George Winter, *Indians on the Eel River* (ca. 1850)

The First Nations have been a common subject throughout America’s history. Many early artistic depictions portrayed the peoples of the First Nations as “primitive savages” without much, if any, comment or interpretation. In *Indians on the Eel River*, George Winter successfully creates a meaningful and sympathetic scene through the formal qualities of art.

George Winter (1809-1876) was born in Portsea, England and studied art both in his hometown and in London. In 1830, he left for the United States with his family, continuing his training at the National Academy of Design in New York. As a member of the Hudson River School, Winter was committed to the creation of harmonious scenes by combining precise renderings of the natural features of a landscape with a suggestive, thoughtful narrative.

In 1837, Winter arrived in Logansport, Indiana, largely because of his interest in the culture of the Potawatomi and Miami tribes in the surrounding area. Winter established a relationship with these First Nations peoples and produced many drawings and watercolors of them and their environment. In the tradition of the Hudson River School, he combined his outdoor sketches to create a larger, idealized image in his paintings.

Meanings of *Indians on the Eel River* may be discerned with closer inspection. At first, the painting might seem to just be a rosy twilight view of a river scene, with a group of native peoples inserted into the foreground to add interest. However, closer examination reveals the artist’s concern, as documented in his writing, with the poor treatment of these people by the early settlers and the policies of the federal government.

In 1838, the Potawatomi, along with other First Nations tribes across the eastern half of the United States, were forced to leave their homeland and march to a reservation in Kansas. This process of removal and displacement of the Native peoples is known as the “Trail of Tears” because of the loss of their ancestral lands and the suffering endured on this long journey. In *Indians on the Eel River*, Winter presents a melancholic, somber scene, with the Potawatomi adjacent to a few dead and dying trees, confined on a small rocky island in the middle of a surging river. Gushing rapids break through the landscape in the distance and join the ensuing rush of this river. The entire painting is bathed in a pinkish tone, suggesting twilight or dawn, perhaps commenting on the future of the First Nations.
Questions to Consider

1. What is the main focus of this painting?
2. What is the mood of this painting?
3. Can you describe other images of Native Americans that you’ve seen. How do they compare and contrast to the people in this painting?
4. How has the artist suggested the idea of a landscape in the process of change?
5. How do you interpret the prominent trees in this painting? The rushing water?

Connections

Art: The Hudson River School, landscapes
Artists: Thomas Cole
Geography: The Eel River, Indiana
History: First Nations, the Trail of Tears, reservations, Manifest Destiny, Westward expansion

Further Reading


Teachers’ Extensions

Work: Indians on the Eel River (ca.1850)
Artist: George Winter
Location of work: Indiana University Art Museum (IUAM)

Vocabulary/Key Concept(s):
Trail of Tears (forced removal to reservations) Forced march of 15,000 Native Americans from the Southeastern United States to the Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma in 1838.
Reservations Land set aside by the United States government for Native Americans.
Westward Expansion After the War of 1812, exploration and settlement of the territory to the West, which had been greatly enlarged by the Louisiana Purchase.
Louisiana Purchase Territory purchased by the United States from France in 1803 extending from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada.
Manifest Destiny is the historical belief that the United States [man] was destined and divinely ordained by Jehovah to expand across the North American Continent, from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific Ocean.
Cherokee Nation Native Americans (including Miami and Potawatomi Nations)

Art Connection(s):
Landscape A landscape is a picture representing either natural scenery or an idealized pastoral scene.
Hudson River School A group of American landscape painters active from 1825 to 1875 whose works, influenced by European Romanticism, depict the beauty and grandeur of areas such as the Hudson River Valley, the Catskill Mountains, and Niagara Falls.

Geography Connection(s):
Logansport, Indiana
Eel River

Time Line Connection
1838

Resources
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Picturing America website:
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/

Connect to web links listed below by clicking on individual address or through the NEH site for additional resources at:
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/about.php?subPage=about_ad_res
http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=634
National Endowment for the Humanities, EDSITEment, *Everything in Its Right Place*, a curriculum overview to a four-part lesson on the structural elements of a painting, featuring Emanuel Leutze’s *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, for Grades 9-12.


National Endowment for the Humanities, EDSITEment, *Horse of a Different Color: An Introduction to Color in the Visual Arts* has two lesson plans on color; the first: In-Depth with the Full Spectrum, for Grade 9-12, introduces students to color basics, the color wheel, and how artists manipulate color to draw attention to the aspects of their work.


Getty Museum Education department Web site, *Teachers’ Programs and Resources*, is designed for K-12 teachers who wish to introduce art and art history into their classrooms. The site uses works form the museum’s collection along with pages A Grade-by-Grade Guide, *The Elements of Art* (teaching the formal components of art such as line and color) and a PDF file, *Lesson Template*.

Monroe County Public Library (MCPL) Bloomington, Indiana University
(812) 349-3050 – To Reserve Resource Materials

*Trail of Tears* by R. Conrad Stein  Call Number: J970.5 St (Children’s Collection)

*Indians of North America (Potawatomi)* Video Series  Call Number: J970.3 Pot (Children’s Collection)

*American History for Children: Native American Life*  Video Series  Call Number: J970.1 Nat (Children’s Collection)

*Native Homelands along the Lewis and Clark Trail*  Video General Audio Visual Collection  Call Number: 917.80424 Nat

Web sites:

**Native Americans**

[http://www.trailtribes.org](http://www.trailtribes.org)

trailtribes.org – Traditional and Contemporary Native Culture (information)

includes: Films, pdf files, discussion questions, maps, culture and history information

*[http://www.brainpop.com/about/](http://www.brainpop.com/about/)*


BrainPOP animated curriculum-based content that supports educators and engages Students. Information, movie, and interactive materials for the study of the Native American Culture/Nations

**Trail of Tears**


*The Trail of Tears and Forced Relocation of the Cherokee Nation*  

Includes: lesson plan, inquiry questions, historical context, maps, readings, images, activities, supplementary resources

[http://www.nps.gov/trte](http://www.nps.gov/trte)

Trail of Tears National Historic Trail (U.S. National Parks Service)  

Includes maps of the route taken by Native Americans  pictures of the Trail of Tears as it appears in present time.


Westward Expansion (1807-1912): Indian Removal

**Westward Expansion**


Westward Expansion (1807-1912) Includes: General summary, historical context, timeline, study questions, additional resources
American Westward Expansion Includes: maps, images and information of the Lewis and Clark 1804 Expedition and the Santa Fe Trail in 1821.

Westward Expansion WebQuest Includes: Introduction, lesson plan, and extension activities

Manifest Destiny

Includes: General information, images, themes and influences, effect on Continental expansion, additional resources

Hudson River School

Includes: literature, Science Connections, lesson plans, activities, power point presentations, images of artists including Jasper Cropsey, Asher Durand, and Thomas Cole, and additional resources

Lesson Plans Relating to Nature: Taming the Wild- Landscape painting and the Hudson River School – Jasper Cropsey and Thomas Cole

Grades 6-8 – Subject Areas: Language Arts, Science. Activity: Writing Painting, Discussion. Additional resources and images provided

Eel River

Information, location and map of the Eel River

Indiana Academic Standards – Visual Arts Grade/Level 5

RESPONDING TO ART: History

Standard 1

Students understand the significance of visual art in relation to historical, social, political, spiritual, environmental, technological, and economic issues.

5.1.1 Identify the relationship between a work of art and the geography and characteristics of the culture, and identify where, when, why, and by whom the work was made (Focus: North America).

5.1.2 Identify and compare works of art and artifacts with similar functions.

5.1.3 Identify themes and symbols used in works of art and artifacts throughout history that portray universal ideas and beliefs.

RESPONDING TO ART: Criticism

Standard 3

Students describe, analyze, and interpret works of art and artifacts.

5.3.1 Analyze the artist’s use of sensory, formal, technical, and expressive properties in a work of art.

5.3.2 Construct meaning in the work based on personal response, properties found in the work, and background information on the context of the work.

5.3.3 Use appropriate art vocabulary.
Standard 4
*Students identify and apply criteria to make informed judgments about art.*
5.4.2 Apply criteria based on properties found in the work and research from the historical context of the work to make informed judgments.

**RESPONDING TO ART: Aesthetics**

Standard 5
*Students reflect on and discuss art theories and aesthetic issues concerning the meaning and significance of art.*
5.5.1 Identify problems or puzzles in a work of art or aesthetic issue, construct a hypothesis, and evaluate alternate hypotheses.

Standard 6
*Students theorize about art and make informed judgments.*
5.6.1 Identify artwork made from the artist’s philosophy that art is at its best when it moves people to act for the betterment of society (instrumentalism).
5.6.2 Understand that personal preference is one of many criteria used in making judgments about art.

**INTEGRATED STUDIES**

Standard 13
*Students identify and make connections between knowledge and skill in art and all other subject areas such as humanities, sciences, and technology.*
5.13.1 Compare characteristics of a theme, historical period, or event through the multiple perspectives of different disciplines.
5.13.2 Create products or performances (debates, critiques, papers) that communicate in-depth knowledge gained through integrated study of a theme, historical period, or event.

**National Academic Standards – Visual Arts – Level 5**

**Content Standard #4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures**

*Achievement Standard:*
Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures
Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts
Students analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art