

Exploring Rural Kentucky Through Documentary Art: Supplementary Resource Set 1 | Dennis Thrasher - Documentary Artist - For the Student -

BACKGROUND READING

Dennis Thrasher loves combining historic research with art. His oil paintings reflect both the thoroughness of his research and the joy he takes in telling a visual story.

Inspired and mentored by his father, Fred Thrasher, Dennis has been painting all his life. And like his father, Dennis enjoys painting scenes that capture everyday rural Kentucky life, past and present.

He learned more from his father than how to apply paint to canvas, though. He also learned that it takes persistence and determination to follow your life's dreams.



Dennis Thrasher discusses his two paintings used in the documentary Creelsboro and the Cumberland: A Living History.

Dennis composes his paintings from the background to the foreground, building up layers of paint as the scenes emerge. He likes to paint from an eye-level perspective, to give his viewers the impression that they could walk right into the painting. His style is realistic with a fresh vibrancy that makes it seem that, at any moment, the people in his paintings will begin to talk and go about their daily lives.

His work is always carefully balanced without seeming contrived. He uses color and perspective techniques to give his paintings a sense of depth. You can always tell what season it is, what the

weather is like, what time of day it is. You can almost hear the sounds of the river and the whistle of the steamboat.

Dennis Thrasher realizes that some people have a natural “eye” for art. But he also believes that anyone can learn to paint if they approach it with confidence and a “can do” attitude.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Would you consider the purpose of Dennis’ art to be expressive, narrative, ceremonial, or functional?
2. How would you describe Dennis’ style?
3. What kinds of art have you created and for what purposes? Which experiences did you find satisfying? What was satisfying about those experiences?
4. Have you ever told a story through art? What was the story? How did you tell it?
5. If you were to tell the story of a special place in your community, where is it? What happens there? What would you include?
6. Have you had a mentor in your life who inspired you? Who was it and how did that person inspire you?
7. Have you ever tried to do something that required persistence and determination to succeed? What was it? How did you manage to succeed?