Jasper Cropsey, *American Harvesting* (1851)

The subject of landscape has fascinated American artists since the Revolutionary era. In contrast to the decaying and depleted landscapes of over-civilized Europe, these New World artists saw America as a place of boundless possibility, purity, and freedom. Many of the paintings of Jasper Francis Cropsey (1823-1900) and his colleagues showcased the majesty, bounty, and optimism that many Americans felt with the new democracy.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a group of American landscape artists, known as the Hudson River School, rose to prominence. Following in the footsteps of the great American landscape painter Thomas Cole, these artists examined the uncorrupted countryside and virgin wilderness around the Hudson River Valley in New York State with the sharp eyes of naturalists and the hearts of storytellers.

Cropsey was one of the more famous painters of the second generation of this school of painters. Born on a farm near Staten Island, Cropsey began his artistic training at age fourteen with an extensive apprenticeship under the New York architect Joseph Trench. Here, he studied watercolor and was trained in architectural drawing. Trench taught Cropsey to include landscape in his architectural renderings as well as a balance of civilization and wilderness, which soon became a recognizable feature of the artist’s style until his death in 1900.

In *American Harvesting*, Cropsey presents America as a pure and prosperous Eden, where, as if by divine mandate, human beings live effortlessly as masters of pristine nature. Here, progress is unimpeded, and the wilderness of the beautiful American landscape inevitably yields to the civilization of the American family farm.

For Cropsey, painting landscapes was much more than a pleasing representation of natural geography. Based on traditional landscape methods, Cropsey made precise drawings directly from nature and combined them to create a larger, composite landscape painting. *American Harvesting* reflects the Romantics philosophical conviction that the sublimity of God is revealed through natural features such as infused light, magnificent clouds, and expansive vistas. Highly influential and critically acclaimed in its day, this idyllic depiction of rural farm life was widely reproduced and cherished as an embodiment of hope and prosperity.
Questions to Consider

1. Name the features of the painting that are “natural” and those that show human presence.
2. How has the artist organized spatial recession in this landscape?
3. How does Cropsey focus your attention in this painting?
4. What might the people near the fence be contemplating?
5. What feeling does this landscape inspire? What features make you feel this way?
6. What time of day is captured in this painting?
7. What features of the painting lend a “spiritual” quality?
8. How might this painting relate to 19th Century idea of westward expansion?
9. What might this painting tell you about Cropsey’s thoughts about the relationship between man and nature?

Connections

Arts: Landscapes, naturalism, Thomas Cole, Joseph Turner.
Geography: The Hudson River Valley.
History: 19th Century America, Westward expansion.
Politics: Nationalism, Manifest Destiny.

Further Reading

Work: American Harvesting (1851)
Artist: Jasper Cropsey
Location of work: Indiana University Art Museum (IUAM)

Vocabulary/Key Concept(s):
- **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 ‘The God of Christianity’ to expand across the North American Continent, from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific Ocean.
- **Nationalism**: Strong feeling of pride in one’s country.

Art Connection(s):
- **Landscape**: 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.
- **Naturalism**: An objective, even scientific interest in detailed depictions of the natural world; Sometimes this term is used interchangeably with realism.
- **Romanticism**: A nineteenth-century international movement in both art and literature that rejected the order and restrictions of neoclassicism in favor of individual freedom of expression and greater emphasis on feeling. Romantic painting tends to be rich in color, mood and atmosphere.

Geography Connection(s):
- **New York State**
- **Hudson River Valley (New York)**

Time Line Connection:
1851
Resources:
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) *Picturing America* website:  
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/

Connect to web links below by clicking on individual address or access 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.

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=641  
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.

http://www.getty.edu/education/for_teachers/building_lessons/  
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.

http://www.nga.gov/education/amercan/figure.htm  
National Gallery of Art Web site, *Themes in American Art*, covers topics such as abstraction, historical subjects, narrative art, and portraiture; illustrated by works in the collection. Includes a glossary.

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=620  
National Endowment for the Humanities, EDSITEment, *Realistic Impressions: Investigating Movement in the Visual Arts*, for Grade 9-12, teaches students about the meaning of the terms “movement” in the visual arts, and covers the major movements of Impressionism, Realism, and Romanticism, with links to other movements in the arts.

Web sites:
http://www.iub.edu/~iuam/iuam_home.php  
Indiana University Art Museum web site  
Click on Teach and Learn then E-Learning: Scroll down to Second Grade Web Module  
Includes: interactive format for *American Harvesting*, information, images and pdf file for teacher resources. Website also includes teacher resources for Looking and Talking About with Students and guide to the IUAM on-line collection.

Westward Expansion  
http://www.sparknotes.com/history/american/westwardexpansion/  
Westward Expansion (1807-1912) Includes: General summary, historical context, timeline, study questions, additional resources

http://www.americanwest.com/pages/awexpans.htm  
American Westward Expansion Includes: maps, images and information of the Lewis and Clark 1804 Expedition and the Santa Fe Trail in 1821.
http://www.radford.edu/~sbisset/westward.html
Westward Expansion WebQuest Includes: Introduction, lesson plan, and extension activities

Manifest Destiny
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifest_Destiny
Includes: General information, images, themes and influences, effect on Continental expansion, additional resources

Hudson River School
http://education.yahoo.com/reference/encyclopedia/entry?id=22690
Information and images of the group of American landscape painters, working from 1825 to 1875
http://www.projectview.org/HudsonRiverSchool/ActivitiesandLessons.htm
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

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.

Standard 2
Students recognize significant works of Western and non-Western art and understand the chronological development of art movements.
5.2.1 Identify and be familiar with a range of selected works of art identifying artists, culture, style, and period.
5.2.2 Identify distinguishing characteristics of style in individual artists work and art movements.
5.2.3 Begin to identify works of art and artifacts from major periods or movements of Western art and place on a chronological time line.

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.
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.
5.5.2 Identify and analyze a variety of well reasoned points of view on aesthetic issues (censorship, plagiarism) and develop a personal point of view.

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.

Standard 14
Students understand the connections between many art forms including dance, theater, music, visual arts, and media arts.
5.14.1 Compare characteristics of a theme, historical period, or event through the multiple perspectives of different art forms.

National Academic Standards – Visual Arts – Level 5
Content Standard #3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
Achievement Standard:
Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values, and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks

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

Content Standard #5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others
Achievement Standard:
Students compare multiple purposes for creating works of art
Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry
Students describe and compare a variety of individual responses to their own artworks and to artworks from various eras and cultures

**Content Standard #6:** Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

*Achievement Standard:*
Students compare the characteristics of works in two or more art forms that share similar subject matter, historical periods, or cultural context
Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts

*Additional Resource for NACD Poster Contest 8-07 Page 5 of 7*