

A FILM BY KEN BURNS

THE NATIONAL PARKS

America's Best Idea

www.weta.org/nationalparks

Historical Painter Keith Rocco

Subjects

Art Appreciation,
Historical Understanding,
Language Arts

Grade Level

9–12

These lessons are provided as an educational service of public television station WETA in Washington, D.C. Our thanks to Greg Timmons, author of the lesson plans.

Overview

Paintings can “freeze a moment in time” and allow the viewer to take in information. Historic paintings blend both imagination and realism to inform and elicit an emotional response. Nineteenth Century artists like Albert Bierstadt, George Catlin, and Thomas Moran painted expansive portrayals of the National Parks in landscape art and character sketches. These images brought the grandeur and jaw-dropping scenic beauty of the West to Americans living in the East, inspiring their imaginations and prompting them to “see American first” on their vacations.

In this lesson, students will explore the world of historical artist Keith Rocco, who has been painting for the National Park Service for the past 13 years. They will discover his thought process and development procedure as he reconstructs historic moments in time. They will then perform research and allow their imaginations to soar as they create a scenario for one of Rocco’s artworks.

Learning Objectives

Students will do the following:

- Describe their reaction to the art of Keith Rocco.
- Research the circumstances surrounding a Keith Rocco historical depiction.
- Develop a fictional scenario of the events in and around the artwork.

Materials

- Student Handout: Keith Rocco Paintings Graphic Organizer
- Student Handout: Delving into the Past
- A PDF of Selected Paintings by Keith Rocco

Opening Activity

Before class gather some newspapers or magazines with photographs of people in some sort of activity. Place students in pairs and have them take out a sheet of writing paper and a pencil or pen. Distribute the newspapers/magazines to all pairs of students. Ask students to look through the publications and select two or three photographs that interest them. Tell them not to look at the captions or the related article, but only the photograph. Then have them work with their partner and answer the questions “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” “why,” “how.” Tell them the object of this activity is not to be right but to be creative. After they’ve come up with answers to these questions, have them write a brief paragraph explaining what they believe is going on in the photograph. Have them share with the class.

Next, show students the WETA Extra film “Historical Painter Keith Rocco” (<http://www.weta.org/local/parks>). After watching the film, ask students the following questions:

- What kind of paintings does Keith Rocco create?
- What steps does he take to prepare himself for creating a painting?
- What does he see as his role with the National Park Service in creating his paintings?
- What do you think of his artwork?

Main Activity

Tell students they are going to view several of Keith Rocco’s paintings and analyze their content and message. Then they will follow his method of research and preparation but in reverse, by selecting one of his artworks, making detailed observations of the painting, conducting research on the event and location depicted, and commenting on the emotional feeling portrayed in the painting.

Part 1. Keep students in pairs or create new groups. Distribute the student handout, “Keith Rocco Paintings Graphic Organizer.” Then have each pair count off by sevens. Distribute one of the seven Keith Rocco paintings to each pair corresponding to their number. Tell students to complete the graphic organizer as they observe their assigned painting. Have students share some of their observations with the class.

The PDF slide show contains the following paintings:

- Jamestown, Virginia 1660s
- Pickett’s Charge
- Jamestown, Virginia 1620
- 14th Brooklyn—study #1
- Confederate Reconnaissance
- Always Ready—The 9th New York Hawkin’s Zouaves at Antietam
- Jamestown, Virginia 1660s

Part 2. Distribute and review the student handout “Delving into the Past.” This activity is written for individual assessment, but you can put students in small groups if you wish. Provide time for them to work on the activity and make available any research sources they might need. When they’ve finished, have them present their findings to the class.

Assessment

- Coverage of the required content in their presentation (listed in the student handout)
- Writing mechanics
- Understanding the emotional feeling portrayed in the painting

Extension Activities

- Have students select a park or special site in the Washington D.C. area or in their own neighborhood. Have them follow Keith Rocco’s research procedure to find out more about the park or special site and then create artwork that depicts a history of the site. As an alternative, they can take photographs and compile a brochure or photographic exhibition.

Standards

This lesson addresses national content standards established by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks>)

VISUAL ARTS

Art Connections

Standard 1:

Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines

Art Communication

Standard 2:

Knows and applies appropriate criteria to arts and communication products

Standard 3.

Uses critical and creative thinking in various arts and communication settings

HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

Standard 2.

Understands the historical perspective

LANGUAGE ARTS

Writing

Standard 1.

Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Standard 3.

Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions

Standard 4.

Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Listening and Speaking

- Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.
- Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

About the author

Greg Timmons is a freelance curriculum writer, and educational consultant of web-based and broadcast media materials. After a 30 year career as a social studies teacher in the public schools, he has written and consulted for several national news and educational organizations including FRONTLINE, the *NewsHour*, History Channel, Colonial Williamsburg, and other projects for WETA.

A FILM BY KEN BURNS

THE NATIONAL PARKS

America's Best Idea

www.weta.org/nationalparks

Student Handout

Keith Rocco Paintings

Graphic Organizer

1. Study the painting for 2 minutes, and then provide an overall impression of what you see.

2. Divide the painting into four parts and examine individual items in the painting.
On the chart below, list the objects, people, and activities in the painting.

Objects	People	Activities
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

3. Study the painting for 2 minutes, and then provide an overall impression of what you see.

A.

B.

C.

4. What questions do you have about this painting?

5. Write a descriptive caption for this painting. The caption can be a full sentence or just a few words.

Header painting image, courtesy: Keith Rocco

A FILM BY KEN BURNS

THE NATIONAL PARKS

America's Best Idea



Student Handout

www.weta.org/nationalparks

Historical Painter Keith Rocco

Delving into the Past

Overview

When Keith Rocco prepares to create a historical painting, he does extensive research on the subject and the time period. In addition to visiting the site where the event occurred, he gains a general understanding of the subject matter. Then he researches information on individuals from their memoirs, letters, and biographies. From there he creates a story of what happened.

In this activity, you will complete Rocco's process in reverse beginning with one of his historical paintings. From there, you will make detailed observations of the painting, conduct research on the event and place depicted, and describe the emotional feeling portrayed in the painting.

Directions

1. Select one of the images from the Keith Rocco Slide Show that you didn't analyze earlier or choose another one from his website at <http://www.keithrocco.com>.
2. Follow Keith Rocco's method by researching the event and location depicted in the artwork. Be sure to check out the National Parks website at <http://www.nps.gov> for information on the actual location depicted in the painting. Write detailed observations of the following:
 - The location of the painting, including a brief summary of the national historic park or site
 - A historical summary of what happened at the location indicating dates, names of individuals, and events
 - A brief description of the activities going on in the painting, the emotional feeling portrayed for the viewer, and the human experience of what happened at this site
 - An analysis of how the artist's work reflects the uniqueness of a location that became a national park or historic site

Header painting image, courtesy: Keith Rocco

A FILM BY KEN BURNS

THE NATIONAL PARKS

America's Best Idea

Student Handoutwww.weta.org/nationalparks

Historical Painter Keith Rocco



Courtesy: Keith Rocco



Courtesy: Keith Rocco



Courtesy: Keith Rocco



Courtesy: Keith Rocco



Courtesy: Keith Rocco



Courtesy: Keith Rocco



Courtesy: Keith Rocco