

# AMERICAN IMAGES



## *Objective*

Students compare two John Lewis Krimmel paintings of the Fourth of July as a way to discuss images and perspectives of America before and after the War of 1812.

## *Standards*

Reading 4.A.2.b (grades 3 – 5)

## *Grade level*

3 – 5

## *Length of lesson*

45 – 60 minutes

## *Materials from trunk*

- John Lewis Krimmel's paintings:
- Fourth of July, Centre Square (1811/12)
- Fourth of July Celebration in Centre Square, Philadelphia (1819)
- Copy of the *Star-Spangled Banner* from Book: *By Dawn's Early Light* (extension/modification activity)

## *Materials from Classroom*

- Chart Paper
- Writing materials

## *Overview*

In this lesson, students ground a discussion of images portraying the Fourth of July with close observation and analysis of historic paintings by John Lewis Krimmel. They will consider how Krimmel's depiction of Independence Day changed before and after the War of 1812, and engage in a discussion of how his views might fit within a larger context of possible shifts in the understanding of **nationhood**.

## *Teacher Background*

John Lewis Krimmel (1786 – 1821) immigrated to Philadelphia from Germany in 1809. His images of the daily life of people living in Philadelphia are some of the earliest produced in America. Starting with portraits and miniatures, Krimmel soon began sketching and painting genre scenes—paintings

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that capture moments in everyday life (set in markets, homes, streets and taverns). Krimmel used direct observation of people, places and things to set the stage for his scenes. Sometimes categorized as humorous (or ironic), his scenes capture a wide range of figures engaged in various activities. His artwork is significant to historians of the early nineteenth-century for how specifically they capture everyday life. Many of Krimmel's paintings depict humorous subjects. Krimmel was the first American artist to portray free blacks in his work, as well as to depict Fourth of July celebrations. Krimmel drowned at the age of 35.

## *Procedure*

1. If you have not worked with Krimmel's paintings in a previous activity, discuss with students a little bit of information about John Lewis Krimmel – his body of work, his particular subject interests. Explain that students will be examining two specific paintings. Show the two paintings (if possible side-by-side) and share the titles and the dates they were painted. Ask students to look closely at these two paintings for one minute in silence (time yourself).
2. Draw a Venn diagram on the board/chart paper (two overlapping circles, where each circle represents one painting) and then discuss the two paintings, recording student thoughts in the Venn diagram to show what is similar and what is different in these two works of art. You may choose to use the following questions to prompt discussion: Where do these paintings take place? What is the environment or setting like? What do you feel the mood is (use adjectives)? How would you describe the activities in which people are engaged? Who do you think these people are?
3. End the discussion by reviewing the words and phrases in the Venn diagram. What conclusions can be drawn? Can we make any hypotheses about the point of view of the painter? Do you think he was trying to convey a message? What do you see in the paintings that make you say that? Do you think that the artist was capturing an actual event or working from memory, sketches and/or his imagination?
4. Remind students that some historians have called the War of 1812 the “second war for independence.” Why would this be? Could a sense of being “American” have changed between the **Revolutionary** and **Federal** periods? For whom? Could one interpret Krimmel's paintings, created before and after the War of 1812, as a reflection of a shift in the understanding of nationhood? Why or why not? Consider issues of diversity (cultural, economic, racial, gender) and how they could impact one's understanding of nationhood. Do you think Krimmel, as an immigrant, might or might not have a different perspective on nationhood than native-born Americans during this time?
5. Students choose one of the images and compose an art-inspired poem about it. For inspiration, they can use the adjectives and phrases in the Venn diagram, as well as notes from class discussion. For suggestions on poetic forms, see the Modifications section below.
6. Share poems. Students may choose to read their own aloud. You can also collect the work and read aloud poems at random. You may also consider having students trade their poems and read each other's work silently. Are they similar? Different? What was the process like for students?