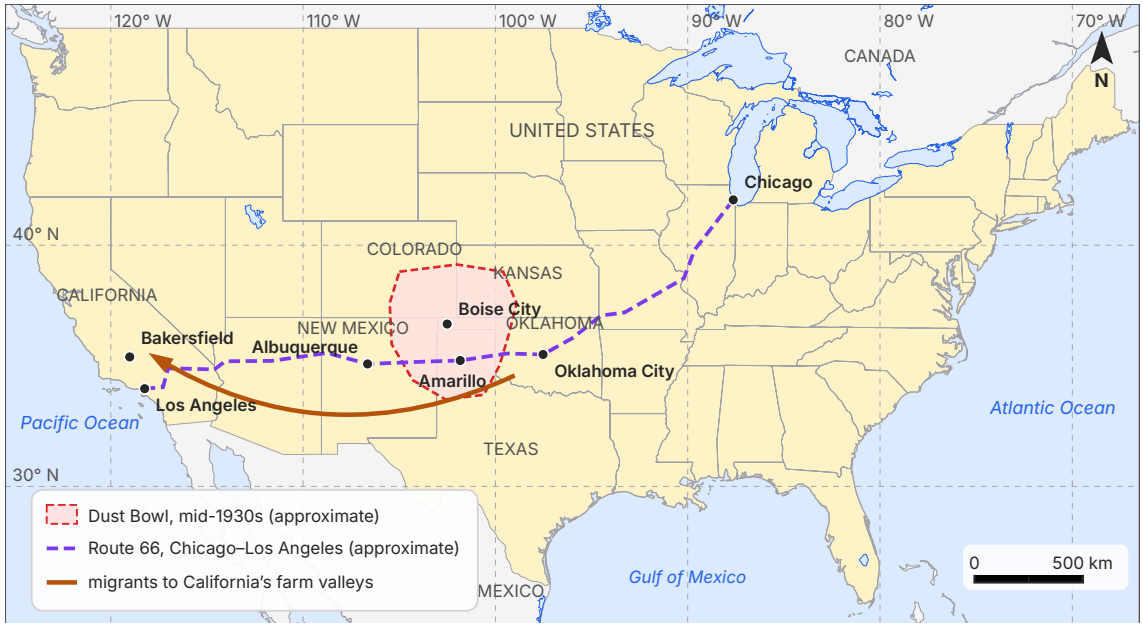



**Figura 11.5** The Dust Bowl of the mid-1930s (approximate area of the worst wind erosion, centred on the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles), the course of Route 66 from Chicago to Los Angeles (simplified) and the main direction of migration to California. Boise City, Oklahoma: where the term "dust bowl" was first reported, on 14 April 1935. Outlines: Natural Earth.

### 11.5.3 Speaking: interpreting a graph orally

In the colloquio, in a CLIL lesson or in a presentation you may have to talk about a graph without a script. Speak in the same order as a written commentary — what it shows, the big picture, the details, a careful interpretation — but in shorter sentences, with signposts that help the listener follow you.

**Tabella 11.8** Useful language — talking about a graph

| Function | Useful language |
|---|---|
| Introducing the graph | *This line graph shows… · On the horizontal axis we have…, on the vertical axis… · The figures are percentages / annual averages.* |
| The big picture | *Overall, … · The general trend is… · The most obvious feature is…* |
| Highlighting | *What stands out is… · It's worth noticing that… · The key year is…* |
| Comparing | *…compared with… · …almost three times as high as… · In contrast, …* |
| Interpreting carefully | *This could be explained by… · One possible reason is… · The graph doesn't tell us why, but…* |
| Checking with the listener | *As you can see here… · If you look at 1938, …* |

- **Task 1 (1 minute).** Describe Figura 11.2 to a partner who cannot see it. Your partner draws the line from your description; then compare.
- **Task 2 (2 minutes).** Using the table in the writing task below, explain to the class how unemployment changed during and after the Second World War. Give one possible explanation, clearly marked as an interpretation.

### 11.5.4 Writing: a data commentary

A **data commentary** (*commento di dati*) is a short text that describes and compares the information in a graph, chart or table. Scientists write one under every figure of a paper; examiners and INVALSI-style tasks ask for its skills. It is objective: it reports what the data show, selects the key features and compares them, and does not invent causes. Read the model, written on Figura 11.2.

**Tabella 11.9** Model text — a data commentary on US unemployment, 1929–1941 (187 words)

The line graph shows the unemployment rate in the United States, as a percentage of the civilian labour force, between 1929 and 1941 (annual averages). Overall, unemployment rose dramatically in the first years of the Depression and then fell slowly and unevenly, without returning to its 1929 level.

In 1929 the rate stood at just 3.2%. It then climbed steeply, to 8.7% in 1930 and 15.9% in 1931, and peaked at 24.9% in 1933, when almost one worker in four had no job. In other words, it rose by 21.7 percentage points in four years, and the 1933 rate was almost eight times as high as that of 1929.

From 1933 the rate declined steadily, falling to 14.3% in 1937. However, this recovery was interrupted in 1938, when unemployment jumped to 19.0%, an increase of 4.7 points in a single year. After that, the downward trend resumed, and by 1941 the rate had dropped to 9.9%.

In conclusion, the data show a sudden collapse followed by a long and incomplete recovery: twelve years after the Crash, unemployment was still about three times as high as in 1929.

**Structure.** 1 *Introduction*: what the graph shows, where, when, in what units — in your own words, not copied from the title. 2 *Overview*: the main trend in one or two sentences, without numbers. 3–4 *Key features*: the important values, grouped by period, with comparisons. 5 *Conclusion* (optional): one sentence that sums up — not new data, not an opinion.

**Checklist.** ✓ introduction paraphrased ✓ an overview ✓ only the key figures, each with its unit ✓ *to / by / from … to / at* used correctly ✓ past simple for past data ✓ varied verbs and nouns of change ✓ no invented causes ✓ 180–220 words.

**Tabella 11.10** Writing task data — unemployment in the United States, 1941–1950 (% of the civilian labour force, annual averages; from 1947 the series counts persons aged 16 and over, before 1947 aged 14 and over). Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States* (1975), series D 86.

| Year | 1941 | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 1946 | 1947 | 1948 | 1949 | 1950 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rate (%) | 9.9 | 4.7 | 1.9 | 1.2 | 1.9 | 3.9 | 3.9 | 3.8 | 5.9 | 5.3 |

**Task.** Write a data commentary of 180–220 words on the table above. Follow the structure of the model, and mention the change in the age group counted from 1947.

LEARNING TO LEARN

**INVALSI day: time, flags and guesses.** The English test (grado 13) is taken on a computer, in March, and has two parts, reading and listening; taking it is a requirement for admission to the exam, while the level you reach (*non ancora B1*, B1 or B2) is reported but does not decide admission. Check the current year's rules on the official INVALSI and MIM pages. Three habits help on the day:

- **Read the questions before the text**, then skim the text for its structure and scan for the details you need (chapter 2).
- **Keep an eye on the clock.** Divide the time by the number of texts; if a question blocks you, mark it (many test screens let you flag a question and return to it before you close the section — read the instructions on screen) and move on.
- **Never leave a blank.** An empty answer cannot score. Eliminate the options that are clearly wrong and choose among the rest; for short answers, copy the words exactly from the text and respect the word limit.

The same method works for the Italian INVALSI and for a Latin version against the clock: questions first, structure second, details last.

## 11.6 Connections: the Italian Myth of America

### 11.6.1 Pavese, Vittorini and the America of the translators

In the 1930s, while Fascism closed Italy to the outside world, a group of young Italian writers discovered American literature and made it a myth. Cesare Pavese (1908–1950), from the Langhe in Piedmont, wrote his university thesis in Turin on Walt Whitman (1930) and translated Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, John Dos Passos and, in 1932, Melville's *Moby-Dick* (chapter 5). Elio Vittorini translated Steinbeck and Faulkner and edited the anthology *Americana* for Bompiani; the Fascist censors blocked it, and it came out only in 1942, without Vittorini's introductory notes and with a preface by Emilio Cecchi in their place. For these writers America — its cities, its open roads, its plain spoken language — stood for freedom, energy and modernity, everything the regime seemed to deny. After the war Pavese himself would describe the myth with more detachment.

His last novel, *La luna e i falò* (1950), turns the myth around. Its narrator, called "l'Americano" in his village, is a foundling who emigrated to the United States, worked his way across the country to California, and has come back rich to the hills where he grew up. In chapter XXVI his friend Nuto asks him why he left. He answers:

> *Gli dissi che non tanto era stata l'America quanto la rabbia di non essere nessuno, la smania, piú che di andare, di tornare un bel giorno dopo che tutti mi avessero dato per morto di fame.*

"I told him that it hadn't been America so much as the rage at being nobody, the longing, more than to leave, to come back one fine day after everybody had given me up for dead of hunger." (Translation by the editors.)

Gatsby and Pavese's narrator are both men who were nobody, left, became rich, and return to the place where they wanted to be recognised. But Gatsby wants to repeat the past, and dies of it; Pavese's narrator discovers that the past cannot be found again, because the people and the world he left have changed. Both novels turn the American Dream into a dream of return — and show that it cannot come true.

### 11.6.2 Sacco and Vanzetti in Italian memory

For Italians the most famous American trial of the 1920s was not just a news story: Sacco came from Torremaggiore, in Apulia, and Vanzetti from Villafalletto, in Piedmont, and they were two of the millions who had emigrated (English 2, Unit 9). Their case became a symbol of the prejudice faced by Italian immigrants. In 1971 Giuliano Montaldo's film *Sacco e Vanzetti* brought it to a new generation, with music by Ennio Morricone that included the ballad "Here's to You", sung by Joan Baez.

### 11.6.3 Screen, music and art

**Jazz**, born among African American musicians in New Orleans, moved north with the Great Migration. In Chicago, between 1925 and 1928, the trumpeter Louis Armstrong (1901–1971) recorded with his Hot Five the solos that made the soloist the centre of jazz. In Harlem, Duke Ellington (1899–1974) and his orchestra were the house band of the Cotton Club from December 1927 to June 1931 — a club where Black artists performed for a white-only audience, a contradiction that sums up the age.

**Edward Hopper** (1882–1967) painted the loneliness of the American city. In *Nighthawks* (1942), now in the Art Institute of Chicago, we look through the large glass window of a diner at night: three customers and a man behind the counter, under a hard electric light, on an empty street corner. Nobody speaks; nobody looks at anybody else.

**On screen**, *The Great Gatsby* was filmed for the first time in 1926, only a year after publication (the silent film is lost; a short trailer survives), then in 1949, in 1974 with Robert Redford and a screenplay by Francis Ford Coppola, and in 2013 by Baz Luhrmann, with Leonardo DiCaprio and a soundtrack of contemporary music in place of jazz.

**COLLEGAMENTI**

**Earth science: how wind erodes soil.** Soil is held together by plant roots, by moisture and by organic matter. When the grass of the southern Plains was ploughed and a long drought dried the bare ground, the process called **wind erosion** (*erosione eolica*) could move the soil in three ways: the smallest particles of silt and clay rose in *suspension* and travelled hundreds of kilometres, forming the black clouds; sand grains moved in short jumps close to the ground (*saltation*), striking and loosening other particles; and larger grains rolled along the surface (*surface creep*). Wind erosion increases very quickly with wind speed once a threshold is passed, so a few violent storms removed more soil than years of ordinary wind. The methods of the Soil Conservation Service (1935) attack each factor: **shelterbelts** (*frangivento alberati*) of trees reduce wind speed near the ground, stubble and cover crops keep roots and moisture in the soil, and contour ploughing and strip cropping stop erosion from spreading across a field. The same problem threatens dry farmland today, in the Sahel, in Central Asia and in parts of southern Europe.

**DA RICORDARE**

**For the exam.** Starting point: a description of Hopper's *Nighthawks* (1942) — four figures in a lit diner, seen through glass, on an empty street at night. Three links it opens: **English** — loneliness in the crowd: Gatsby, alone among hundreds of guests, and Nick "alone again" in T1; **Italian** — Pavese's America of solitary people in *La luna e i falò*, and the Italian myth of America in the 1930s; **another subject** — history (the New Deal and the electrification of rural America) or physics (artificial light: the electric lamp and the spectrum of its light).

**SINTESI**

- After 1918 the USA was the richest nation in the world; the 1920s brought cars, radio, advertising and buying on **credit**, including shares bought on margin.
- **Prohibition** (1920–1933) failed to stop drinking and enriched organised crime; the quota laws of **1921 and 1924** drastically reduced immigration, including from Italy.
- The **Great Migration** brought African Americans from the South to northern cities; Harlem became the centre of the **Harlem Renaissance**.
- **Sacco and Vanzetti**, two Italian anarchists, were executed on 23 August 1927 after a trial widely judged unfair.
- The **Wall Street Crash** (24 and 29 October 1929) set off the **Great Depression**: US unemployment rose from 3.2% (1929) to 24.9% (1933).
- **Roosevelt** (inaugurated 4 March 1933) launched the **New Deal**: public works, bank reform, the TVA, Social Security; unemployment fell slowly. Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941) brought the USA into the war.
- The **Jazz Age** (a phrase Fitzgerald made famous) and the **Lost Generation** (Stein's, reported by Hemingway) name the decade and its writers; the **American Dream** was popularised by J. T. Adams (1931).
- *The Great Gatsby* (1925): narrated by Nick Carraway; Gatsby's dream of Daisy, the green light; a commercial disappointment that became a classic. T1: the first sight of Gatsby; T2: "boats against the current".
- Hemingway (*A Farewell to Arms*, the iceberg theory) and Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*, the Dust Bowl migrants) are not PD: summarised. T3: McKay's "If We Must Die" (1919), an English sonnet printed as 8 + 6.
- Describing data: verbs and nouns of change, adverbs and adjectives, *to / by / from … to / at*, percentage points vs per cent, approximation, past simple for past data.
- The Dust Bowl: ploughing of the grasslands plus drought, then wind erosion; the Soil Conservation Service (1935) and its methods.
- Pavese and Vittorini made America an Italian myth in the 1930s; *La luna e i falò* (1950) turns it into a story of return.

## ESERCIZI

### History and Literature

1. ● Which law began Prohibition in the United States?
   - **A.** the Nineteenth Amendment
   - **B.** the Immigration Act of 1924
   - **C.** the Eighteenth Amendment
   - **D.** the Social Security Act

2. ● Who is the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*?
   - **A.** Nick Carraway
   - **B.** Jay Gatsby
   - **C.** Daisy Buchanan
   - **D.** an omniscient narrator

3. ●● The phrase “Lost Generation” is…
   - **A.** the title of a novel by Fitzgerald
   - **B.** a phrase used by the historian J. T. Adams
   - **C.** Hemingway’s name for the Dust Bowl migrants
   - **D.** Gertrude Stein’s phrase, made famous by Hemingway

4. ● True or false? Correct the false statements. a The Great Gatsby sold very well in 1925. b Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in 1927. c The Wall Street Crash happened in October 1929. d Roosevelt was elected before the Crash. e Hemingway was wounded on the Italian front. f Claude McKay was born in Harlem.

5. ●● Explain each term in one or two sentences and give an example from this chapter: a Jazz Age · b American Dream · c Harlem Renaissance · d New Deal.

6. ●●● Short answer (10–12 lines). How did the United States change between the Armistice of 1918 and Pearl Harbor? Refer to the economy, to society and to the role of the federal government.

### Text Analysis

7. ● In T1, what does Nick finally see when he looks out to sea?
   - **A.** Gatsby’s boat
   - **B.** a single green light
   - **C.** the lights of New York
   - **D.** Daisy on her dock

8. ● T1. Answer briefly. a Where is Gatsby standing? b Why does Nick decide not to call to him? c What does Gatsby do with his arms? d What happens when Nick looks again?

9. ●● T2. Find: a a sentence that places Gatsby's dream in the past; b a sentence about the future; c an image of effort and failure. Then explain how the three are connected.

10. ●● T3. Write out the rhyme scheme of "If We Must Die" and say what kind of sonnet it is. Why might the magazine's layout (8 + 6 lines) be misleading?

11. ●● T1 and T2. The green light appears at the beginning and at the end of the novel. Compare its meaning in the two extracts in about 80 words.

12. ●●● Compare Gatsby and the narrator of Pavese's *La luna e i falò* (Connections) in a PEE paragraph of 100–120 words: what does each man want when he returns?

### Language

13. ● Between 1933 and 1937 unemployment fell ___ 24.9% ___ 14.3%.

    **A.** by ... to
    **B.** from ... at
    **C.** of ... to
    **D.** from ... to

14. ●● In 1929 the unemployment rate ___ 3.2%.

    **A.** stood at
    **B.** stood to
    **C.** was standing by
    **D.** has stood at

15. ● Complete with *to, by, from, at, of* or *in*. a Unemployment peaked ___ 24.9% in 1933. b There was a sharp rise ___ unemployment after the Crash. c In 1938 the rate jumped ___ 4.7 points. d The Dow Jones index fell ___ 381 ___ 41. e Unemployment dropped ___ 9.9% in 1941. f The increase was ___ about 680%.

16. ●● Rewrite each sentence using the noun form, beginning with *There was*. a Share prices plunged in October 1929. b Unemployment rose steadily between 1929 and 1933. c The rate fell slightly in 1939. d Wheat prices fluctuated sharply in the 1920s.

17. ●● Error correction. Find and correct the mistakes (some sentences have two). a ✗ The unemployment increased of 5% in 1930. b ✗ The 25% of the workers had no job. c ✗ Since 1929 to 1933 unemployment has risen. d ✗ The rate went up from 3,2% to 8,7%. e ✗ There was a dramatic increase of the number of unemployed.

18. ●● Approximation. Rewrite each figure with a word or phrase from the chapter: a 24.9% b 9.9% c 52% d 33% e 3.09 times f 12.83 million.

19. ●●● Translate into English. a Nel 1933 la disoccupazione raggiunse il 24,9%, cioè quasi un lavoratore su quattro. b Tra il 1937 e il 1938 il tasso aumentò di 4,7 punti percentuali. c I dati mostrano che la ripresa fu lenta e incompleta.

### Vocabulary

20. ● Complete with a word from the vocabulary table: *shares, bankrupt, drought, mortgage, boom, relief*. a The ___ of the 1920s ended in 1929. b Many families could no longer pay the ___ on their farm. c Thousands of banks went ___. d Investors bought ___ with borrowed money. e A long ___ dried the Plains. f The New Deal gave ___ to the unemployed.

21. ●● Match the halves of the collocations and use four of them in sentences about this chapter: a go · b hit · c lay off · d run up · e make · f take out — 1 a fortune · 2 rock bottom · 3 bankrupt · 4 debts · 5 a loan · 6 workers.

22. ●● Word formation. Complete the table with the missing noun, verb or adjective: a prosper → ___ (noun) → ___ (adjective) · b employ → ___ (the opposite noun) · c speculate → ___ (noun) · d recover → ___ (noun) · e fluctuate → ___ (noun) · f decline → ___ (noun, same form).

### Writing and Speaking

23. ●● Writing. Do the writing task in the Skills section: a data commentary on the unemployment table for 1941–1950 (180–220 words).

24. ●● Speaking (2 minutes). Describe Figura 11.2 orally to the class, using at least six expressions from the "Useful language" table and one careful interpretation.

### Towards INVALSI

The following tasks are on the reading text "Black Sunday".

25. ● (B1) On the morning of 14 April 1935 the weather in the Oklahoma Panhandle was…

    **A.** windy and dusty
    **B.** cold and rainy
    **C.** clear and warm
    **D.** dark and stormy

26. ●● (B2) According to paragraph 3, the main human cause of the Dust Bowl was…

    **A.** the end of the native grasses after ploughing
    **B.** the use of chemical fertilisers
    **C.** the building of new roads
    **D.** the cutting of forests on the Plains

27. ●● (B1/B2) Short answers (maximum 4 words). a Who wrote the first reports from Boise City? b In which city was his story rewritten? c What did people call the dust storms? d What did families hang over doors and windows? e When did Congress create the Soil Conservation Service? f Where did many families go to look for work?

28. ●● (B2) True, false or not given? a The Black Sunday storm came from the south. b The phrase “dust bowl” was invented by Geiger himself. c The 1934 storm reached cities on the East Coast. d Bennett had studied at a university in Oklahoma. e All the migrants to California came from the Dust Bowl. f Steinbeck’s novel was published in 1939.

### Towards the Exam

29. ●●● Starting point: Roosevelt’s sentence “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself” (4 March 1933). Talk for 3 minutes and link it to two other subjects.

30. ●●● Starting point: Figura 11.2, the graph of US unemployment 1929–1941. Describe it briefly, then talk for 3 minutes and link it to two other subjects.

## PER APPROFONDIRE

- [GRA] R. Gray, *A History of American Literature*: the chapters on the 1920s, on Fitzgerald and Hemingway and on the Harlem Renaissance.
- [NAA] *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*: the volume on American literature between the wars, with McKay and Fitzgerald.
- [HOB] E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*: the chapter on the world economic crisis after 1929.
- [SWA] M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*: the entries on numbers, *per cent / percentage* and *data*.
- [HEW] M. Hewings, *Advanced Grammar in Use*: the units on prepositions after verbs and nouns.

# Glossario del capitolo

**American Dream**
*sogno americano* — the belief that anyone in America can rise through their own effort to wealth and happiness; popularised by J. T. Adams (1931).

**Black blizzard**
*tempesta di polvere* — a huge dust storm of the 1930s on the Great Plains, which darkened the sky.

**Bootlegger**
*contrabbandiere di alcolici* — a person who made, transported or sold alcohol illegally during Prohibition.

**Buying on margin**
*acquisto a margine* — buying shares with a small payment and money borrowed from a broker.

**Data commentary**
*commento di dati* — a short objective text that describes and compares the key information in a graph or table.

**Dust Bowl**
*Dust Bowl* — the region of the southern Great Plains hit by drought and dust storms in the 1930s, and the disaster itself.

**Great Depression**
*Grande depressione* — the world economic crisis that followed the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and lasted through the 1930s.

**Great Migration (African American)**
*Grande migrazione* — the movement of African Americans from the rural South to northern cities from about 1910.

**Harlem Renaissance**
*Rinascimento di Harlem* — the flowering of African American literature, music and art in Harlem in the 1920s.

**Iceberg theory**
*teoria dell'iceberg* — Hemingway's idea that a writer can omit most of what he knows, and the reader will still feel it.

**Jazz Age**
*età del jazz* — the American 1920s, the decade of jazz, new freedoms and easy money; a phrase made famous by Fitzgerald.

**Lost Generation**
*generazione perduta* — the American writers who came of age in the First World War and lived in Europe in the 1920s.

**New Deal**
*New Deal* — Roosevelt's programmes of relief, reform and public works from 1933.

**Percentage point**
*punto percentuale* — the unit of the difference between two percentages (3% → 5% = 2 points).

**Prohibition**
*proibizionismo* — the ban on making and selling alcoholic drinks in the USA, 1920–1933.

**Quota**
*quota* — a fixed maximum number, e.g. of immigrants of each nationality allowed into the USA each year.

**Shelterbelt**
*frangivento alberato* — a line of trees planted to protect fields from the wind.

**Wind erosion**
*erosione eolica* — the removal of soil by the wind, by suspension, saltation and surface creep.

# Soluzioni

**1.** C (17 January 1920; repealed by the Twenty-first Amendment, 5 December 1933). A gave women the vote.

**2.** A. Nick is a first-person narrator and a character, not the hero.

**3.** D (Hemingway's epigraph to *The Sun Also Rises*, 1926).

**4.** a F — it sold fewer than 20,000 copies by October 1925 and was a commercial disappointment. b T (23 August 1927). c T (24 and 29 October). d F — he was elected in November 1932 and inaugurated on 4 March 1933. e T (Fossalta di Piave, 8 July 1918). f F — he was born in Jamaica and came to the USA in 1912.

**5.** a The American 1920s, the decade of jazz, new freedoms and easy money; the phrase was made famous by Fitzgerald's *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922). b The belief that in America anyone can rise through their own effort; popularised by J. T. Adams (1931); Gatsby's self-invention is the example. c The flowering of African American literature, music and art in Harlem in the 1920s; McKay's "If We Must Die", Locke's *The New Negro*. d Roosevelt's programmes from 1933: public works (CCC, WPA), bank reform, the TVA, the Social Security Act (1935).

**6.** *Traccia.* 1918: the richest nation, creditor of Europe. 1920s: mass consumption (cars, radio), credit and speculation; Prohibition and the quota laws of 1921 and 1924 express fear of change and of foreigners; the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance change northern cities. 1929: the Crash sets off the Depression (unemployment from 3.2% to 24.9% in 1933), with bank failures, homelessness and the Dust Bowl. From 1933 the New Deal makes the federal government responsible for relief, work and welfare. 1941: Pearl Harbor brings the country into the war and back to full employment.

**7.** B.

**8.** a On the lawn of his mansion, about fifty feet from Nick, with his hands in his pockets. b Gatsby seems to want to be alone. c He stretches them out towards the dark water. d Gatsby has vanished and Nick is alone.

**9.** a The third sentence of the first paragraph (Gatsby "did not know" that his dream was "already behind him"). b The second sentence of the second paragraph, with *to-morrow* and the verbs *run* and *stretch out*. c The last sentence: the boats that row forward against the current. The future we work for (b) is really a past we cannot recover (a): the effort continues, but the current of time carries us back (c).

**10.** *abab cdcd efef gg*: an English (Shakespearean) sonnet, with three quatrains and a final couplet. The layout in an octave and a sestet looks like an Italian sonnet, but the rhymes do not divide the poem that way; the real closing movement is the couplet (ll. 13–14).

**11.** *Traccia.* In T1 the light is a real object, tiny and far away, seen without explanation; Gatsby's gesture towards it shows longing for something out of reach. In T2 Nick knows what it meant — Daisy, and the future Gatsby hoped for — and turns it into a symbol of every human hope: "the orgastic future" that always recedes. The light has become a symbol of a dream that was "already behind him".

**12.** *Traccia.* P: both men return to the place of their youth to be recognised as somebody. E: Gatsby wants to repeat 1917 and win back Daisy; Pavese's narrator says it was not America he wanted, but to come back after everyone had thought him dead of hunger. E: Gatsby believes the past can be repeated and dies trying; Pavese's narrator finds that the world of his youth has changed and cannot be recovered. Both stories show the American Dream as a dream of return that cannot come true.

**13.** D.

**14.** A.

**15.** a at b in c by d from … to e to f of.

**16.** a There was a plunge in share prices in October 1929. b There was a steady rise in unemployment between 1929 and 1933. c There was a slight fall in the rate in 1939. d There were sharp fluctuations in wheat prices in the 1920s.

**17.** a Unemployment increased by 5% in 1930 (no article; *by*). b 25% of (the) workers had no job. c From 1929 to 1933 (or Between 1929 and 1933) unemployment rose. d from 3.2% to 8.7%. e a dramatic increase in the number of unemployed (people).

**18.** a almost (nearly) a quarter / one in four b just under 10% c just over half d (roughly) a third e about three times f nearly 13 million / just under 13 million. (Accept equivalents.)

**19.** a In 1933 unemployment reached 24.9%, that is, almost one worker in four. b Between 1937 and 1938 the rate increased (rose) by 4.7 percentage points. c The data show (shows) that the recovery was slow and incomplete.

**20.** a boom b mortgage c bankrupt d shares e drought f relief.

**21.** a 3 go bankrupt · b 2 hit rock bottom · c 6 lay off workers · d 4 run up debts · e 1 make a fortune · f 5 take out a loan. Sentences: open (e.g. *Gatsby made a fortune through bootlegging.*).

**22.** a prosperity, prosperous b unemployment c speculation d recovery e fluctuation f a decline.

**23.** *Model (181 words).* The table shows the unemployment rate in the United States, as a percentage of the civilian labour force, from 1941 to 1950. Overall, unemployment fell to very low levels during the Second World War and then rose moderately in the post-war years. In 1941 the rate stood at 9.9%. It then fell sharply, to 4.7% in 1942 and 1.9% in 1943, and reached a low of just 1.2% in 1944, almost full employment. In 1945 it was still under 2%. After the war, the rate roughly doubled, to 3.9% in 1946, and remained stable at just under 4% until 1948. In 1949 it rose to 5.9%, the highest figure since 1941, before falling slightly to 5.3% in 1950. It should be noted that from 1947 the data count people aged 16 and over instead of 14 and over, so the figures before and after that year are not perfectly comparable. In conclusion, the war years brought unemployment to its lowest level of the decade, while the late 1940s show a modest rise that remained far below the levels of the Depression.

**24.** *Model.* "This line graph shows the unemployment rate in the US from 1929 to 1941 — percentages on the vertical axis, years on the horizontal one. Overall, it's a story of a sudden rise and a slow fall. What stands out is 1933: unemployment peaks at almost 25%, nearly eight times the 1929 figure of 3.2%. From then on it declines steadily to about 14% in 1937 — but if you look at 1938, there's a jump back to 19%. After that the downward trend continues, to just under 10% in 1941. The graph doesn't tell us why, but one possible reason for the fall after 1933 is the New Deal's public works…"

**25.** C (paragraph 1: "the sky was clear and the air was warm").

**26.** A (paragraph 3).

**27.** a Robert Geiger b Kansas City c black blizzards d wet sheets e 27 April 1935 f (to) California.

**28.** a F (from the north) b F (it was added by an editor) c T d NG e F (many came from a wider area) f T.

**29.** *Traccia.* Context: Roosevelt's first inaugural address, 4 March 1933, at the lowest point of the Depression (24.9% unemployment, banks closing); fear as the enemy that "paralyzes" action; the New Deal that followed. Links: **English** — Steinbeck's Joads, whom fear and poverty push along Route 66, or the end of the Jazz Age in Fitzgerald; **history** — the 1929 crisis in Europe and the rise of dictatorships (chapter 12), or the Italian state's response (IRI, 1933); **economics / mathematics** — how confidence affects banks: a run on a bank as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

**30.** *Traccia.* Describe: rise from 3.2% (1929) to a peak of 24.9% (1933), steady fall to 14.3% (1937), jump to 19.0% (1938), 9.9% in 1941 — still about three times the 1929 level. Links: **history** — the

Crash, the New Deal, the recession of 1937–38 and the war economy; **mathematics** — percentage points and relative change, reading a line graph; **earth science** — the Dust Bowl, where drought added an environmental crisis to the economic one; **English literature** — *The Grapes of Wrath*, or the end of Gatsby's world of easy money.