

# Exploring Rural Kentucky Through Documentary Art: Unit 1 - Rural Economy in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century - For the Teacher -

## OVERVIEW

Students explore the ways geography has shaped the history, culture, and economy of a Kentucky river town while they explore how documentary art can be used to tell a story of the past. Then they consider how geography has shaped their own community and how they might share that story.

## TEACHING TIPS AND ACTIVITIES

Using interviews, period photography, and documentary art, this unit and its short video ([Rural Economy](#)) provide a window into the economy of one rural community in Kentucky in the early 20th century. It serves as a springboard for

- **social studies** activities, such as researching local history using primary and secondary sources, investigating the impact of innovations in transportation (in particular, Cumberland River steamboats), and investigating the impact of human interaction on the environment.
- **visual and media art** activities, such as exploring how documentary art communicates information, adding visual imagery to multimedia presentations, or creating original works of art.
- **reading and writing** activities, such as writing original poems or songs.

You also can connect this unit with the [Creelsboro Landing, 1890s - Documentary Art Interactive](#) and with Dennis Thrasher - Documentary Artist (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)) for a deeper experience in interpreting and creating documentary art and exploring life in rural Kentucky communities in the early 20th century.

### Suggested Activities – Social Studies

1. **Explore Local History through Compelling and Supporting Questions**: Lead students in developing compelling and supporting questions about how geography influences history, culture, and economy. Lead them in working in small groups or individually to research local history to explore these questions and share their conclusions through a multimedia presentation. You may assign certain topics such as economy, culture, or geography or allow free choice.

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. You may also want to lead students in considering the primary source materials available for learning about local history. For ideas about how to find resource materials, review with your students the available resources at Documenting Local History Using Primary Sources (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)) and watch its short video - [Using Primary Sources](#).

Consider ways to share student projects with a wider audience - either physically or virtually.

2. **Explore the Impact of Innovations in Transportation through Compelling and Supporting Questions**: Lead students in developing compelling and supporting questions about the impact of innovations in transportation on cultures and societies. Lead them in working in small groups or individually to research one or more innovations in technology and the impact on one or more cultures or societies. You may assign specific modes of transportation, specific time periods, or specific cultures or societies, or allow free choice. Ask students to share their conclusions through a multimedia presentation.
3. **Explore the Impact of Human Interactions on the Environment through Compelling and Supporting Questions**: Lead students in developing compelling and supporting questions about the impact of human interaction on the environment. Lead them in working in small groups or individually to research one or more impacts that human interaction has had on the environment. You may assign specific types of interactions, specific time periods, or specific cultures or societies, or allow free choice. Ask students to share their conclusions through a multimedia presentation.

#### **Social Studies Standards**

**HS.UH.I.Q.1** Generate compelling questions to frame thinking, inquiry and/or understanding of key concepts in U.S. history.

**HS.UH.I.Q.2** Generate supporting questions to develop knowledge, understanding and/or thinking relative to key concepts in U.S. history framed by compelling questions.

**HS.G.HE.1** Assess the reciprocal relationship between physical environment and culture within local, national and global scales.

**HS.G.HE.2** Analyze how human settlements are influenced by or influence the relationship between people and the environment.

**HS.UH.CH.5** Analyze the impact of technology and new ideas on American culture from 1877-present.

4. **The Steamboat Era**: Lead students in learning more about the steamboat era in local, state, regional, or U.S. history. Students may work individually or in small groups to explore one aspect of the era - culture, technology, economics, politics, or geography - and share their findings through a multimedia presentation. Ask each group to include the impact of the invention of the steamboat on their research subject.

#### **Social Studies Standards**

**HS.UH.CH.5** Analyze the impact of technology and new ideas on American culture from 1877-present.

#### **Helpful Resources for Activity 4**

**[Steamboat Jimmy](#)**

Learn about James Rumsey, who was the first person to invent the steam-powered boat, and the challenges he faced when he demonstrated it for a crowd of people.

### **Steamboats on Minnesota's Red River**

Students watch a video and learn about the use of steamboats on the Red River in Minnesota as industries boomed and faster ways of transporting goods were sought. Using a map, students track the route that steamboats had to take, on and off the river.

### **Steamboats on the Red: A Monopoly Generates Competition, Manipulation, and Piracy**

In Minnesota's Red River Valley, a monopoly developed in the steamboat trade, and two separate attempts were made to provide competition. The first ended when the competitors joined forces and returned the steamboat industry to a monopoly; the second when the larger company sank their competitor's boats. From 1859 to 1909, steamboats hauled thousands of settlers and millions of tons of freight across the border between the United States and Canada. Although it lasted barely 50 years, the age of the steamboat forged the commercial network between the two countries that exists today in the form of the Interstate-29 corridor.

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

5. **Documentary Art**: Ask students to analyze the different modes of information-sharing in the video **Rural Economy**. Guide them to see that the video combines interviews with documents like maps and art, including both period photography and documentary paintings. Lead a discussion about how period photographs and documentary paintings help tell a visual story of the steamboat era in the Creelsboro Valley. What is the difference between period photos (primary sources) and documentary paintings created later (secondary sources)? How does each form of imagery help to tell the story?

Ask students to select one of the research projects they completed in Suggested Activities 1-4 and analyze how they used primary and secondary sources in their multimedia presentations.

Learn more about documentary art by viewing the video **Dennis Thrasher**. Dive deeper into the ways that documentary art provides information while engaging viewers' senses by exploring the interactive **Creelsboro Landing, 1890s - Documentary Art Interactive**.

Working individually or in small groups, allow students time to refine one of their earlier multimedia presentations to incorporate more visual imagery. Allow time for each individual or group to share their refined presentation and talk about the changes and additions they made. Allow time for supportive feedback on each project. Consider ways to share the projects with a wider audience - either physically or virtually.

### **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.

### **Suggested Activities – Visual and Media Art, Reading and Writing**

6. In the [Rural Economy](#) video, Mr. Reeder says “The river gave a lot, but it took a lot, too.” Ask students to work individually or collaboratively to write a poem exploring these two themes. They might write the poem as a diamante (see **Diamante Poetry** below) or they might write a poem with at least two contrasting stanzas.

They also could consider creating song lyrics or works of art. If they live by a river or other body of water, they could incorporate these ideas into a “Where I’m From” poem. Visit [the official website of George Ella Lyon](#), author of “Where I’m From,” for ideas on how to lead your class in writing this type of poetry.

Decide as a class how to share these artistic interpretations with a wider audience.

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### **Reading and Writing Standards – Literacy Practices**

1. Recognize that text is anything that communicates a message.
2. Employ, develop and refine schema to understand and create text.
3. View literacy experiences as transactional, interdisciplinary and transformational.
4. Utilize receptive and expressive language arts to better understand self, others and the world.
5. Apply strategic practices, with scaffolding and then independently, to approach new literacy tasks.
6. Collaborate with others to create new meaning.
7. Utilize digital resources to learn and share with others.

8. Engage in specialized, discipline-specific literacy practices.
9. Apply high level cognitive processes to think deeply and critically about text.
10. Develop a literacy identity that promotes lifelong learning.

## Helpful Resources for Lesson 6

### Documenting Communities

Berea College's *Partners for Education* joined with communities in ten of Kentucky's Appalachian counties to develop the [Our Creative Promise](#) website to showcase the region's creative assets. They invited schools in each county to engage students in creating artworks to celebrate the unique attributes of their communities. Students wrote poetry, painted murals, created sculptures, recorded interviews, and wrote songs. Media arts were integrated throughout so that their projects could be added to the regional website. Each county profile has a section entitled "Youth Lens," where student multimedia creativity is showcased.

### **Diamante Poetry**

Diamante poems are written to form the shape of a diamond. They create a strong contrast between two themes (winter/summer, mother/father, dog/cat, sun/rain, etc.). They have seven lines and a title.

- Line One – a noun (your first theme)
- Line Two – two words describing the first theme
- Line Three – three adjectives that end in –ing and describe the first theme.
- Line Four – Two words related to the first theme: Two words related to the second theme.
- Line Five – three adjectives that end in –ing and describe the second theme
- Line Six – two words describing the first theme
- Line Seven – a noun (your second theme)

Here is an example contrasting a snake and an eagle:

### **River Grass**

Snake,  
Ankle low,  
Slithering, winding, striking,  
Danger, deception: Freedom, flight  
Lifting, flapping, soaring,  
Cloud high,  
Eagle