**The Ups and Downs of Unemployment**

**Subject area/course**: Social Sciences, Macroeconomics

**Grade level/band:** 11–12

**STUDENT PROMPT SECTION**

1. **Task context**:

Two major challenges in a market economy are inflation and unemployment. They are similar in that they are economic factors that have major impacts on people’s lives. This is especially true of unemployment. One of the most devastating experiences a person can have is to be out of work for a prolonged period. Feelings of hopelessness and self-doubt brought on by a depressed standard of living can overwhelm individuals. For these reasons, unemployment statistics are among the most closely watched numbers in the country.

For this task, imagine that *The Wall Street Journal* is holding a competition for the best undergraduate paper in economics. The theme of this year’s competition is unemployment. Part of your task is to research the unemployment rate in the United States over the last twenty years and to display that information graphically. *The Wall Street Journal* isn’t just interested in the facts, though. They want you to explain the unemployment trends by referring to different types of unemployment. Include an analysis of government automatic stabilizers that help those who are impacted most by unemployment.

Even though this topic may seem far removed from your current situation as a student, a study by Rutgers University, *Chasing the American Dream: Recent College Graduates and the Great Recession*, shows that only half of America's recent college graduates were employed full time at the time they were surveyed (Stone, Van Horn, and Zukin 2). Chances are that unemployment has already affected your life. The more you understand the causes and effects of unemployment, the better prepared you’ll be for the future.

1. **The task**:

Your task is to respond to *The Wall Street Journal’s* call for papers about unemployment. You will need to collect data about the U.S. unemployment rate over the last twenty years and create a graphic representation of trends in unemployment. After researching topics related to unemployment in macroeconomic textbooks and other sources, write a 3- to 4-page paper that examines the causes of and explains the effects of unemployment. What conclusions or implications can you draw about U.S. unemployment trends over the last two decades? Be sure to make your paper interesting for someone who hasn’t studied macroeconomics.

Your paper should:

* Clearly display information about unemployment trends over the last twenty years.
* Use discipline-specific vocabulary.
* Employ standard English grammar and usage.
* Cite your sources correctly in the text of your paper and create a Works Cited page using MLA format or another style that your instructor selects.

1. **Materials/resources:**

* Macroeconomics textbook
* Access to the Internet for research (The Bureau of Labor Statistics on the U.S. Department of Labor web site may provide valuable information.)
* Graphing software
* Stone, Charley, et al. “Chasing the American Dream: Recent College Graduates and the Great Recession.” John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development. May 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.

1. **Time requirements**:

Depending on your class schedule, you will have about two weeks to complete this task. Your teacher will give you instructions about how much time you should spend collecting and analyzing data, and how long you will have to write your paper.