

# Exploring Rural Kentucky Through Documentary Art: Unit 1 - *Creelsboro Landing, 1890s* - Documentary Art Interactive - For the Teacher -

## OVERVIEW

Documentary art can be used to portray a bygone way of life. The painting, *Creelsboro Landing, 1890s* by Dennis Thrasher, tells the story of a bustling Kentucky river town's Cumberland River landing.

Access the Powerpoint [\*Creelsboro Landing, 1890s - Images for Projection\*](#), and lead your students in analyzing the artwork and interpreting the narrative through this painting and its' four vignettes. Then consider how your students can share the story of their own communities through art.

## INTERACTIVE INTRODUCTION

The documentary art painting *Creelsboro Landing, 1890s* by Dennis Thrasher, provides a window into the economy of one rural community in southcentral Kentucky in the early 20th century. The lessons linked to this interactive, to [\*Directions to the Artist - Creelsboro Landing, 1890s\*](#), and to its four vignettes - Rafting Logs, Fishing, Campbell's Ferry, and The Steamboat - serve as a springboard for:

**visual art** activities, such as analyzing, interpreting, critiquing, connecting, and generating original documentary art (use the lessons below and [\*Directions to the Artist - Creelsboro Landing, 1890s\*](#)).

**visual and media art** activities, such as analyzing and interpreting meaning in artistic work, critiquing the artist's style, intent and success, exploring how perspective influences perception of subject matter, and creating and presenting students' own documentary art linked to their community's history. Use the lessons below, Lesson Set 1 - Rafting Logs (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)), Lesson Set 3 - Campbell's Ferry (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)), and Lesson Set 4 - The Steamboat (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)).

**visual art and theater** activities, such as improvisation, script development, and technical aspects of theater. Use Lesson Set 2 – Fishing (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)), Lesson Set 3 - Campbell's Ferry (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)), and Lesson Set 4 - The Steamboat (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)).

**visual art and music** activities, such as analyzing and interpreting sound elements of media art and creating original soundscapes through improvisation. Use Lesson Set 4 - The Steamboat (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)).

**reading and writing** activities, such as script writing and poetry. Use Lesson Set 1 - Rafting Logs (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)).

**social studies** activities, such as exploring the impact of technology on social interactions, and the economic and social implications of changing patterns of food production and

consumption. Use Lesson Set 1 - Rafting Logs (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)) and Lesson Set 3 - Campbell's Ferry (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)).

You also can connect this interactive with two videos – [Rural Economy](#) and [Dennis Thrasher](#) – and their associated activities Rural Economy in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)) and Dennis Thrasher - Documentary Artist (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)) for a deeper experience in interpreting and creating documentary art and exploring economic life in rural Kentucky communities in the early 20th century.

Dennis Thrasher's other painting for the *Creelsboro and the Cumberland River: A Living History* documentary, *Irvin Store, 1920s*, was used to portray the bustling activity at one of Creelsboro's general stores. You can access an interactive of that painting and its associated activities [here](#).

If you enjoy integrating art and social studies through documentary art, access instructional materials related to civil rights in Kentucky's post-Civil War period at [TEACHING THROUGH DOCUMENTARY ART - Lessons For Elementary and Middle School Social Studies Teachers](#).

## INTERACTIVE TEACHING TIPS AND ACTIVITIES

The whole painting serves as a springboard for:

**visual art** activities, such as analyzing, interpreting, critiquing, connecting, and generating original documentary art.

**visual and media art** activities, such as analyzing and interpreting meaning in artistic work, critiquing the artist's style, intent and success, exploring how perspective influences perception of subject matter, and creating and presenting students' own documentary art linked to their community's history.

### Suggested Activities – Visual Art, Visual and Media Art

#### Visual Art

1. **Responding:** Access the Powerpoint - [Creelsboro Landing, 1890s - Images for Projection](#). While projecting the entire painting, lead students in a visual thinking strategy by asking these questions:
  - What is happening in this painting?
  - What do you see that makes you say that?
  - What else can you find?

At this point, there are no right or wrong answers, and students' interpretations might be contradictory. The point of this approach is not to see if students can interpret the artist's intent, but rather, to sharpen their observation skills and visual thinking, and pique their curiosity.

After arousing students' interest in the content of the painting, distribute **Directions to the Artist - Creelsboro Landing, 1890s**. While projecting the painting Powerpoint, lead a discussion about the sections "Goal," "Setting," and "Point of View." Ask students if the setting of the painting and the point of view (perspective) match what was expressed in the directions.

Ask students to work in small groups to compare the elements listed in the directions to the artist with the elements included in the painting. What did the artist include? What did he leave out? What did he add?

Ask students to respond to one or more of these questions:

Why do you think the artist made the decisions he did about which elements to include, what to exclude, and what to add to the painting? Would you have made the same decisions? Why or why not?

Do you think the video producer intended that the artist include all the elements in the painting or was he providing a list of *possible* elements to include?

How would the mood of the painting have been changed if the artist had included all the elements?

Did the artist change the point of view listed in the directions? How did that change the painting? Would you have made the same decisions? Why or why not?

Finally, working in small groups or in a large group, consider the goal of the painting stated in the directions. Ask students to develop criteria for the painting based on the stated goal. If this work is done in small groups, reconvene as a class to synthesize a list of criteria.

Using the criteria established, ask students to write a brief critique stating whether or not the painting achieved the goal, described with specific evidence for their response.

### **Visual Art Standards**

**Anchor Standard 7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 8:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 9:** Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

## **Visual and Media Art**

2. **Responding:** Access the Powerpoint - **Creelsboro Landing, 1890s - Images for Projection**. While projecting the entire painting, lead students in a visual thinking strategy by asking these questions:

What is happening in this painting?

What do you see that makes you say that?

What else can you find?

At this point, there are no right or wrong answers, and students' interpretations might be contradictory. The point of this approach is not to see if students can interpret the artist's intent but to sharpen their observation skills and visual thinking and pique their curiosity.

After arousing students' interest in the content of the painting, play the short video [Rural Economy](#). Tell students that as they watch the video, they should keep the painting in mind and make notes about observations that coincide with or contradict their interpretations.

Have students look at the painting one more time and then watch the video again. This time, ask them to focus on the historic photographs that are included and note which ones might have served as references for the artist, Dennis Thrasher. Ask them to pay attention to specific details.

Then project the painting a third time. Were activities mentioned in the video that are not represented in the painting? Conversely, were activities represented in the painting but not mentioned in the video?

You may want to allow students time to click on the interactive's vignettes and read each BACKGROUND READING:

[Lesson Set 1 – Rafting Logs](#)

[Lesson Set 2 – Fishing](#)

[Lesson Set 3 – Campbell's Ferry](#)

[Lesson Set 4 – The Steamboat](#)

Ask students to respond to one or more of these questions:

Why did the artist make the decisions he did about what to include and what to exclude from his painting?

Would you have made the same decisions? Why or why not?

Why did the video producer include this painting?

What did the painting communicate that was not captured in the historic photographs and interviews?

How does documentary art give viewers a different perspective about the past?

Students may respond individually or in small groups. Responses could be written or multimedia.

### **Visual and Media Art Standards**

**Anchor Standard 7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 8:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

3. **Responding:** Remind students that documentary art tells the story of a particular event or historic time in a realistic manner with attention to accuracy and detail. All artists take a different approach to interpreting and representing the events or time periods in their own style. Ask students to brainstorm words and phrases that describe Dennis Thrasher's style.

If you wish, you could compare and contrast his style with the work of other documentary artists. You can find a video showcasing the famous documentary painting *Washington Crossing the Delaware* by Emanuel Leutze [here](#).

Watch the short video [Dennis Thrasher](#), and ask students to summarize his intent in creating this painting - both as an artist and as a documentarian. Thrasher talks about trying to provide entry points into his paintings. As a class, identify entry points in *Creelsboro Landing, 1890s*. Ask students how these entry points provide balance and movement in the painting.

Based on the artist's intent, develop criteria to evaluate the success of the painting. Ask small groups to complete a critique of the painting using the four steps of Describe, Analyze, Interpret, and Judge. Share the critiques as a class, emphasizing that no two people experience the same reaction to a work of art.

### **Visual and Media Art Standards**

**Anchor Standard 7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 8:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 9:** Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

4. **Creating, Presenting, Responding:** Dennis Thrasher likes to paint from an eye-level perspective.

Working individually or in small groups, ask students to take a series of photos of objects, buildings, people, or scenes from different perspectives. Ask them to create a multimedia or virtual gallery using some of their photos and develop captions and artist statements exploring how perspective influences our perception of subject matter. They may choose to explore the same subject represented from different perspectives or the same perspective applied to diverse subject matter.

### **Visual and Media Art Standards**

**Anchor Standard 1:** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

**Anchor Standard 2:** Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

**Anchor Standard 3:** Refine and complete artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 4:** Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

**Anchor Standard 5:** Develop and refine artistic technique and work for presentation.

**Anchor Standard 6:** Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 8:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 9:** Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

5. **Creating, Presenting, Connecting:** Ask students to click on the interactive of the painting, explore each vignette, and read the short descriptions. Then, ask them to consider what might be interesting to document about their own communities - past and present.

Lead students in a discussion of their communities and the histories of their communities. You may want to invite a local historian, librarian, or tourism director to visit your class to share information about the communities in your school district.

Working in small groups or as a whole class, decide on one or more community stories that you want to record through documentary art. You may determine if each student should do research or if you should assign students to research teams. For ideas about how to find resource materials, review the available resources at Documenting Local History Using Primary Sources (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)) and its short video [Using Primary Sources](#).

Consider the visual resources you have that can help tell one or more stories about local history. Decide if you will do individual paintings, a collaborative mural, or take a different approach. Consider how you will share your documentary art. Will you create public art, have an exhibit, make a video, or create a virtual gallery?

Lead students in creating and presenting documentary art representing one or more aspects of local history. Your finished product might be:

- an exhibit of the paintings (physical or virtual) with artist statements;
- a video with voice-over commentary;
- a mural with vignettes; or
- some other mode of presentation.

### **Visual and Media Art Standards**

**Anchor Standard 1:** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

**Anchor Standard 2:** Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

**Anchor Standard 3:** Refine and complete artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 4:** Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

**Anchor Standard 5:** Develop and refine artistic technique and work for presentation.

**Anchor Standard 6:** Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

**Anchor Standard 10:** Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

**Anchor Standard 11:** Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.