

Painting the history of the Frontier: Eric Bransby

Answer Key for Instructors

The point of the exercise is the students to conduct critical thinking while interpreting the murals. Answers will differ depending on the interpretation by each student. These are sample answers.

Questions: The First Dragoons: Fort Leavenworth

1. What medium was used to complete the murals? What other artists have used this medium? **Bransby used a medium called egg tempera. This method mixes colored pigments with egg as a binder. Egg tempera was a ubiquitous technique during the early Italian Renaissance, when it was considered the standard for portable easel paintings.**
2. In what style are the paintings created? How does the style help tell the story? **The mural is painted in a realism style. It tells the story by portraying actual historical events in a realistic style. It lays the story out simple and direct to the viewer.**
3. Color is used by artists to influence and invoke feelings. What color scheme did Bransby use to portray the painting? What feelings do the colors evoke? **The colors used in the mural are dark, neutral tones. The colors give the overall effect of seriousness. The colors are made to evoke a sense of historical importance.**
4. What is the focal point of the painting? **The Dragoons.**
5. What movement/motion do you see in the mural? And what does it mean/point to? **Forward motion of the horses- this shows the arrival of the Dragoons. Native Americans passing the peace pipe in the right bottom corner of the painting**
6. Who were the Dragoons and what role did they play in Westward Expansion? **The Dragoons were the first mounted soldiers for the U.S. Army. The role they played in Westward expansion included protection of travelers on the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails, as well as security for western forts. The Dragoons also interacted with the local native populations to try and make peaceful connections.**
7. What feelings does Bransby evoke by centering the Dragoons in the middle of the painting? **The Dragoons are placed in the center of the painting. On horseback they are higher than the rest of the subjects in the painting. The viewer's eye immediately goes to the mounted soldiers. This is to show the importance of these figures and let the viewer know that the main theme of the painting is about the Dragoons.**
8. What is happening in the right corner of the painting with the Native Americans? Why would Bransby include a portrayal of the Native Americans in the painting? **The group**

of Native Americans are sitting together in a circle. They are performing a ceremony and passing a smoking pipe. The Dragoons frequently interacted with the Native Americans in the West. Adding them in the painting helps to tell the story of the Dragoons' role on the frontier.

9. What activity is occurring on the left side of the painting? What story does the tools, materials, and unfinished building on the left side tell the viewer? **On the left side of the painting men are cutting down trees. They have stopped working to view the dragoons. These men are soldiers helping to build Fort Leavenworth. The men looking at the Dragoons help to signify the importance of the mounted men. The tools and materials help to tell the story of the building of Fort Leavenworth (1827).**
10. If you were creating a mural to tell the story of the Dragoons, what would you include? What would you want the viewer to learn about this era of history?

Questions: The Fork - The Oregon And Santa Fe Trail

1. What medium was used to complete the murals? What other artists have used this medium? **Bransby used a medium called egg tempera. This method mixes colored pigments with egg as a binder. Egg tempera was a ubiquitous technique during the early Italian Renaissance, when it was considered the standard for portable easel paintings.**
2. In what style are the paintings created? How does the style help tell the story? **The mural is painted in a realism style. It helps to tell the story by portraying actual historical events in a realistic style. It lays the story out simple and direct to the viewer.**
3. Color is used by artist's to influence and invoke feelings. What color scheme did Bransby use to portray the painting? What feelings do the colors evoke? **The colors used in the mural are dark, neutral tones. The colors give the overall effect of seriousness. The colors are made to evoke a sense of historical importance.**
4. What animals do you see in the painting? **Horses and Oxen.**
5. What is the focal point of the painting? **The focal point is the covered wagon being pulled by oxen.**
6. What movement/motion do you see in the mural? And what does it mean/point to? **The forward motion of the oxen and the wagons shows movement west. The clouds moving in the same direction as the oxen and wagons also suggests the movement west (headed west). The man pulling the rope behind one of the wagons to the right of the painting could symbolize a preview of struggles that will come about when moving west.**
7. Why were different animals used for different tasks? **Animals were useful to help complete different tasks on the frontier. Horses were fast and allowed soldiers to**

travel long distances at a fast pace. However they were high maintenance and needed plenty of grain. Mules were another animal used on the frontier. Mules were stronger than horses and more sure footed when it came to climbing mountains and hills. However mules tended to be stolen frequently. Oxen were useful for pulling large, heavy loads due their strength. They could forage natural grasses so they were low maintenance. However oxen moved much slower than horses or mules.

8. What was the main difference between the Santa Fe Trail and the Oregon Trail? **The Santa Fe Trail was used to move goods to Santa Fe and southwest. The Oregon Trail moved people to the West to start a new life.**
9. What was significant about the Oregon Trail? **The Oregon Trail was significant because it allowed large groups of people to migrate and settle in the West. The new settlements created by these emigrants became the foundation for the cities and towns today.**
10. In the painting, there are military Dragoons pictured on horseback riding along civilian wagons. What was the significance of the Dragoons at the time? **The Dragoons offered security on the trails. Dragoons would travel with wagon trains to offer protection to civilians as they traveled west.**
11. If you were creating a mural to tell the story of Westward expansion what would you include? What would you want the viewer to learn about this era of history?

Questions: Keelboats on the Missouri Founding of Fort Leavenworth

1. What medium was used to complete the murals? What other artists have used this medium? **Bransby used a medium called egg tempera. This method mixes colored pigments with egg as a binder. Egg tempera was a ubiquitous technique during the early Italian Renaissance, when it was considered the standard for portable easel paintings.**
2. In what style are the paintings created? How does the style help tell the story? **The mural is painted in a realism style. It helps to tell the story by portraying actual historical events in a realistic style. It lays the story out simple and direct to the viewer.**
3. Color is used by artist's to influence and invoke feelings. What color scheme did Bransby use to portray the painting? What feelings do the colors evoke? **The colors used in the mural are dark, neutral tones. The colors give the overall effect of seriousness. The colors are made to evoke a sense of historical importance.**
4. What is the focal point in the painting? **The men on the right side are one focal point of the painting, they are at the forefront of the painting. The open sky and clear water help to draw the eye to the right side of the mural were the detailed figured are located?**

5. What movement/motion do you see in the mural? And what does it mean/point to?
Ripple in the water show the movement of the keel boats- shows the arrival of Col. Leavenworth with the Dragoons. The clouds located at the top left move right- they are pointing toward Col. Leavenworth, the focal point of the painting.
6. What are the people in the picture doing? **Soldiers are carrying materials off of the keelboat and placing them on the shore. Other soldiers are trying to anchor a keelboat near the shore.**
7. Why were keelboats used to transport materials and goods? **Keelboats were designed to navigate rivers and shallow waterways. Keelboats were very effective in navigating the Missouri River.**
8. What was the significance of the location in which Fort Leavenworth was established? (Think about its location near the Missouri River). **In 1827 Colonel Leavenworth was sent to find a location to place a cantonment (military settlement). He was instructed to find a location on the Missouri River. The river helps to provide a natural protection on one side as well as provides fresh water and a mode of transportation. COL Leavenworth placed the cantonment on the west side of the river on a higher bluff in order to prevent flooding and disease. The fort would serve as a gateway and security to the west.**
9. What details did the artist include to tell the story of the foundation and construction of Fort Leavenworth? **The Missouri river depicted helps to establish the location. Soldiers are carry boxes and materials that would be used to construct and fortify the post. The military tube on the right helps to establish that it was a military operation, particularly for securing the west. Additionally no buildings are visible, only trees and a natural landscape. This indicates that this area has not been settled.**
10. If you were creating a mural to tell the story of the foundation of Fort Leavenworth, what would you include? What would you want the viewer to learn about this era of history?

Follow-Up Questions

1. Compare all three murals. How do these murals tie together to tell a cohesive story? **Even though each mural tells a separate story, when viewed together they tell the story of the U.S. Army's history in Kansas and its role during Westward expansion.**
2. In what ways does this painting fit your stereotype of the American frontier? How is it different?
3. How was Fort Leavenworth important to the development of the west? What significance does the fort play today? **Fort Leavenworth played an important role in the development of the west. The fort was established along the Santa Fe Trail to protect settlers and merchants traveling westward as well as maintaining peace with the American Indian tribes that still lived in the area. Today the post served as the Army education center, training and educating current and future Army officers.**
4. Eric Bransby studied under Thomas Benton Hart. Examine the works of Thomas Benton Hart. How are their styles similar? Different?