

Exploring Rural Kentucky Through Documentary Art: Unit 2 - *Irvin Store, 1920s* - Documentary Art Interactive - For the Teacher -

OVERVIEW

Paintings are often incorporated into documentary videos to help portray a bygone way of life. The painting, *Irvin Store, 1920*, was used in the video *Creelsboro and the Cumberland River: A Living History* to portray the bustling activity around a general store in the rural community of Creelsboro, Kentucky, on a Saturday afternoon in the fall.

Access the Powerpoint – [***Irvin Store, 1920s - Images for Projection***](#), and lead your students in analyzing the artwork and interpreting the narrative through this painting and its' three vignettes. Then consider how your students can share the story of their own communities through art.

INTERACTIVE INTRODUCTION

Dennis Thrasher's documentary art painting - *Irvin Store, 1920s* - provides a window into life in one rural community in Kentucky in the early 20th century. The lessons linked to this interactive, to [***Directions to the Artist - Irvin Store, 1920s***](#), to [***Video Script for Rural Life***](#), and to its three vignettes - Saturday Social Life, Pumpkin Harvest, and Jammin' on the Porch - serve as a springboard for:

visual art activities, such as analyzing, interpreting, and critique documentary art, connecting, brainstorming and creating original documentary art. Use the lessons below, Lesson Set 1 - Saturday Social Life (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)) and Lesson Set 2 - Pumpkin Harvest (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)).

visual art and theater activities, such as improvisation, script development, technical aspects of theater. Use the lessons below and Lesson Set 1 - Saturday Social Life (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)).

media art activities, such as analyzing and critiquing artistic work, and creating and presenting students' own documentary art linked to their community's history. Use the lessons below and Lesson Set 3 - Jammin' on the Porch (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)).

music activities, such as analyzing soundtracks in a documentary video, learning about the roots of bluegrass music, and creating an original soundtrack. Use Lesson Set 3 - Jammin' on the Porch (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)).

reading and writing activities, such as composing explanatory and informational text, and poetry and script writing. Use the lessons below, Lesson Set 2 - Pumpkin Harvest (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)), and Lesson Set 3 - Jammin' on the Porch (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 - Saturday Social Life (teacher version [here](#), student

version [here](#)) and Lesson Set 2 - Pumpkin Harvest (teacher version [here](#), student version [here](#)).

You also can connect this interactive to two short videos [Rural Life](#) and [Dennis Thrasher](#) and their accompanying activities – Rural Life in the Early 20th 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 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, *Creelsboro Landing, 1890s*, was used to portray the bustling activity of a steamboat landing. You can access an interactive of that painting and its associated activities [here](#).

And if you enjoy integrating art and social studies through documentary art, you can 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, and critique documentary art, connecting, brainstorming and creating original documentary art

media art activities, such as analyzing and critiquing artistic work, and creating and presenting students’ own documentary art linked to their community’s history.

reading and writing activities, such as script writing.

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

Visual Art

1. **Responding:** Access the Powerpoint – [Irvin Store, 1920s - 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 with the discussion questions, distribute [Directions to the Artist - Irvin Store, 1920s](#). While projecting the painting, 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 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 did the artist make 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 would 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 changed if the artist had included all the elements?

Did the artist add any elements that were not on the list 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 as 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 established criteria, ask students to write a brief critique, stating whether or not the painting achieved the goal described, and citing the 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.

2. **Creating, Presenting, Connecting:** Ask students to click on the interactive of the painting ([Irvin Store, 1920s - Documentary Art Interactive](#)), explore each vignette and read the BACKGROUND READING:

[Lesson Set 1 – Saturday Social Life](#)

[Lesson Set 2 – Pumpkin Harvest](#)

[Lesson Set 3 – Jammin' on the Porch](#)

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 highlight 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 Resources (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 create individual paintings, a collaborative mural, or take a different approach.

Revisit the [Directions to the Artist - Irvin Store, 1920s](#) document. As a class, craft a similar document(s) defining the setting, point of view, goal, and elements for a group painting or for individual paintings. Include images that can be used as reference.

Consider how you will share your documentary art. Will you create public art, have an exhibit, create a virtual gallery, or make a video (see Activity 4)?

Lead students in creating and presenting their 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 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.

Media Art

3. **Responding:** Watch the short video [Rural Life](#). Explain that this is a clip from a longer video production – [Creelsboro and the Cumberland: A Living History](#). Ask students to summarize the main points of the video clip.

Watch the video clip a second time and this time, ask students to make notes about the different visual elements, such as paintings, historic photos, and live video footage. Then, lead a discussion about those elements. Ask students why they think the video producer decided that he needed to commission a painting for this video.

Ask students to write a short journal entry or exit slip answering these questions:

What did the painting add in terms of visual appeal?

What did the painting add in terms of telling the story of life in Creelsboro?

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.

Media Art, Reading and Writing

4. **Creating, Producing, Connecting:** As a class, watch the short video clip [Rural Life](#). Discuss the various elements of the video clip: live video of interviews, voice-over narration, visual elements (historic and contemporary photographs, paintings), and a soundtrack.

Based on the research your students have done into local history, ask them to consider what you might include in a student-produced video focused on one or more aspects of local history.

You might divide students into small groups for this work and have each group prepare a short proposal for a video. The proposal should describe the main topic and outline the available resources to support that topic: people to interview, historic or contemporary photographs, artwork (including any artwork created in Activity 3), and ideas for a soundtrack (see activities for [Lesson Set 3 - Jammin' on the Porch](#)).

Ask each group to present their proposal to the class. Discuss the options, including finding ways to merge one or more proposals.

When you have determined the topic for your original video and have discussed available resources, distribute [Video Script for Rural Life](#). Assign students to small groups and have them use highlighters of different colors to identify the different elements of the script (interview, narrator, video, audio, and graphics).

Ask students to consider what would be the first step in video production. Could they write the script before they recorded interviews and selected the portions of the interviews they would use? Would they need to identify the graphics they would be using before scripting the narration?

Then, watch and discuss the three videos in the PBS LearningMedia collection [Creating Media Art](#).

Ask students what jobs need to be done - from planning to editing - to pull together the elements for an original video. What skills are needed for each phase of the production? What equipment is needed?

Divide students into teams to

- Research the topic and plan elements of the video.

- Conduct, video-record, and edit interviews with people who can add interest to the topic the students have selected.

- Collect and/or create photographs, artwork, and other graphics.

- (Optional) - identify music for the soundtrack, obtain any rights needed.

- Write the script.

- Create voice-over narration.

- Edit the script.

Teams will need to work together, with the teacher leading the process and serving as the producer.

When the video is complete, consider how you can share it with a wider audience - perhaps on the school website or through a local TV station.

Interview Extension

If you want to provide your students with more opportunities to enhance their audio interview skills and make a contribution to history, consider the in-person and virtual recording opportunities provided by [StoryCorps](#). These interviews/recordings are archived in the StoryCorps collection at the Library of Congress. StoryCorps provides lots of tips for developing great interview questions.

Media Art Standards

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

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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.

Reading Standards

Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details.

Reading and Writing Standards - Composition

Compose informative and/or explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.

- a. Produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.
- b. Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting, graphics and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- c. Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
- d. Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.
- e. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity.