

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

An Exploration of Southern Art and Literature

GRADES 4-8



Overview

In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, the Newberry award-winning book by Mildred D. Taylor, children get a first-hand look at life during the Great Depression. Issues of race, segregation, and poverty are survived by the narrator's developing sense of family and love of the land. Likewise, art from the era or about the era explores many of the same issues and themes. Here, visual art makes powerful connections to literature and the larger social implications that allow contemporary students to meaningfully explore another time in American history.

Objectives

- ✓ Students will analyze and research reproductions of works of art (postcards) individually and in small groups.
- ✓ Using synthesis and evaluation skills, students will engage in small group debates to determine which work of art best connects to the issues and themes found in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.
- ✓ At The Ogden Museum of Southern Art, students will explore the works of art studied in the classroom as well as additional works through dialog and writing activities.

Works of Art for the Classroom Activity

- William Christenberry, *GHOST FORM*, 1994, mixed media sculpture and red soil, 16 3/4" x 34" x 20"
- Benny Andrews, *PLOWER*, 1989, oil and collage, 36" x 24"
- John Kelly Fitzpatrick, *MULES TO MARKET*, 1937, oil on canvas, 30" x 36"
- Marie Atchinson Hull, *TENANT FARMER*, c. 1935, oil on canvas, 36" x 30"

Tour Stops at the Museum

Third Floor

- John McCrady, *EVENING MEAL, DUCK HILL, MISSISSIPPI*
- Marie Atchinson Hull, *TENANT FARMER*
- John Kelly Fitzpatrick, *MULES TO MARKET*
- Eudora Welty, Mississippi Depression-Era Photographs
- Marion Post Wolcott, *NEGRO ENTERING MOVIE THEATER, BELZONI, MS*

Fourth Floor

- William Christenberry, *GHOST FORM*
- Benny Andrews, *PLOWER*
- George Andrews, Dot Man Installation
- Richard Wilt, *FAREWELL*

Fifth Floor

- Clementine Hunter, *PANORAMA BAPTISM ON CANE RIVER*
- Willie Birch, *GOING HOME*

ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY Literature and Art of the Great Depression



Hi! I'm Max Katz and together with Elva Louise Swan, we're going to help you solve an art mystery that combines art and the book you're reading, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

Every work of art tells a story. You can figure out the story behind the artwork just by looking. All you have to do is follow a few simple steps. Let's try it!

What do you see in the artwork?

What's the most eye-catching detail of the work? (center of interest)

How would you describe the mood (feeling) of the artwork?

How might this work relate to the themes or issues in the book *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*?

You can figure a lot out by looking, can't you? But it's always good to get a little more information. Next you'll read more about your work of art by reading Max's and my secret curatorial files. We got the information from museum labels, books, and even our own children's activity book.



Take a look on the back of the postcard.

Who is the artist?

When did the artist create this?

What medium did the artist use?

After reading the information in the packet, write down important facts about this artist and artwork?

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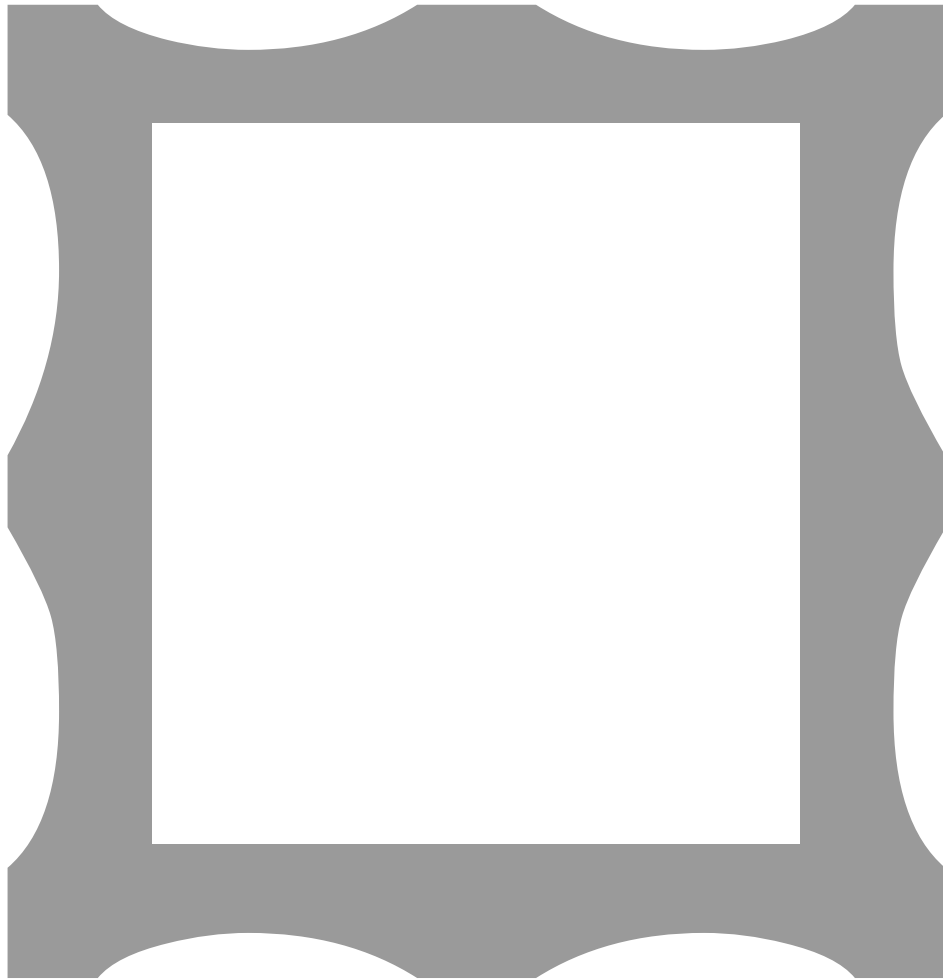
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Now that you've learned more, do you have any further thoughts on how this work of art might relate to *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*?

What sort of image do you think would best relate to the book? Design an image below.



SMALL GROUP DEBATE



Now that you've researched your work of art, it's time to put your findings to the test. In a **debate** you use your power of **persuasion** to argue your point of view. So get ready to defend your work of art!

Here's what you do: try to persuade your group members that your work of art best relates to the issues and themes found in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

In the end your group needs to agree on one work. So your powers to persuade must match your willingness to listen to others and make the best choice.



Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

An Exploration of Southern Art and Literature

at

THE OGDEN MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN ART

GRADES 4-8

Museum Tour Script

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND PERTINENT INFORMATION

Remember during the classroom activity you were asked to select a work of art that **BEST** relates to the book *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*? Today you'll see the original works of art from the postcard activity and many more. By the end of the tour you might think a different work of art best relates to the book.

Today we'll be looking at works of art that deal with a theme or issue related to the book. Let's list the major themes and issues. Below are a few sample responses:

Themes:

Family

Sense of Place (love of the land)

Issues:

Poverty

Racism

Segregation

Nutrition

Some of the works of art were created during the time period of the Great Depression. Other works were created later. Your mission will be to figure out how each piece relates to the book. Let's get started!

START ON ANY FLOOR

John McCrady, *EVENING MEAL, DUCK HILL, MISSISSIPPI* 1934
(Southern Regionalism)

- What's going on in this work of art?
 - How does the artist direct your eye to the interior of the house?
 - What else is important to notice?
 - Where does this family live? How can you tell?
 - Overall, are the figures energized or exhausted? How do you know?
- Relate your response to an example from *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

John McCrady was born in Canton, MS in the early part of the 20th century. By the time McCrady attended art school in New York city, an important movement called **regionalism**, a unique look at American daily life, was well underway led by artists like Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry. Although McCrady spend most of his artistic career here in New Orleans, he spent a good deal of time focused on rural Mississippi life when he returned from New York. John McCrady became known for painting “cutaways.”

- What do you think that means? Where do you see another painting of a cutaway. How is the city image different from the rural one?

Marie Atchinson Hull, *TENANT FARMER* c. 1935
(Southern Regionalism)

- Describe the overall colors in this work?
- Where does the artist use **complementary** colors? (colors opposite on the color wheel: red/green, blue/orange, yellow/purple)
- Like John McCrady's work, how might this work fit into the **regionalist** tradition?
- Is this man wealthy or impoverished? How does the artist provide clues to support your response?
- What's surprising about this work based on what you know from the book?

Marie Hull is one of the best-known Mississippi artists. The state even declared a Marie Hull Day in 1975! During the Great Depression, the artist painted a series of portraits of tenant farmers. Does the artist portray this farmer with dignity or pity?

John Kelly Fitzpatrick, *MULES TO MARKET* 1937
(Southern Regionalism)

- This artist has been described as using a “lively palette.” What do you think that means? Use examples from the artwork.
- How does the artist contrast light and shadow?
- Would you say this artist's style is more realistic or impressionistic?
- How does this work suggest the changes that will affect farming in the South after the Great Depression?

Just as Marie Hull is a beloved Mississippi artist likewise John Kelly Fitzpatrick is an important Alabama artist. He served in the military during World War I and

stayed after the war to study art in Paris, where he learned the French Impressionist painting style. He returned to Alabama, where he worked the rest of his life.

Eudora Welty, *WOMAN OF THE THIRTIES*

1935

(Photography II)

- What is the **emphasis** or **center of interest** in this work?
- Compare and contrast this photograph with the Marie Hull portrait of a tenant farmer?
- How does the medium affect the message of each work?

Eudora Welty is best known as a writer. How many of you have heard of her? What was she known for writing about? Prior to becoming one of the most important American writers of the 20th century, Eudora Welty worked as a junior publicity agent for the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression. While she traveled Mississippi reporting on the conditions of rural families she took photographs. Later in life after she became a well-known author, Welty commented on how photography influenced her stories in the following: "Photography taught me that to be able to capture transience [something that lasts for a short time; fleeting], but being ready to click the shutter at the crucial moment, was the greatest need I had."

Marion Post Wolcott, *NEGRO ENTERING MOVIE THEATER, BELZONI, MS,*

1939

(Photography III)

- What's going on in this photograph?
- There's a strong diagonal line in this work, isn't there? What other kinds of lines does the artist incorporate?
- What is the purpose of the diagonal line to the photograph's sense of **balance** and **unity**?
- How does the black and white photography add to the message of this work? How does the work comment on civil rights in the South?

Marion Post Wolcott is not a Southerner, but she spent a good deal of time documenting the suffering families endured during the Great Depression. She worked for the Farm Security Administration (FSA). How is this photograph different from Eudora Welty's? Do you think non-Southerners see the South differently than Southerners in photography? If yes, how so? (Along this wall are other non-Southerners depicting Southern images, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Ralston Crawford.)

William Christenberry, *GHOST FORM*

1994

(Contemporary Photography)

- What is this work made out of?

- You worked with a postcard reproduction of this piece in the classroom. How is the original work different from the reproduction?
- How might this work be a commentary on life during the Depression?
- How do the photographs on the wall relate to this piece?
- Why do you think the work is called *Ghost Form*?

William Christenberry grew up in Alabama. Although, Christenberry was born toward the end of the Great Depression and doesn't remember it directly, he did hear many of the stories through his family. In 1960, Christenberry bought a copy of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* written by James Agee with photographs by Walker Evans. Like Marion Post Wolcott, the author and photographer worked for the FSA and documented life in Hale County, Alabama, the same county where Christenberry's family lived. This book changed the artist's career. For the last four decades William Christenberry returns to Hale County every summer to photograph buildings and how they've changed over time.

Benny Andrews, *PLOWER*

1989

(Andrews Humphrey Family)

- What elements in this piece are different from the postcard reproduction?
- Would you say this is a painting, a collage, or both? Why?
- What is the overall feeling in this work? It's different from the other images of tenant farmers we've seen, isn't it?

Benny Andrews was born in 1930, one of 10 children in a sharecropping family. Like Cassie in the book, Benny endured poverty, racism, and segregation, but he also was nurtured by a strong sense of family. At home after a long day's work in the field, Andrews' father George would make art with the children. In his installation along this wall you see how he got his nickname, "The Dot Man."

George Andrews is a self-taught artist who only received a third grade education. Benny Andrews, on-the-other-hand, went to art school on the GI Bill (everyone who served in the military receives scholarship opportunities for college). Despite his formal training, can you point out instances where George Andrews influenced his son?

In additions to the hardships you read about in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* the Andrews family has a mixed-race heritage – Scotch Irish, African American, and Native American. Given what you've read, what additional challenges do you think the family faced?

Richard Wilt, *FAREWELL*

1943

(Changing South)

- Would you say the colors in this work are more **muted** (subdued, soft, dull...) or **more bold** (bright, standing out, intense)?

- What is unusual about this work of art?
- How does the color palette affect the mood of the work? Does the artist use color to make a positive or negative affect about change in the rural South?

Although Richard Wilt was not from the South, he did spend time here during World War II for his pilot training. The Depression was over by this time, but there are still remnants of that time in this work. What are they? There is also a symbol of change. What role do the bomber airplanes play in this scene?

Clementine Hunter, *PANORAMA BAPTISM ON CANE RIVER* 1945

(Self Taught)

- What is going on in this scene?
- What elements or design principles in the work indicate the artist is self taught?
- How does this work relate to *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*?

Clementine Hunter lived to be over 101 years old. Her life spanned the end of the Reconstruction era after the Civil War through the Great Depression and the Civil Rights Movement. Hunter remained on Melrose Plantation in central Louisiana for most of her life working in the fields and then in the house. She began painting later in life focusing on scenes of daily plantation life – work, leisure, and church.

Willie Birch, *Going Home*

1992

(Contemporary)

- This work doesn't look like it's from the Depression, does it? Let's look closer...
- Walk around this piece, what do you recognize?
- What do you think the story might be? Where do you find evidence of rural life and the Great Depression?
- What materials did the artist use to create this piece? How do the materials add to the story?

Willie Birch was born here in New Orleans. Like many artists after receiving his art degree from the Maryland Institute College of Art, he moved to New York City. After living in New York for many years, he returned to his childhood neighborhood here in New Orleans. This work, *Going Home* tells the story of a contemporary mother and daughter returning to the South from the North. The history of their family's migration from rural beginnings to big city living is highlighted on the travel cases. *Jubilee*, a book by Margaret Walker shares the struggle of a young African American woman and her family during and after slavery. How does the book add to the story?

Conclusion

- How are the original works different from working with postcard reproductions?
- Now that you've seen the original works from the postcard activity and several other pieces, which work of art best represents the themes and issues in the book?