PRESIDENT HOOVER’S RESPONSE TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION

President Herbert Hoover had to deal with the worst economic event in American history. He was greatly concerned about the millions of unemployed Americans, but felt that the government should not be directly involved in business. Instead, he asked business leaders to keep workers employed and he called upon private charities to develop soup kitchens to feed the hungry. Hoover did not believe the Great Depression would last. In fact, he predicted it would end in sixty days. He was wrong.

As conditions worsened, Hoover continued to take a laissez-faire approach - believing that the federal government should play a minimal role in dealing with the crisis. He did set up some public works programs. These programs involved the government hiring workers to build schools, construct dams and pave highways. He mostly believed, however, that relief efforts should be handled at the local and state level – NOT by the federal government.

1. What views did Hoover have about government’s role in helping Americans during the Great Depression?

In spite of Hoover’s efforts, the Depression worsened. Unemployment increased from 3 million in 1929 to 9 million in 1931, and to 13 million in 1932. That meant that one out of four Americans (25%) was unemployed, and many who had jobs worked only part of the day or two or three days a week. As the crisis worsened, Hoover continued to insist that things were not that bad, that “the worst was behind us.” Many Americans were angered by this and blamed Hoover for doing too little.

Americans used ironic humor to show their dislike for Hoover. They gave the name Hoovervilles to the shacks where the homeless lived. See if you can determine what some of these other “Hooverisms” were...

“Hoover blanket” ____________________________

“Hoover flag” ________________________________

“Hoover hog” ________________________________

“Hoover leather” ____________________________
We’d Like to Thank You, Herbert Hoover
From the 1977 Broadway musical “Annie,” based on a comic strip from the Great Depression.

Today we’re living in a shanty
Today we’re scrounging for a meal
Today I’m stealing coal for fires
Who knew I could steal?

I used to winter in the tropics
I spent my summers at the shore
I used to throw away the paper—

We don’t anymore

We’d like to thank you: Herbert Hoover
For really showing us the way
We’d like to thank you: Herbert Hoover
You made us what we are today

Prosperity was ’round the corner
The cozy cottage built for two
   In this blue heaven
   That you gave us
   Yes!
We're turning blue!

They offered us Al Smith and Hoover
We paid attention and we chose
Not only did we pay attention
We paid through the nose.

In ev’ry pot he said "a chicken"
But Herbert Hoover he forgot
Not only don’t we have the chicken
We ain’t got the pot!
Hey Herbie
You left behind a grateful nation
So, Herb, our hats are off to you

We’re up to here with admiration
Come down and have a little stew
Come down and share
some Christmas dinner
Be sure to bring the missus too
We got no turkey for our stuffing

We’d like to thank you, Herbert Hoover
For really showing us the way
You dirty rat, you Bureaucrat, you
Made us what we are today
Come and get it, Herb!

2. Summarize the message this song is sending about Herbert Hoover.

3. Quote at least two specific lines in the song that support this message. Explain each line in your own words.