

Name _____

THE COUNTY ELECTION

by George Caleb Bingham

1. What is happening in this painting?

2. Find the following things and write where they are in the painting:
 - A white dog

 - A seated man in a top hat who might be sketching or writing

 - A man pouring drinks

 - A man with a bandaged head and a horse and rider:

3. Where is this scene taking place?

4. Describe how Bingham unified this scene so that many figures form a connected group.

5. How did Bingham create an illusion of depth?

6. Why are there no women in this scene?

7. Describe the different shapes of hats in this painting. What do the hats suggest about the occupations of these individuals?

8. What message does Bingham give in this crowded scene about the election process in American democracy?

9. Compare this election scene with a contemporary American voting scene.



Picture courtesy of the Saint Louis Art Museum

ANSWER KEY

Ask students to guess what is happening in this painting. Look for clues. It's Election Day, 1852. Most of these people are voters.

Ask students to find these elements.

A white dog: *It is located in the center.*

A seated man in a top hat who might be sketching or writing: *He is located in the center — that's the artist.* A man pouring drinks: *He is on the left.*

A man with a bandaged head and a horse and rider: *They are in the center distance.*

Where is this scene taking place?

It is located on the courthouse steps in a small Missouri town.

Ask students to describe how Bingham unified this scene so that many figures form a connected group. *He repeated shapes and colors and overlapped the bodies.*

How did Bingham create an illusion of depth?

He made shapes overlap and made objects in the distance smaller. Parallel lines in the buildings and table slant up and get closer in the distance. Distant objects are much lighter and bluer.

Why are there no women in this scene? *American women could not vote in 1852.*

Ask students to describe the different shapes of hats in this painting. What do the hats suggest about the occupations of these individuals?

The tall stiff hats with the small brims (top hats) probably belong to the politicians. Farmers and laborers wear hats with softer crowns and wider brims.

What message does Bingham give in this crowded scene about the election process in American democracy?

A whole community of men, from rich to poor, comes together to vote. Notice how no one figure is emphasized or made larger than others in this crowd. That suggests that all the votes are equal.

Have students compare this election scene with a contemporary American voting scene.

Today Americans vote with secret ballots in private booths rather than declaring their votes while surrounded by fellow citizens. Women and African Americans would be among the voters. Today campaigners are kept a legal distance from the actual polling place.