



Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art

Start with Art

Hudson River School

Arts Integration Educator's Guide for Teachers and Parents

HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL :

American Romanticism:

Romantic painting in America encompassed two subjects: nature and the natural man. Both the landscapes and the genre paintings (paintings of common people in ordinary activities) were depicted idealistically; forests and landscapes were perfect, often majestic, and happy American settlers were cheerful at work or play.

Before 1825, Americans had considered nature to be menacing. The first thing that colonial settlers did was destroy vast tracts of virgin woods to make clearings for fields and villages. They admired nature only when it was tamed in plantations or gardens. However, a shift occurred after 1830 as America's natural wonders became a bragging point for settlers. As tides of settlers continued to push westward, the wilderness became a symbol of America's unspoiled national character.

This shift in sentiment was revealed in the arts. American writers such as Emerson and Thoreau preached that God inhabited nature, which dignified landscapes as a portrait of the face of God. Suddenly, in America, the artistic conventions of Europe became obsolete, and the grandeur of the American continent became the artist's inspiration.

The Hudson River School:

The Hudson River School, although never truly an organized school or group, was America's first native school of painting. The name was first applied as a term of ridicule around 1879, though neither the originator of the term nor its first published use is certain. The members of the National Academy of Design to whom the name was applied—Durand, Church, Bierstadt, Gifford, Whittredge, and Cropsey (among others)—and had worked and socialized in New York, the Hudson's port city, and had painted the river and its shores with varying frequency between 1825 and 1880. More importantly, they had all faithfully maintained a certain technique and composition consistent with those of Thomas Cole, who was considered America's first popular landscape artist. Cole and his followers would first record nature's marvels in sketchbooks and then return to paint the scenes within their studios.

The members of the Hudson River School used paint to deliver visual sermons on the glories of nature. They were the first to concentrate exclusively on landscapes, which replaced portraits as the focus of American art. America may have lacked picturesque ancient ruins, but its lush river valleys and awesome chasms and cascades were subject enough for the Hudson River School. Man ceased to be the primary subject matter of these images, and instead was included to reveal the monumental scale of the landscape. The Hudson River School painters' patriotic scenes of the

Hudson River area and other natural monuments conveyed a mood of worshipful wonder. They combined realistic detail with idealized composition in a new form of panoramic horizons that seemed to radiate beyond the painting's borders, suggesting America's unlimited future.

POINT-OF-ENTRY:

American Landscape:

The landscape of America is certainly different now than it was when Cropsey and other Hudson River School artists were capturing the spirit of the American Wilderness. In this exercise, students will observe the world around them, capturing what they believe to be the "Landscape of America" first in journal sketches, and then in a painting.

OK PASS (listed for 5th grade but applicable to additional grade levels): **VA 3.1-2; 4.1-3**

Supplies: journal with un-ruled paper; pencils; paints; paper or canvas; brushes

1. Observe and study the Hudson River School paintings at the Museum.
2. Look at Albert Bierstadt's journal for inspiration at the Museum (pictures also available at: <http://www.mgmoa.org/education/bierstadt-journal>).
3. Take your journal and pencil with you as you walk around the Museum, your neighborhood, your school, your library, and your town. Record several sketches in your journal that depict the "Landscape of America." Record people, animals, buildings, etc.—anything that you believe makes up America's landscape.
4. Take the sketches back to your classroom or home. Look at them all carefully and choose which elements of the sketches best communicate your ideal American landscape. You will combine these elements for your finished painting. For example: in the finished painting, you might choose to place the woman walking her dog from your neighborhood in front of your school next to the classic car that you saw in the park.
5. Draw the elements you have chosen from your journal onto the paper or canvas with a pencil. Be sure to draw lightly, or the graphite might smear when you paint.
6. Try to paint the elements as realistically as possible, honoring the traditions of the Hudson River School.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:

Science:

OK PASS (listed for 5th grade but applicable to additional grade levels): **LS 2.1-2**

Before students begin their journal assignment (above), suggest that they look at their surroundings with a "scientist's eye" to try and discover in their familiar surroundings something that they had never noticed before. In addition to drawing landscapes, people, structures, plants, animals and insects, students might also be encouraged to write in their journals. They could include written physical descriptions (including texture, size, and color) of the landscapes, people, animals, and objects. They could also include the sounds and smells that they observed while making the drawing (wind, conversation, music, barking, bees buzzing, etc.).

Back in the classroom, discuss what items in the journal are habitats and what items would need

habitats. Then, discuss the habitats and ecosystems present in the Hudson River Valley and in Oklahoma. How are these areas alike and how are they different? Do the similarities and differences correlate to the needs of the wildlife living in these two distinct areas? Students can visit the library and the computer lab to research these ideas, recording these ideas in their journals.

Then, students should each pick an endangered or threatened animal from either Oklahoma or the Hudson River Valley (see the Web Resources for sites that list these animals). Students should research the animal, its habitat, and the reason it is endangered, paying particular attention to how human interactions and natural phenomena have affected its lifestyle and how the decline of the population of this animal has affected other species that are part of its ecosystem. Students should record their findings in their journals and then present these findings to the class in a presentation that includes photographs/illustrations, graphs, and maps.

Social Studies:

OK PASS (listed for 5th grade but applicable to additional grade levels): **6.3; [L.A. W/G/U&M 2.1-2]**

During the 19th century, when Manifest Destiny reigned and American minds were filled with the concept of westward expansion, Albert Bierstadt was sent to visually record this untamed land. Students should examine the images of Bierstadt's sketchbook (available at <http://www.mgmoa.org/education/bierstadt-journal>). Bierstadt created these sketches when traveling through the western wilderness with U.S. government surveyors. However, Bierstadt recorded little of his personal thoughts on this journey.

In this assignment, students will pretend that they are Bierstadt on his western exploration. They should choose at least two sketches from his journal for which to provide a departure point for a fictional narrative about Bierstadt's journey written from his point of view. Students should familiarize themselves with the concepts of westward expansion and Manifest Destiny and read about Albert Bierstadt (see Web Resources) before beginning the assignment, making notes in their journals.

In the narratives students should decide whether to take a point of view for or against Manifest Destiny and westward expansion. Furthermore, they should include historical facts about the 19th century that will make their narratives realistic, keeping in mind that Bierstadt was completing his travels west between 1859 and 1873.

Language Arts:

OK PASS (listed for 5th grade but applicable to additional grade levels): **W/G/U&M 2.1, 2.3; OL/L&S 1.2, 2.1**

Have students study one of the Hudson River School paintings, *Autumn on the Hudson* by Jasper Francis Cropsey (available for download at <http://www.mgmoa.org/education/programs-for-schools/start-with-art>). Instruct them to write in their journals a five-sentence description of the painting. Encourage them to include a metaphor or simile in each sentence. You may choose to specify that the description contain a specific number of either metaphors or similes. Have students read their descriptions aloud.

Then, have the students do the same activity for the paintings that they completed for the art activity. Display the students' paintings. Have students read their descriptions aloud and allow the other students to guess to see which of the artworks matches the description.

Math:

OK PASS (listed for 5th grade but applicable to additional grade levels): **MPS 1.1-5; MCS 5.1**

There are many opportunities for the integration of science and math by means of data analysis in studies of endangered species, habitat devastation, estuary tidal activities, river transportation, and other topics integral to the Hudson River Valley. Visit <http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/36570.html> for applicable lesson-plan ideas.

Likewise, math can be integrated into both the social studies and language arts activities, suggested above, by having students construct timelines. Timeline subjects could include: the life of Albert Bierstadt; the growth and progression of the Hudson River School; the western expansion of the United States.

Finally, students could also be encouraged to use their journals when solving math problems. Math journaling is a great way to strengthen problem solving skills, encourage mathematical thinking; and enhance mathematical communication skills. Journal entries should be completed following the solving of a math problem. Prompts for entries could include questions such as: I knew I was right when...; if I missed _____ I would have to _____; the thing you have to remember with this kind of problem is...; tips I would give a friend to solve this problem are...; I wish I knew more about...; It took me _____ tries to solve the problem; I finally solved it by...; I could have found the answer differently by...; I used this method to solve the problem because....

WEB RESOURCES:

Learn more about the Hudson River Estuary, including its endangered/threatened wildlife at:

- <http://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/themes/science.php>
- <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4923.html>

For lesson plans focusing on the Hudson River Valley, visit:

- <http://www.teachingthehudsonvalley.org/>
- <http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/25386.html>

Discover which animals are threatened or endangered in Oklahoma by visiting:

- <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/endanger2.htm>

Learn more about the Hudson River School painters at:

- <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ihas/icon/hudson.html>
- <http://artchive.com/artchive/hudsonriver.html>

For more information about Albert Bierstadt, visit:

- <http://artchive.com/artchive/B/bierstadt.html>

