

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

### BACKGROUND READING

Art is created and enjoyed for diverse reasons. Some art expresses an emotion or idea, some is functional as well as beautiful, and some is intended primarily for appreciation of the aesthetics. Documentary art also tells a story, and documentary art tells the story of a particular event or historic time in a realistic manner with attention to accuracy and detail. Documentary photos are usually a primary source because they are created in the moment. Most documentary paintings, however, are secondary sources, created after the event. To create documentary art, the artist must research his/her topic and reference all the primary source imagery available.

Voyageur Media Group, Inc. specializes in the creation of public media about science, history, art, and culture. Their productions often incorporate documentary art. Some, like historic photos, are primary sources, but others are paintings that interpret the past through an artist's lens.



*Creelsboro Landing, 1890s* by Dennis Thrasher (2018).

Voyageur Media Group commissioned Dennis Thrasher to paint *Creelsboro Landing, 1890s* for the documentary *Creelsboro and the Cumberland: A Living History*. Director/Producer Tom Law provided Thrasher with details about what he wanted included in the painting (see [\*\*Directions to the Artist - Creelsboro Landing, 1890s\*\*](#)). Law explained the mood that he wanted the paintings to convey. He also provided historic information and any existing photographs. This helped Thrasher make the painting reflect the time period as accurately as possible.

As the artist, Thrasher drew on his experience living in the area. He was free to make his own artistic choices about things like style, colors, focal points, contrasts, and perspective. The resulting painting adds a vibrancy to the video, the feeling that you could almost step into the past.

In this painting, Thrasher has created vignettes of activities that took place around Creelsboro's river landing where steamboats docked during their travels up and down the Cumberland River. As you watch the video [Rural Economy](#), you will see many of the historic photos Thrasher referenced to give historic accuracy to his lively painting.

Thrasher pays attention to keeping his artwork from becoming too busy. He provides open spaces in the artwork that invite the viewer to enter the scene and take a look around, as if they were actually there. He wants the viewer to be able to see all the different scenes in his painting – but not all at once!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After reading the BACKGROUND READING, look at the painting and consider these questions. There are no right or wrong answers – the idea here is to sharpen your observation skills and get you to start thinking visually:

1. What is happening in this painting?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What else can you find?

After watching [Rural Economy](#), consider these questions:

1. Why did the artist make the decisions he did about what to include and what to exclude from his painting?
2. Would you have made the same decisions? Why or why not?
3. Why did video producer Tom Law include this painting in the video?
4. What did the painting communicate that was not captured in the historic photographs and interviews?
5. How does documentary art give viewers a different perspective about the past?