

Virtual Visit: Outline

Thomas Cole

Landscape (Landscape with Tree Trunks), 1828

Content Areas

Social Studies, History, Visual Art, English/Language Arts

Essential Question

How does a landscape painting made in 1828 by European-American artist Thomas Cole both reinforce and intervene in settler-colonial ideas about the environment and Native American people?

Overview

A museum educator leads students to look at *Landscape (Landscape with Tree Trunks)*, a painting made in 1828 by Thomas Cole. After a guided visual analysis with a discussion of the socio-political context, students write their opinions about the painting's underlying ideas.

To compare depictions of Native American people in European-American art, two more paintings, *Native American Sachem* and *The Landing of Roger Williams* in 1936 are introduced to interrogate the myth of the vanishing Native. Students identify ways Cole's painting reinforces this myth. They then synthesize their insights by writing a museum label for the painting and explore more perspectives by researching and reflecting on objects of their choice by Native American artists.

Objectives

- Students will cite visual evidence to back up written opinions.
- Students will synthesize visual observations, information and interpretations about the painting's context by writing a museum label.
- Students will research and write reflections on an object made by a Native American artist of their choice.

Materials

Lined paper and a pen or pencil.

Key Terms

- Contrast
- Stereotype
- Manifest destiny
- Myth of the vanishing Native
- Industrial Revolution
- Settler colonialism
- Genocide

Discussion/Support

Teachers can support students by checking for comprehension and prompting students to reflect and respond to questions asked during the virtual visit. They can assist students to complete the assignment and help students share their work with each other. Work can be shared online ([#RISDMuseum](#) [#museumfromhome](#) [#TeachingwithArt](#)) or with the RISD Museum at teachers@risd.edu.

Evaluation of Student Work

Students will write or share meaningful responses to questions about an artwork during the virtual visit. Students will synthesize their learning by writing a museum label. Students will research and reflect on an object of their choice by a Native American artist.

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Do you think this painting is spreading a message of hope, a message of despair, or some of both? Use visual evidence to support your opinion.

How could Thomas Cole's painting perpetuate the myth of the vanishing Native? Use visual evidence to support your ideas.

Look at the painting and your written responses to create a new museum label. Your label should be one paragraph (about 80-100 words) and include:

- A simple visual description of the artwork (what?)
- Facts about the context in which it was made (where? when? who?)
- Ideas that Thomas Cole may have been exploring (why?)

Find 2 examples of creative work by Native American artists in different media. One place to start is by searching "Native" on risdmuseum.org/collection. Taking inspiration from one of the creative works, write a short paragraph about what the work reveals about its maker's context, relationship to nature, or sense of self.

Works in this Lesson

Thomas Cole, [Landscape \(Landscape with Tree Trunks\)](#), 1828.

John William Hill, [View on the Erie Canal](#), 1829.

William James Bennett, [View of South Street, from Maiden Lane, New York City](#), c. 1827.

English or European, [Native American Sachem](#), ca. 1700.

Alonzo Chappel, [The Landing of Roger Williams in 1636](#), 1857.

Haudenosaunee (Iroquois); Native North American, [Glengarry cap](#), 1800s.

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, [Sticky Mouth](#), 1997.

More Activities and Resources

Teaching Notes: [Imagining the Americas p. 11](#)

Virtual Visit: Paul Scott, [New American Scenery](#)

Audio: [Lorén Spears on the Native American Sachem](#)

Article: [Kunneepaumwuw ut Nahhiggananeuck aukéashut / You are standing on Narragansett lands.](#)

Article: [Assembling History: The Landing of Roger Williams in 1636, Manual / Issue 6, p. 30](#)