AMERICA PERSONIFIED

Grade level: secondary
Works of art: 
America (slide 8)
Bronco Buster (slide 11)
American Gothic (slide 16)
Trolley, New Orleans (slide 22)
M & H (slide 25)

Over the past two centuries artists have created images that, intentionally or unintentionally, personify America and express its values at the time.

Examine the works of art listed above as personifications of America. What does each image tell students about the time in which it was created and the “climate” of the country? Does the image present a positive image of America? Do students think that each image is “read” or understood by Americans today in the same way that it was when it was created? Do they think that all Americans today respond to the images in the same way? Discuss. Do any of these personifications of America still ring true in the 1990s?

Student Projects:

1. Have students find images that personify contemporary America in newspapers and magazines. What do these images “say” about the United States and its values?

2. Assign students an imaginary commission for a sculpture or painting that is a personification of contemporary America. What aspects of the United States will students address and with what props, costumes, backgrounds, etc. will students “dress” their personifications to convey their intended meanings?

3. American Gothic is one of the most replicated and mimicked images in the world today. Using the same two figures and basic composition of the painting, have students update the image so that it personifies America in the 1990s. What will the man and woman wear? What will the man hold in place of the pitchfork? What will the barn and home look like, as well as the environment in the background?