ART IMITATES LIFE:
JACKSONIAN AMERICA

Grade level: secondary
Work of art: Walking the Line (slide 7)

"Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds...The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and gait of the body..."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

William Sidney Mount is credited with having established American genre painting, the painting of scenes of everyday life. He was a storyteller in paint, creating scenes within the frame that mirrored the larger "story" of everyday life in the villages and homes of rural America in the Jacksonian era.

Determine the "characters" in this story. What relationships do they have with one another, and what roles do they play within their community? What clues has Mount provided to indicate their social position and how they live?

How does this painting reflect American society in the Jacksonian period? How does the scene challenge the notion of a democratic America?

How might this scene be portrayed differently today?

Adapted from work by Museum Classroom participants from Evanston Township High School