

Exploring Rural Kentucky Through Documentary Art: Unit 2 - Rural Life in the Early 20th Century - For the Teacher -

OVERVIEW

Students learn about the lifeways of a rural Kentucky community in the early 20th century while they explore how documentary art can be used to bring the past to life. Then they consider what life was like in their own community in the early 20th century 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 Life](#)) provide a window into life in one rural community in Kentucky in the first half of the 20th century. It serves as a springboard for:

- **social studies** activities, like researching local history using primary and secondary sources and investigating the impacts of industrialization.
- **media art** activities, such as analyzing how the components of a video work together; and brainstorming, creating, and refining an original video, including creating a script.
- **visual and media art** activities, such as exploring how documentary art communicates information and adding visual imagery to multimedia presentations; creating original works of documentary art; documenting artisans who continue handmade traditions; and making a traditional craft.

You also can connect this unit with the [Irvin Store, 1920s - 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 the economy of rural Kentucky communities in the early 20th century.

Suggested Activities – Social Studies, Media Art

1. **Explore Local History through Compelling and Supporting Questions**: Lead students in developing compelling and supporting questions about how we can learn about the past. 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.

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.HI.2 Analyze how cultural and economic decisions influence the characteristics of various places.

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

HS.UH.CH.1 Examine the ways diverse groups viewed themselves and contributed to the identity of the United States in the world from 1877-present.

HS.G.KGE.1 Explain how Kentuckians view sense of place differently based on cultural and environmental characteristics of varying regions of the state.

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 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

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

2. **The Impact of Industrialization:** Changing technologies in transportation and manufacturing transformed communities. Many occupations that had once been central to communities became almost obsolete. Lead a discussion about occupations that were once practiced in Creelsboro, and those once practiced in the students' own communities that were marginalized by industrialization.

Since the early 20th century, Creelsboro has changed from a lively mercantile center to a nearly deserted community. Other communities grew as a result of industrialization, but the nature of their daily lives changed. Many people who were once self-employed or owned small, local businesses became factory workers, miners, or worked in other capacities for corporations or large businesses.

Work together as a class to develop compelling questions about the positive and negative impacts of industrialization on communities. Consider not only the economic impacts but also the social impacts.

You could use Creelsboro as a case study for the whole class to explore, and then invite students to research the impact of industrialization on their own community or state (to

learn more about the impact of industrialization on Creelsboro, show the short video - **Rural Economy** - to your students).

You could also broaden the scope to consider how other external factors – such as pandemics, tariffs, or climate change – impact communities.

Ask students to work individually or in small groups to explore these questions and 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.HI.2 Analyze how cultural and economic decisions influence the characteristics of various places.

HS.UH.CE.1 Analyze the political, economic and social impacts of industrialization on the United States between 1877-1945.

HS.G.KGE.1 Explain how Kentuckians view sense of place differently based on cultural and environmental characteristics of varying regions of the state.

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 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

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

Suggested Activities – Visual and Media Art

3. **Documentary Art:** Ask students to analyze the different modes of information-sharing in the short video **Rural Economy**. Guide them to see that the video combines interviews with documents - like including both period photography and a documentary painting. Lead a discussion about how period photographs and documentary paintings help tell a visual story of the Creelsboro community in its heyday. 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 1-2 and analyze how they used primary and secondary sources in their multimedia presentations.

Dive deeper into the ways in which documentary art provides information while engaging viewers' senses by exploring the interactive [**Irvin Store, 1920s - 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 3: Refine and complete artistic work.

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.

4. **Creating Original Documentary Art:** Watch the short video [**Dennis Thrasher**](#). Lead students in discussing both Thrasher's style and his approach to documentary art. What research does he conduct? Why does he consider research critical to his documentary art?

Ask students to consider what they learned about their own communities in Activity 1. How could they represent one aspect (event, building, person, occupation, community scene, etc.) of their community's past? What media and style would be most appropriate to what they want to communicate? How can they research their subject matter? Consider period photographs and other images as well as written texts. 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 view its short video [**Using Primary Sources**](#).

Ask students to make a rough preliminary sketch of what they want to represent and jot down ideas for style, details, and resources for research. Put them in small groups to discuss and refine their ideas before they begin working on their project. You may assign specific media, style, or other criteria, or allow free choice. Engage students in developing a rubric for their artwork so that they know what is expected.

Allow sufficient time for students to experiment, refine their ideas, and complete the artwork and write an artist's statement. Organize a classroom showing of the artwork.

Consider how to share the work with a larger 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.

5. **Traditional Skills:** Some people continue to practice handcrafting skills that were largely replaced by large-scale manufacturing. Many people prefer to purchase functional handcrafted items rather than manufactured goods, even though the handcrafted items are often more expensive. They appreciate the quality and creativity of handmade items and support the continuation of handmade traditions.

Ask students to work individually or in small groups to research a local or regional artisan. If possible, ask them to record an interview (audio or visual) with the artisan. Alternatively, they could use Internet resources like those listed below to research an artisan whose work continues a handmade tradition.

Ask students to create a multimedia presentation that includes both images and excerpts from interviews (with the local/regional artisan or from the Internet resources below) to showcase the artisan they have researched.

Their presentation should include an analysis of how the work of the artisan represents the continuation of a tradition, as well as the artisan's own artistic vision.

Leatherworkers

[The Sorrell Family: A Perfect Fit | Craft in America Collection](#)

Students learn about artist Lisa Sorrell, her work as a boot maker, and the process of making leather cowboy boots by hand. Students gain insight into how a family can contribute to the rich and purposeful life of the craftsperson; and they have the opportunity to craft a custom foot covering.

[Impact of Art and Tradition on the Individual: Walter "Super" LaBatte | Intergenerational Art and Culture Traditions Collection](#)

Walter "Super" LaBatte, Jr. of the Pejuhutazizi Kapi ("the place where they dig for yellow medicine" – the Upper Sioux Community in Minnesota) has become known in Native circles for his traditional process of tanning deer hides, and making beaded moccasins, drums, and his pasdayapi (corn soup).

Weavers

[Jim Bassler: Woven in Tradition - Lesson Plan | Craft in America Collection](#)

Students explore the work of weaver James Bassler and learn about the basic techniques of weaving. They discuss the role of technology in craft, consider the importance and origins of weaving in our world, and create a piece of woven cloth dyed with indigo.

Blacksmiths

Forge: Iron Horse Forge | Visual Arts Toolkit

Chris Casey and Tony Higdon describe how they use ancient techniques to create one-of-a-kind functional iron pieces and sculpture.

Ceramics

Ceramics: Chris Strecker | Visual Arts Toolkit

Chris Strecker demonstrates how to throw a pot and discusses the ceramics-making process, from shaping the clay to glazing and firing the pot.

Visual and Media Art Standards

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

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

6. **Create a Traditional Craft:** If possible, lead students in creating a traditional, functional craft. Depending on the level of your class and your available time and materials, you might present this as a step-by-step process, or you might allow students to make artistic choices.

Discuss the experience. Were students surprised by anything in the experience? What did they find satisfying, challenging, or frustrating? Would they like to work in this craft medium again? What would they do differently? Would they like to try out one of the craft processes or techniques that they learned about in Activity 5?

Consider ways to share their artwork with a broader 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 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.