

### Learning to Look:

Introduce the painting to the students, guiding their looking and using open-ended questions to elicit their personal responses.

- ▶ *This is not the time to focus on the background information; save it until the students have shown interest in the information, generated some questions and tried to answer their questions through looking!*



**“Take a few minutes to look quietly at the image.”**

Older students could write down their thoughts while looking.

**“What do you see?”**

This is an opportunity for everyone to offer an idea, as each new thought enables everyone to see new things. Precise verbal descriptions help to clarify and identify details and usually allow for “correction” of any unsubstantiated ideas.

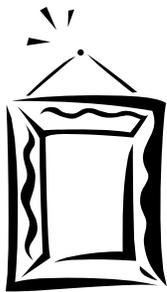
- ▶ *Teacher facilitates the discussion but should not be an expert on what “should” be seen, or how the painting “should” be interpreted!*

**“How does the artist help us to see that?”**

Colors used, placement of objects in the composition, use of light and shadow to highlight details, use of strong or dynamic lines, size of objects, and other decisions made by the artist can help us to “read” the painting.

**“What questions do you wish you could ask the artist?”**

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### Looking to Learn:

The suggested activities are strategies to enhance student observation and analysis skills while having fun looking and learning.

**Make copies of the worksheets** for use by individuals or groups of students.

**Project the image and outline selected features** on blackboard or large paper.

Students can then add appropriate details or “continue the story” in mural-form.

**Create a museum-in-the-classroom** (or hallway) so students can see each other's work and share their ideas.

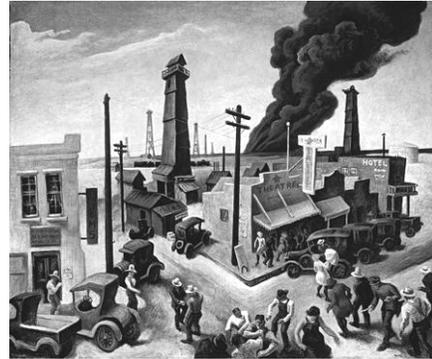
# Art Alive! – Lessons for the Primary Classroom

**Boomtown**, 1927-28

Thomas Hart Benton, American, 1889-1975

Oil on canvas

51.1



## **LET'S LOOK:**

What do you see?

What in the painting makes you say that?

How does the artist help you to see that?

What questions do you have?

## **STUDENT ACTIVITIES:**

### **Five Senses**

*Ask students to imagine and describe textures, smells, sounds, and tastes they “see” in the artwork. What specific details are they “reading?”*

*Using the line drawing of the painting, students can fill in the missing details that they think are important.*

### **Then What Happened?**

*Introduce the artwork as if it were a scene from a storyboard. Ask the students to imagine how the story might continue (group activity).*

*Using the storyboard worksheet, the students can draw additional or alternate scenes using details gleaned from the brainstorm session.*

### **Art in Action**

*Translate the painting into theater: students can take turns in the role of the characters, creating a few moments of dialogue or action.*

*Experiment with still poses and action scenes.*

*Photograph the students in their poses and compare with the painting.*

## **TARGETED SKILLS:**

description, details, vocabulary,  
point of view

story structure, details, sequencing

description, inference, prediction,  
point of view

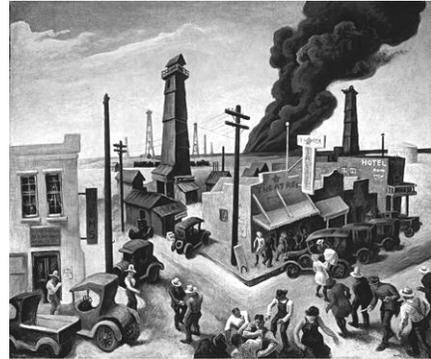
# Art Alive! – Lessons for the Elementary Classroom

**Boomtown**, 1927-28

Thomas Hart Benton, American, 1889-1975

Oil on canvas

51.1



**LET'S LOOK:** What do you see?  
What in the painting makes you say that?  
How does the artist help you to see that?  
What questions do you have?

## **STUDENT ACTIVITIES:**

### **Yesterday & Today**

*Ask students to imagine the painting as a scene from the past. What clues or details indicate that it is an historical scene? How might the scene have changed since it was painted?*

*Use the line drawing worksheet to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the scene. Students can draw in the details or use pictures from magazines.*

### **What's in a Name?**

*Introduce the name of the painting and ask students to find all the details that fit the title.*

*Ask students to rename the painting and explain their choice.*

*Divide the class into groups and ask each to create a new title based on a different characteristic of the painting: color, location, action, time, etc.*

### **Musical Moods**

*Ask students what sounds they hear in the painting. What colors or lines or characters are they "hearing?"  
Try to recreate various sounds from the scene.*

*Ask students what music they would use if this was a scene in a movie.*

*Listen to examples of music from the time and place of the painting.*

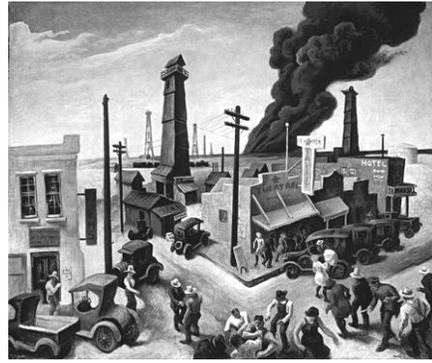
## **TARGETED SKILLS:**

details, description,  
vocabulary, inference  
compare / contrast

inference, details,  
prioritizing, description,  
point of view

details, compare/contrast,  
description

***Boomtown***, 1927-28  
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### **About the Painting:**

Through the eyes of the artist, we view a small town from an upper-story window. The background is dominated by a huge black cloud of smoke. Rows of oil well derricks march toward us from the background, up to the plain, shabby buildings of the town. Signs indicate a hotel and a theater, old black cars line the streets, and a small crowd of people rushes along the sidewalks or gather around a pair of fighting men. Most of the people wear hats of some type to guard against the strong sun, at the same time hiding their faces from our view. The black cloud of smoke spews from a carbon mill burning huge amounts of natural gas, seen as a troublesome by-product of oil, the real goal. The wastefulness and pollution that upsets our 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities was seen at the time as spectacular evidence of advanced technology and American opportunity.

### **About the Artist:**

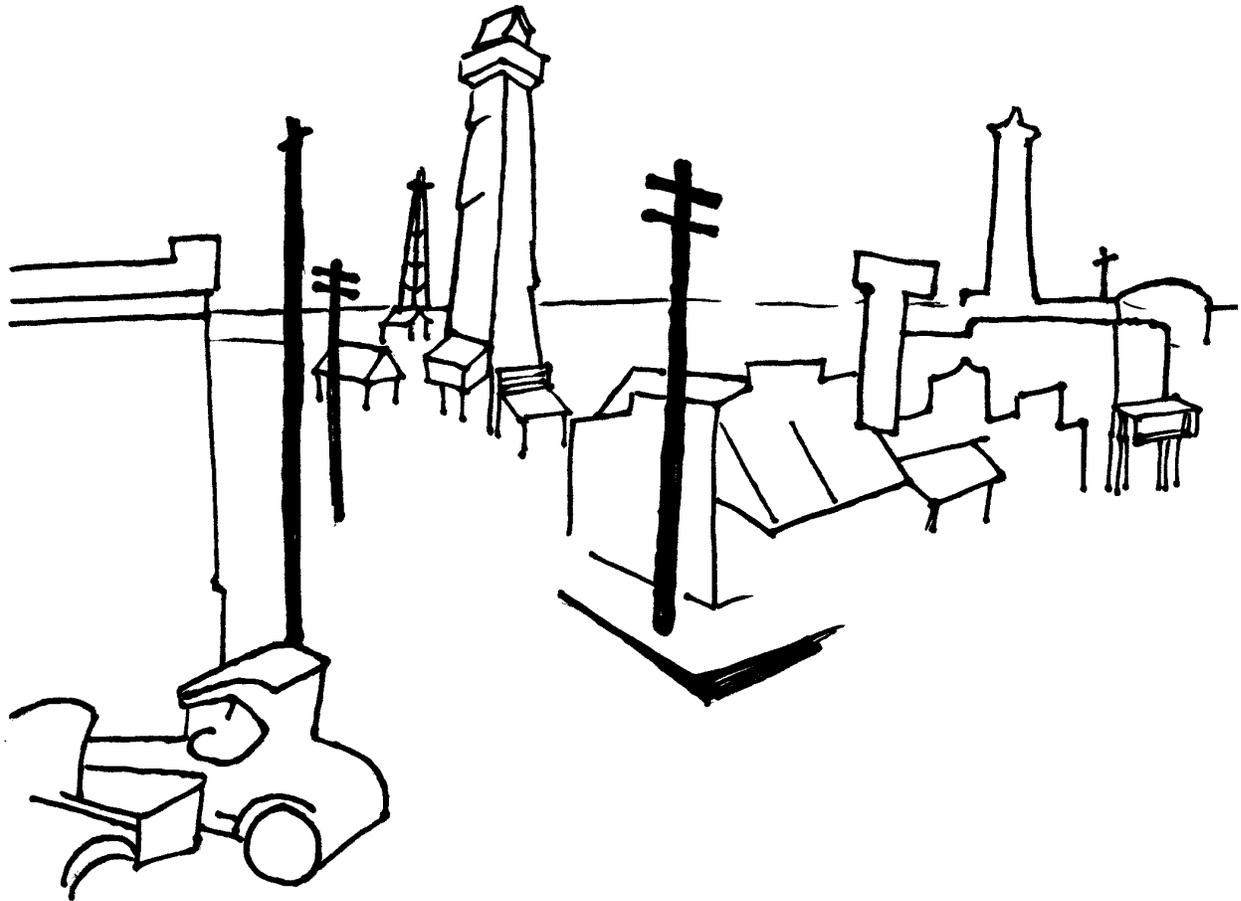
Thomas Hart Benton figured largely in an artistic movement known as “Regionalism;” an attempt to capture the energy, spirit, and traditional views of America. His training in the Art Institute of Chicago and in Paris only frustrated and discouraged him with technical requirements and academic critics. After working in New York City as a movie set designer and part-time painter, Benton finally found his artistic voice as a painter of real, recognizable images of American life.

### **Additional Information:**

In 1927 Benton visited the small Texas town of Borger which was dramatically changing from an insignificant crossroads to a booming oil city – hence, ***Boomtown***. Life was very rough in Borger, with the local government in the form of Texas Rangers dealing with gambling, bootlegging (illegal liquor production) and prostitution, problems that come with sudden opportunities, exploding populations, lonely men and fast money. Benton rented a second floor apartment with a view of Borger’s Main Street and sketched scenes of 1920s American progress.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

## ***Then What Happened?* A Storyboard Worksheet**

Sketch out your story scene by scene, just as movie makers do.

Develop your story idea by placing the painting in as a beginning, middle or ending scene, and then draw two other scenes that fill in the story.

THOMAS HART BENTON  
*Boomtown, 1927-28*

Story Title: \_\_\_\_\_

