George Bingham
Born: 1811  Died 1879

- Type of Art: Portraits
  Genre – a realistic illustration of everyday life.
- Mediums Used: Oil based paints on canvas
- Short History
  ✓ GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM was born in Virginia
  ✓ Father was prosperous tobacco plantation owner.
  ✓ At age 8, his family lost everything and moved to St. Louis, Missouri.
  ✓ At age 9, he was “inspired” by Chester Harding. A famous portrait artist.
  ✓ At age 12, his father died.
  ✓ At age 16, he began working for a cabinet maker.
  ✓ At age 22, he decided to make a living at painting portraits for people.
  ✓ At age 24, he began his 1st studio painting portraits for $20 each.
  ✓ At age 25, Bingham married and soon after had a child.
  ✓ In 1838, he studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts where he began his “genre” style of painting. Does anyone remember what genre means?
  ✓ In 1840 he and his family moved to Washington DC where he developed interest in politics and even painted John Quincy Adams.
  ✓ Four years later he moved back to Missouri where he remained for the rest of his life.
  ✓ Bingham continued to paint genre style paintings which portrayed ordinary people preparing the “Wild West” for civilization progress westward from the East coast.
  ✓ Later served in political offices including State Treasurer and was profoundly concerned with national issues and how they affected Missouri.
  ✓ He is considered one of the greatest American painters. His work shows an authentic view of American frontier life from river men and politicians to land owners and merchants.
  ✓ His work gives us a real feel for frontier life.

- Fun Facts
  ✓ George Bingham painted three presidents: George Washington, Andrew Jackson, and John Adams.
  ✓ Before finally dedicating his career to full time painting, he thought of being an attorney and even tried being a preacher.
- Key Words: American Frontier, Politician, Merchant, Wild West, John Quincy Adams, George Washington, Andrew Jackson.
Questions About Art

George Caleb Bingham

*Fur Traders Descending the Missouri*

Painted in 1845

1. What country do you think this painting is set in?
From the title, we can tell that the painting is set in the United States. Have the students look at the clothing, the type of boat and the features of the people for clues.

2. Who are the people in this painting?
They are a father and son. You probably do not want to share the original title of this painting, French Trapper and His Half-Breed Son. The art group that purchased it renamed it to give a more positive view of life in the west to curious Easterners.

3. What kind of animal is in the boat?
This animal has been identified as a fox, a cat, and a bear in various books. It might be fun to take a class vote since no one knows for sure.

4. This painting shows a scene from everyday life. What term describes this kind of painting?
This is a genre painting.

5. The elements of art are: line, color, texture, pattern, space, and movement.
What elements of art do you see in this painting?
The colors used in this painting are soft, muted hues. Line and movement can be seen in the current of the river. The clouds give the painting texture. Space (depth) is provided in the reflection of the boat in the river.

6. What is the mood of the painting?
What time of day do you think it is?
The mood is quiet and peaceful. They seem to be relaxing as they float down the river. The time of day is either early morning or evening. The sun is not overhead, and a mist seems to be rising up from the river which is common in the morning and evening.

7. How does the artist invite you into the painting?
It appears that we are eye level with the boat. Since the riverbank is not in the painting, we must be sitting low on the bank or maybe in our own boat. This perspective makes you feel like you are there.