



Colorful Characters

Chapter 7 - by Kay Hively

As George took a sheet of the newsprint and poised to begin a drawing, the large hand of Chester Harding spread out over the paper. Puzzled, George looked up into the face of his teacher.

Mr. Harding removed the pencil from George's hand and asked him a question. He asked his pupil what he really wanted to draw. What subjects did he like, the teacher wanted to know.

George thought for a moment, then said that he had been drawing flowers and trees and animals.

Once again, Mr. Harding asked what George really WANTED to draw.

George had no answer because he didn't fully understand the question.

Mr. Harding leaned back in his chair and asked George what made him happy. What, he asked, was his favorite

place to be? Who did he like to be with?

Now George had an answer. He was happy being down on the river. His favorite place was on the dock talking to the boatmen and listening to their stories, their music and the news they brought.



That, Mr. Harding told George, is what he should draw and paint. Then the famous painter told his student that a man should always paint the things and the people he knew and loved.

George thought for a moment. Then he said he had never drawn people because he didn't know how. Mr. Harding took the pencil and began sketching a face. He explained each mark of the pencil, showing how just one little twist of a mark can turn a smile into a frown. He drew eyes, and taught

George how to put sparkle and light in them.

For several hours George and his teacher sketched and talked. Even after supper, they stayed at their table and worked until both were too tired to stay awake. George listened and drew and admired some of the portrait work from Mr. Harding's canvas bag.

The lessons went on for hours each day, and every morning George could see his own work getting better. Eventually he had the courage to start drawing one of the colorful river boatmen. At first the hands and feet of the dancing boatman were too large, but Mr. Harding explained how to study the movement of a hand or a foot and then reproduce it on paper.

Three days passed quickly. On the fourth morning, Mr. Harding draped his canvas bag over his shoulder and paid for his room at the inn. Together, he and George walked down to the river.

As the boat carrying his teacher disappeared around the river bend, George knew what he would do the rest of his life. Although these lessons were over, a passion for art roared in his heart and mind.

George Caleb Bingham knew he had to be a cabinet maker for a while longer. But one day he would be an artist. He vowed to remember what he had learned from Chester Harding, and he promised to always paint the people and the things that were close to his heart.

Next Chapter: Making His Mark

Things to Think About and Do

1. Draw a picture of a flatboat like George would have seen. Make a list of 10 things you think would have been carried on a boat like this?
Would it be easier to travel east or west on the Missouri River? Explain your answer.
2. Do you think a painter should paint mostly the things he knows and loves? Should we all find jobs that let us do the things we love. Write an editorial to share your opinion. Use the Editorial page in your newspaper as an example of how to write an editorial.
3. Predict what you think George Caleb Bingham will do to reach his goal.

GLEs: R1H, R1I, R2C, W3C

Learn more about George Bingham by visiting the following Web sites:
<http://shs.umsystem.edu/famousmissourians/artists/bingham/bingham.shtml#boone>
www.georgecalebbingham.org/bio.htm
www.vangoghgallery.com/artistbios/George_Caleb_Bingham.html
www.binghammuseum.org/

Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both from Neosho, MO. Produced by the Missouri Press Foundation, ©2010