

A/MFA Arkansas Museum
of Fine Arts

COMMUNITY CREATED

AMERICA 250

LESSON PLAN

WHAT IS YOUR ARKANSAS STORY?



Visit arkmfa.org for full project details, to find inspiration, related programming, and more.

Thomas Hart Benton (Neosho, Missouri, 1889 - 1975, Kansas City, Missouri), *Clay County Farm*, 1971, oil on canvas, 32 × 22 in., Bequest from the Estates of Louise and Fred Dierks, 2012.008.001.

Community Created is sponsored in part by Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts and the Alice L. Walton Foundation.



COMMUNITY CREATED: AMERICA 250

COMMUNITY CREATED INTRODUCTION

Join the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts (AMFA) in celebrating Arkansas and America 250 through Community Created — an art project that invites everyone to contribute to a collective work of art.

Inspired by AMFA's painting *Clay County Farm* by Thomas Hart Benton, design a postcard that illustrates everyday life in Arkansas. Consider highlighting the diverse people, places, and stories across our state. What is your Arkansas story?

When your creation is complete, mail your postcard to the Museum. Your contribution will be added to an art installation on view at AMFA in summer 2026. Be on the lookout for your invitation to visit AMFA and see the installation. Let's celebrate Arkansas and America 250 together!

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project is open to all Arkansans. AMFA is excited for schools, community organizations, and individuals to help shape the installation as your postcards will join thousands of others to form a collective artwork installation that celebrates our state.



This lesson plan provides everything your class or group needs to design Community Created: America 250 postcards.

Please review the “Connect” section for directions on submitting or dropping off completed postcards. Participating schools and organizations will receive additional information about the installation date and opportunities. Thank you and we look forward to seeing you at the celebration.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

This interdisciplinary project can be customized and scaffolded to align to a variety of curriculum areas and grade-levels, including:

SOCIAL STUDIES, GEOGRAPHY, AND CIVICS

- Understanding human and environment interactions through place, regions, and culture.
- Exploring perspectives and historical periods in American history.
- Investigating civic and community participation.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- Using descriptive language to tell a story.
- Summarizing a point of view using evidence including non-textual information.
- Understanding the format of a postcard letter.

VISUAL ARTS

- Perceiving and analyzing artistic work.
- Synthesizing and relating knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- Generating and conceptualizing artistic ideas and work.

OBJECTIVES

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Describe and analyze visual artwork, including Thomas Hart Benton's *Clay County Farm*.
- Generate connections between themes in the artwork and their own lives, including geographical region and culture.
- Communicate ideas in written and illustrated formats, using observation, personal reflection, and research.
- Reflect on how culture and environment can impact personal and regional identities.

PART 1. DISCOVER



Explore Thomas Hart Benton's painting, *Clay County Farm*, with your students.

Start with a guided observation. Encourage them to look closely — such as look from the bottom of the painting up or by following where their eyes naturally move.

Then ask:

- What did you notice first?
- What is the story or subject?
- What details stand out?
- How are color and movement used?

Share background on Benton and the painting to help discussion:

- Thomas Hart Benton's paintings are defined by their dynamic movement, swirling lines, and rhythmic compositions that create a sense of harmony and drama. In *Clay County Farm*, Benton's signature style is illustrated through the repeated curved shapes and lines that weave the landscape together.
- As a key figure in American Regionalism, Benton depicted rural life during the Great Depression when Americans sought reassurance and familiarity. The Regionalist movement focused on American identity, storytelling, and everyday scenes. His 1971 painting, *Clay County Farm*, revisits these themes, presenting a nostalgic landscape emphasizing humanity's connection to the land.
- Born in Neosho, Missouri, Thomas Hart Benton maintained strong ties to the Midwest, shaping his focus on place and identity. His life-long travels across the region, including the Arkansas Ozarks and the Buffalo River, informed his entire career.

Deepen the discussion with questions like:

- Look at the man fishing — what might he see, hear, smell, and feel?
- How would you feel if you were transported into this painting? Describe the area where you would want to be and why.
- Do you have a place in nature or your community that makes you feel calm or peaceful?

PART 2. REFLECT

Arkansas is rich in history, culture, and natural beauty. Like Thomas Hart Benton, think about the people and stories that inspire you about your community.



PEOPLE

Who is someone from Arkansas — past or present — whose character, actions, or values inspire you?



PLACES

Where in Arkansas feels meaningful to you? How does that place reflect the spirit of the state?



STORIES

What Arkansas story, history, or tradition do you want to share with others?

Provide students all three prompts or choose one to guide the project. Facilitate a group discussion for reflection, then have students write or sketch to develop ideas.

- Writing activities: list making, creative writing, or research.
- Image activities: sketch, find, or take reference images. Encourage thoughtful image choices and deeper thematic connections.

From the discussion or research, students should identify 1–2 images that represent their response to the prompt and explain their choices. Reflect as a group on the range of perspectives.

Ask:

- How do these ideas celebrate Arkansas and its people?
- What did you learn from other students?
- What can we learn from exploring different cultures, regions, and histories?

3. CREATE

Join Community Created: America 250 by designing a postcard celebrating life in Arkansas.

- From the reflection, have students choose one community aspect or combine ideas to illustrate their Arkansas story.
- Students should add the name of who or what inspires them in their design or on the back of their postcard.
- Be creative — use any art medium.
- Use a Community Created: America 250 postcard or any 5.5 inch x 8.5 inch paper.

Visit arkmfa.org or email connect@arkmfa.org to request a pack of 30 Community Created postcards or visit the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts to pick up packs or individual postcards.

- Prefer to use your own materials? Any 5.5 inch x 8.5 inch paper will fit the project dimensions.
- When their creation is complete, have students fill out the contact form on the back before mailing. For homemade postcards, don't forget to include name, city, school or organization, and state region: Central, NE, NW, SE, or SW.



4. CONNECT

Share your postcards with AMFA to be included in the Community Created: America 250 collaborative art installation to be unveiled in summer 2026.

- Drop off or mail postcards to: Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, 501 East Ninth Street, Little Rock, AR 72202
- Schools and organizations are encouraged to mail all postcards together in one package or upload images through the online submission form.
- For mailed group packages, please include the contact form below to be recognized as a Community Created: America 250 Community Partner. The contact person will receive program information and installation updates to help partners stay connected.
- Prefer to keep original artworks? Visit arkmfa.org to submit postcards digitally.

Additional America 250 Activities:

- Visit AMFA and tour the galleries to see Benton's *Clay County Farm* and the work of other artists exploring America 250 themes. To schedule a Museum tour guide, visit arkmfa.org.
- Be sure to visit AMFA's calendar for additional America 250 events.

COMMUNITY CREATED: AMERICA 250 GROUP CONTACT FORM



Contact First and Last Name: _____

Contact Email: _____

School / Organization: _____

Number of Participants: _____

City: _____

State Region: ☐ CENTRAL ☐ NORTHEAST ☐ NORTHWEST ☐ SOUTHEAST ☐ SOUTHWEST