

Pre-Visit Lesson #1: A Man of His Time

For standards in your state see: <http://www.educationworld.com/standards/state/toc/index.shtml#math>

Grades: 5-12

Time Required: Two class periods

National Curriculum Standards:

- NSS-USH.5-12.4 ERA 4: EXPANSION AND REFORM (1801-1861)
- NL-ENG.K-12.8 DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS
- NL-ENG.K-12.7 EVALUATING DATA
- NL-ENG.K-12.5 COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Objectives:

- Students will become acquainted with the historical background of Thomas Cole's artwork
- Students will gain an understanding on how Thomas Cole reacted to the cultural, political, social, and environmental movements around him.

Materials:

- Paper and pencil
- Thomas Cole: A Brief Biography (handout)
- Computer time (internet access)

Student Instruction:

1. Begin instruction with a quick warm-up activity to get the creative juices flowing. Ask students to take out a piece of paper. Ask them to close their eyes and take a few seconds to make a random scribble on their paper. Try to have the scribble fill the paper. This should only take a few seconds. All papers should then be shifted to the person behind the student. They will then have five minutes to make a drawing out of the other person's scribble.
2. Begin a discussion about creativity by asking the question: *"As you were deciding how to convert or transform your classmate's scribble into a recognizable form, what was your thought process? How were you inspired? Where did your idea(s) come from?"* Have students brainstorm what creativity means and where it comes from by using some form of a graphic organizer, like a word web.
3. Students should arrive at the idea that creativity comes from both internal and external sources that are often unique to the person. Then inform your students that you will be going to a local museum to visit an exhibit called *Wild Land: Thomas Cole and the Birth of American Landscape Painting*. Ask students if they can guess what the exhibit is about by the title.
4. Give you students the brief biography of Thomas Cole (handout) to read. Follow their reading with the following discussion: *Cole was a landscape artist from the early 1800s who drew his creative inspiration from the world around him. He*

was largely inspired by the natural world, or the Wild Land, as the title suggests. His artistic work was also a product and a reflection of the time period in which he lived.

5. To get a better understanding of the historical time period that produced Thomas Cole and his unique approach to painting and viewing the world around him, students will be constructing a mock newspaper highlighting the important social, political, and environmental events of the early 19th century.
6. Divide students into 5 work/research groups. Assign each group one of the following significant historical events of Cole's time:

Westward Expansion
Jacksonian Democracy
Early Industrialism
Art and Literature
Immigration

7. Give students the following directions:
 - Each team member should decide on a "topic-within-the-topic" to research and write about. In other words, each student will determine a specific event or phenomenon related to their group's broader topic that would have had the most significant impact on someone like Thomas Cole. For instance, students in the Westward Expansion group might choose a specific topic like Indian Removal and the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Early Industrialism group members could research the tanning industry or the opening of the Erie Canal.
 - Each student should research their topic and write a 1-2 page article as if they were writing for a newspaper in the early 19th century. One or two images (with captions) should accompany their story. Each student should be prepared to share their story with the rest of their group at the next class period.
8. During the next class period, assemble students into their working/research groups. Have each group read and pass around the stories in order to decide which story should be given "front page" priority of their section. The "front page" story is the feature article/event that student groups hypothesize would have had the greatest impact on Thomas Cole, a young English immigrant trying to make his way in New England in the early 1800s.
9. Each working/research group should then elect a spokesperson to present their mini-newspaper to the class at large. They should be able to state their reasoning for choosing their front page story. After each working/research group has presented, ask the class what story they would choose to feature on the front page of the entire newspaper and their reasons for choosing that event/phenomenon.
10. As teacher, you will also serve as editor-in-chief of your classroom's newspaper. Assemble the newspaper and make copies for each student.

11. In keeping with the newspaper theme, you may wish to ask each of your students to write an art critic's review of Thomas Cole's work after visiting *Wild Land: Thomas Cole and the Birth of American Landscape Painting*.

Thomas Cole: A Brief Biogaphy
(taken in part from www.thomascole.org)

Thomas Cole was born in 1801 at Bolton, Lancashire in Northwestern England and emigrated with his family to the United States in 1818. During the early years Cole lived for short periods in Philadelphia, Ohio, and Pittsburgh where he worked as an itinerant portrait artist and assisted his father in his floor cloth business.

In 1825, Cole discovered the haunting beauty of the Catskill, New York wilderness. His exhibition of small paintings of Catskill landscapes came to the attention of prominent figures on the New York City art scene including Asher B. Durand, who became a life-long friend, and his fame spread.

In November of 1832, Cole mounted an exhibition of his European paintings, which aroused considerable public interest. Shortly thereafter, Cole first established his rural studio in Catskill, New York, when he rented a small outbuilding at Cedar Grove.

During the early 1830s, Cole met Luman Reed, a native of New York and a successful local merchant who had moved to New York City and opened a private art gallery there. He became Cole's patron, and for Reed, Cole produced one of his best-known and popular series of paintings, known as *The Course of Empire*.

During the winter of 1835-1836, Cole stayed in Catskill working on *The Course of Empire*. During this period Cole began to express strong views concerning the impact of industrial development and its negative consequences for the wild beauty of the Catskills landscapes that were the source of inspiration for his work. The growth of the railroad by "copper-hearted barbarians" was of particular concern. In 1836, both Cole's father and his patron Luman Reed died, but there was happiness in that year as well.

On November 22, 1836, Thomas Cole and Maria Bartow were married in the west parlor at Cedar Grove in Catskill, New York, which became Cole's home. Many of the great painters and literary figures of the day began to visit the Coles at their Catskill home. Among the calling cards in the Cole papers of the Albany Institute of History and Art is that of James Fenimore Cooper.

By February of 1843, Thomas Cole was realizing that he had become a public figure and commented on this in his letters. Cole was also having financial troubles. Throughout the subsequent years, he continued to worry about selling his paintings. During this time, a number of Cole letters and poems were published in New York papers and magazines. In May of 1844 Cole agreed to accept Frederic E. Church as a student in his studio. Church's father agreed to pay \$300 per year for young affluent Church's instruction.

Thomas Cole died at the age of 47 on February 11th, 1848. His legacy long outlives his abbreviated life. Cole inspired the formation of the Hudson River School, a group of artists who followed his style and his celebration of the American wilderness.