MURRAY, KY – Sixty-eight schools systems in west Kentucky recently received ‘Picturing America’ grants because of a collaborative partnership between Murray State University’s (MSU’s) Teacher Quality Institute (TQI) and the Office of Regional Stewardship and Outreach.

Awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, ‘Picturing America’ grants bring significant works of American art directly to classrooms and libraries to help citizens of all ages explore history and culture through our nation’s art. Grantees receive 40 large, high-quality reproductions of notable American artworks and a comprehensive resource book with ideas for using the artworks in all areas of study.

Constance Alexander, MSU/TQI faculty scholar in Arts & Humanities, researched the ‘Picturing America’ program and saw an opportunity to enrich learning in the region’s schools. Alexander approached Gina Winchester, director of the University’s Regional Stewardship and Outreach, for assistance with preparing individual applications for schools that expressed interest in the grants. As a result, the ‘Picturing America’ art reproductions will be available for use by teachers and students in west Kentucky schools in the upcoming school year and for years to come.

To extend the project further, TQI offered a 3-credit graduate course for teachers this summer. “Art & Writing Across the Curriculum” was presented at the McCracken County Public Library with twenty teachers from participating school systems. The hands-on training was designed to spark ideas for incorporating art and writing into
various disciplines, thus improving important communication skills while broadening knowledge in a range of content areas.

According to TQI Director W.A. Franklin, “The ‘Picturing America’ program is one component of TQI’s effective and multi-faceted outreach to improve content knowledge of teachers in the MSU service area.”

Participants ranked the class ‘excellent,’ and there was unanimous agreement that ‘Picturing America’ provides many strategies for improved instruction and enhanced skill development in every subject. One teacher who attended said, “I hope to take the creative aspects learned from the class and the ‘Picturing America’ artwork to make instruction more meaningful.” Another educator came up with ways her students could use visual art to compose word problems for math.

According to Winchester, “‘Picturing America’ is just one of many projects the university has been able to provide the region to enhance educational attainment, thanks to the support of the Legislature and the Council on Postsecondary Education.” Winchester continued, “We look forward to supporting the schools with additional projects throughout the year, as well as looking for new and innovative ways to partner with K-12 schools.”

A complete list of recipient schools and public libraries, by city and state, is available at the ‘Picturing America’ website:

http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/public_awards.php