VIEWING NATURE:
Looking at the American Landscape

by Ryan Redmond, NEH Institute, Summer 2009,
an 8th grade Humanities Unit
Objectives: The Students Will Learn...

(History Standards)

- the causes, course and consequences of westward expansion
- the importance of the transportation revolution of the 19th century - canals, roads, bridges, turnpikes, steamboats, railroads, etc.
- the causes and consequences of the rapid growth of slavery in the south
- the characteristics of and impact of the Transcendentalist thinkers and writers
- the characteristics of and impact of the American landscape painters of the mid 19th century
Objectives, continued...

(Language Arts Standards)

- to integrate relevant information from discussions and interviews for reports
- to give oral presentations showing appropriate changes in delivery and using language for dramatic effect
- to identify and analyze main ideas and supporting details
- to identify, analyze and evaluate evidence used to support an argument
- to relate a literary work to artifacts, artistic creations or historical sites of the period
- to write reports based on research that include quotations, footnotes and a bibliography
- to write and justify a personal interpretation of literary, expository or informational reading
- to write multi-paragraph compositions that have clear topic development, logical organization, effective use of detail and variety of sentence structure
Guiding Questions

• Over time - specifically during the colonial era and during the technologically advancing, westward expanding 19th century - how have people in America viewed nature?

• In addition, how have people viewed human constructed landscapes?

• What do these different views tell us about the relationship between humans and nature?
The following slides and accompanying activities are meant to be possible instructive pathways and, as such, provide a curricular skeleton: many more activities exist than are outlined here. Because of this, there are countless activities addressing named and unnamed learning objectives just waiting to be implemented.
INTRODUCTION
Introductory Case Study 1: Chicago

• Two photographs of Chicago will follow.

• For each one, look, observe, and study.
  – Make Observations: What do you see?
  – Make Inferences: What do you think about what you see? What does this image say about Chicago?
While in edit mode, click on the document to the right for the full version.
Introductory Case Study 2: Appalachia

• Three photographs related to coal mining and coal energy production in Appalachia follow.

• For each one, look, observe, and study.
  – Make Observations: What do you see?
  – Make Inferences: What do you think about what you see? What does this image say about coal mining? About energy production?
Mitch Epstein, *Amos Coal Power Plant, Raymond, WV, 2004*
Introductory Case Study 3: Minnesota

• One photograph, which I took recently, will follow. It is of a landscape near where I grew up and is about two miles from where my parents still live.

• For each one, look, observe, and study.
  – Make Observations: What do you see?
  – Make Inferences: What do you think about what you see?
    What does this image say about Northfield, Minnesota? What does the image say about what I - the photographer, in this case - think about this area?
In late June of 2009, just finished with the school year, grades and comments done and handed in, I traveled back to Northfield, Minnesota to visit my parents. Northfield, ten miles north - fittingly - of Faribault, the town where I grew up, is alliteratively called the town of cows, colleges and contentment. People do seem relatively content, there are two colleges, and there are indeed cows. While downtown Northfield, small that it is, really doesn’t differ from many other towns of its size in Massachusetts, it’s when you step out of the neighborhoods and into the outskirts that the differences - and the cows, corn and soybeans - become apparent.

On the day that I took this photograph of a corn field and barn, I didn’t step out of the neighborhood exactly. I had hopped on my dad’s Kawasaki scooter, black with red rippling flames, in order to head out of town into the surrounding endless landscape of corn and soybean farms, chicken barns and cow pastures. You see, for me, even though I never lived on a farm, the agrarian landscape is what pulls me in every time I return to Minnesota. Now, I know very well that when I look at this landscape, I’m not looking at nature, that a 100 acre field of lanky corn is - if you squint hard enough - no different than a bustling city of skyscrapers stretching upwards.

And yet, I find myself drawn to this landscape just as much as I am to busy, noisy cities and the wilds of remote nature. Sure, I could have photographed the coffee shop in town where I used to hang out in high school, the bank Jesse James and his gang attempted to rob in 1876 only to be thwarted by vigilant citizens or the nature center where I spent hours watching turtles, hiking and swatting mosquitoes, but to me the rural, agrarian landscape is what defines this place, and what defines, in general, the Midwest: my home.
Your Town: Photograph and Essay Assignment

For this assignment - just as I have done with my photograph of Northfield, Minnesota and my three-paragraph essay about the photograph and why I took it - you are going to do the following:

1. Take a photograph that defines, in your opinion, the landscape of your town.

2. Write a brief essay - 3 paragraphs - about why the photograph you’ve taken characterizes your town and your view of it.
THE COLONIAL ERA
What follow are two paintings, both painted in the middle of the 19th century, which depict important scenes of early European exploration in the Americas.

- As you look at these paintings pay close attention to the depictions of the Europeans and the Native Americans.

- How are they depicted differently?

- What do these differences tell us about what the artist is attempting to say?
John Vanderlyn, *Landing of Columbus*, 1836/37
William H. Powell, *Discovery of the Mississippi*, 1847
Native American Views of the Land

• “To generalize about the complex belief system of hundreds of Native American tribes concerning nature is slippery business; the contours of culture are as variegated as the land itself. Yet there are common threads, foremost the indivisibility of the natural world from the human” (Chris Magoc, *So Glorious a Landscape*, 2002, p.3).
“Must We Be One..., Otherwise We Shall Be All Gone Shortly”: Narragansett Chief Miantonomi Tries to Form an Alliance Against Settlers in New England and Long Island, 1640s.

Acoma Pueblo Creation Myth (in Magoc, 20-22)
The town of Pomeiooc and true forme of their houses, covered and enclosed some w' mats, and some w' barks of trees. All compassed about w' small poles stuck thick together in stead of a wall.

INDIAN VILLAGE OF POMEIOOC (no. 344, cf. pls. 81, 134)
Village of Pomeiooc: Open Response Assignment

1. Read John White’s *Village of Pomeiooc* Introduction and Description.

2. Write a paragraph, using the open response method and rubric as a guideline, responding to the following question: Focusing on the center of the village and on the arrangement of the houses, what does the planning of the village tell us about the community in this village?
Open Response

4  The response is clear, complete, and accurate. The response includes relevant and specific information as evidence.

3  The response is mostly clear, complete, and accurate. The response includes relevant but often general information as evidence.

2  The response is partial. The response includes limited information and evidence and may include misinterpretations.

1  The response is minimal. The response includes little or no information or evidence and may include misinterpretations.

0  The response is totally incorrect or irrelevant.
English Views of the Land

• “By virtually every standard of Anglican-Christian society, Indians appeared barbaric...Folk mythology, the Judeo-Christian faith, and the Englishmen’s experience in a well-tamed environment together formed clear definitions of what was virtuous and moral, what was rational and civilized, and what was not. Wilderness was not” (Magoc, 6).

• At the same time, “The English view of the New England wilderness was not monolithic” (Magoc, 7).
Reading 2


(Read from “Being thus arrived in a good harbor and brought safe to land...” to “Let them confess before the Lord his loving kindness, and his wonderful works before the sons of men.”)
Bradford’s Wilderness: Open Response Assignment

1. Write a paragraph, using the open response method and rubric as a guideline, responding to the following question: According to Bradford, what is wilderness, how does he describe it and how does it relate to his mission in this new world?
Knife River: A Web Research Assignment

- Knife River: Early Village Life on the Plains
Savannah: A Web Research Assignment

- Savannah, Georgia: The Lasting Legacy of Colonial City Planning
THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND WESTWARD EXPANSION
• “Our Manifest destiny is to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”

– John Louis O'Sullivan, United States Magazine and Democratic Review (July-August, 1845)
Research Project on Industrial Change

Innovation Technology: Inventions of the 1800's

You will be researching and presenting information about engineering and the Universal Design Process. In doing so, you will research an important technology used in the United States from the first half of the 19th century. (We'll stick to the years between 1800-1850, give or take a few.)

During the first half of the 19th century, this country developed rapidly and industrially, going through what many historians call an industrial revolution. This revolution refers to a change from people making the things they needed primarily at home to goods being made by more complicated machines and in factories. Communication changed. Transportation changed. The production of various materials and goods changed. As a result, society also changed in many ways.

You are going to choose from the following list of technologies for your research.

1. Eli Whitney's Cotton Gin
2. The Steamboat in the United States (John Fitch, first U.S. patent in 1791)
   3. The "New Orleans" built in 1811, designed by Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston
   4. The "Washington," launched by Henry Miller Shreve in 1816
5. First Grain Elevator (1842), built by Joseph Dart, Buffalo, New York
6. Textile (Cloth) Mills
   7. Uriah Boyden's water turbine
   8. Paul Moody and Francis Cabot Lowell's Power Loom
9. John Cabot Lowell's factory in Waltham, Massachusetts
   10. Slater's Mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island
11. Any one of the Lowell mills
12. Eli Whitney's interchangeable parts for muskets
13. Howe's Sewing Machine

OVERVIEW:
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Is That My Phone?

Beginning sometime around the late 1980's or early 1990's, the world entered what is often called the Information Age. While the United States experienced massive changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution beginning in the early 19th century, during the growth of the Information Age, the country's change was just as dramatically. One key technology that has come to symbolize this information age is the cell phone, a device developed in the mid 1980's but not popular until the late 1990's.

During the Industrial Revolution, the country changed in the way that it communicated, transported people and things, and manufactured the goods used in their daily lives. The development of mass production powered by factories in places like Lowell, Massachusetts revolutionized the way cloth was made and changed society as a result. Young women went to work in factories, earned money, and developed a sense of freedom and livelihood outside of their homes. Cotton plantations and the slaves who worked them increased dramatically in number during the 1830's and 1840's to accommodate the drive to produce more and more cotton cloth. Small changes led to more changes and so on. In a sense, the revolution that took place was in society and life. Similarly, with the coming of the Information Age over a hundred years later, society and life were also revolutionized. Personal computers, the World Wide Web, email, online gaming communities, laptops, digital television, networking and cellular phones all produced massive changes in the way we live, interact, conduct business, participate in politics, establish communities, and learn about and participate in the world around us. While that old revolution was driven by the production of things, of stuff, this new age has been driven by.

EXAMPLE FIRST TWO PARAGRAPHS and GUIDELINES FOR EACH PARAGRAPH:

While in edit mode, click on the document to the right for the full version.
Changes in the Land: Viewing Hudson River School Paintings

• Look at the following paintings. For each one, look, observe, and study.
  – Make Observations: What do you see?
  – Make Inferences: What do you think about what you see? What does this image say about nature? What does the image say about the human relationship to nature? What does the image say about the relationship between technological development and nature?
Thomas Birch, *Fairmount Water Works*, 1821
Thomas Cole, *Lake With Dead Trees*, 1825
Jasper Cropsey, *Schatacook Mountain, Housatonic Valley, Connecticut*, 1845
Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, 1836
Thomas Cole, *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn*, 1837
Thomas Cole, *River in the Catskills*, 1843
Jasper Cropsey, *Starruca Viaduct*, 1865
Ralph Waldo Emerson, excerpts from *Nature*, 1836

**Nature**

by Ralph Waldo Emerson

A subtle chain of countless rings The next unto the farthest brings; The eye reads omens where it goes, And speaks all languages the rose; And, striving to be man, the worm Mounts through all the spires of form.

**Introduction**

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.

Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We must trust the perfection of the creation so far, as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy. Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth. In like manner, nature is already, in its forms and tendencies, describing its own design. Let us interrogate the great apparition, that shines so peacefully around us. Let us inquire, to what end is nature?

All science has one aim, namely, to find a theory of nature. We have theories of races and of functions, but scarcely yet a remote approach to an idea of creation. We are now so far from the road to truth, that religious teachers dispute and hate each other, and speculative men are esteemed unsound and frivolous. But to a sound judgment, the most abstract truth is the most practical. Whenever a true theory appears, it will be its own evidence. Its test is, that it will explain all phenomena. Now many are thought not only unexplained but inexplicable; as language, sleep, madness, dreams, beasts, sex.

Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE. In enumerating the values of nature and casting up their sum, I shall use the word in both senses; -- in its common and in its philosophical import. In inquiries so general as our present one; the inaccuracy is not material; no confusion of thought will occur. Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf. Art is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things, as in a house, a canal, a statue, a picture. But his operations taken together are so
Asher Durand, *Progress (The Advance of Civilization)*, 1853
Henry Farny, *Morning Of A New Day*, 1906
Henry Farny, *Song of the Talking Wire*, 1904
John Gast, *American Progress*, 1872 *(Analysis)*
The Hudson River School: Slide and Oral Presentation Assignment

Name:    Date:      Class:

Art and the American Landscape: The Hudson River School Landscape Painting Project

Each of you will be creating and presenting a 'gallery talk' about an artist and one painting done by him or her.

For this "gallery talk", each of you will choose a different artist. I know that, at this point, some of you may have overlapped and have researched the same artist. Fine. You've learned a bit. No harm done. But now you've got to make sure that you all have chosen different artists to present for the 'gallery talk'.

You will prepare your presentation using PowerPoint, and your presentation will consist of two parts: a discussion of the biography of the artist; and a discussion of one painting.

I. The biography part: for this part, each of you must prepare a minimum of 7 slides, which correspond to the seven questions below.

Among the questions you should research concerning the artist:

1. Where was the artist born and where did he/she live?
2. As a youth, did the artist show an aptitude for art and how was that demonstrated?
3. Where did the artist study art (example, in Europe, with another artist, in a special school)? What kind of lessons did he/she learn? What types of art inspired the artist?
4. How did the artist become interested in landscape painting?
5. What locations did the artist paint?
6. What is the style of the artist? For example, do the paintings seem realistic in a traditional way or are they abstract? Does the artist paint with distinct lines or with broad patterns or strokes? How does the artist use color: are the paintings dark, bright, subdued, pale, harsh? How does the artist portray light in the painting? Where is the primary focal point (the primary area of interest) in the painting?

Assignment Guidelines:
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See example slide show on Grant Wood (not a Hudson River School painter, just a guide and template!)
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

• Changes in the Land: Essay Assignment - Referring specifically to five of the paintings as well as Emerson’s piece, write a five-paragraph essay about how these paintings describe the shifting relationship between humans and nature and between the industrial landscape, the agrarian landscape and the wilderness landscape.

• Change Over Time: An Oral History Project - Interview an older family member about changes that he or she has seen over time, specifically focusing on changes in technology, its impact on life, and on changes in how land use in his or her hometown has changed.

• Greenspace: An Local Guide - Photograph, research, map, and write descriptions of green spaces in your town, either little grassy parks, wooded areas or undeveloped areas near the ocean.