REALISM AND IDEALISM:
Art and Literature

Grade level: secondary
Works of art:
- Niagara Falls (slide 6)
- Yosemite (slide 10)
- Roof, Summer Night (slide 13)
- Tanks #2 (slide 15)
- Miner Joe (slide 17)
- Nighthawks (slide 19)
- Nightlife (slide 20)

Explore with students the concepts of realism (or naturalism) and idealism (or romanticism) in art and literature of nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. For example, have students study and compare:

Realism:  
- Roof, Summer Night
- Miner Joe

Works by:
- Stephan Crane
- Jack London
- Upton Sinclair
- Jack London

Idealism:  
- Niagara Falls
- Tanks #2

Works by:
- James Fennimore Cooper
- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Herman Melville
- Henry David Thoreau
- Walt Whitman

What elements do realistic works of art and literature have in common? What are the similarities in approach and/or style of artists and writers exploring idealism?

Student Project:

Assign each student the exercise of selecting a nearby rural or urban landscape and creating a realistic/naturalistic or idealistic/romantic work of art in response. The direction taken by the student must be evident in the final work and the student must be able to articulate his/her decision and process of creating. Students may also respond to the landscape by writing in the style of realistic or romantic writers studied in class.

Adapted from work by Museum Classroom participants from Barrington High School and New Trier Township High School