

# THE CIVIL WAR

AND *American Art*

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**





## Smithsonian American Art Museum

Dear Educator:

At the Smithsonian American Art Museum we use art to teach the history of America. *The Civil War and American Art* illuminates a major turning point in that history that still resonates today. Through this exhibition, students will see how Americans experienced the war, from the first hint of a storm on the horizon to the volcanic explosion of the war itself. Genre paintings by Winslow Homer and Eastman Johnson will show them that with the abolition of slavery African Americans faced new questions and choices. Students will see how the war devastated the South and tarnished the vision of the East as a “New Eden,” inspiring an interest in the vistas of the American West.

We offer this guide to help you prepare for your visit, either actual or virtual, to the exhibition. With these resources, students will learn to be historians—analyzing primary source material, engaging with the past, and asking complex questions. The print guide will be provided to all teachers who attend Civil War professional development programs, to groups that have scheduled school field trips at [americanart.si.edu/education/tours](http://americanart.si.edu/education/tours), and to teachers who request them by email at [AmericanArtEducation@si.edu](mailto:AmericanArtEducation@si.edu). An online version of the guide is available at [americanart.si.edu/education/resources/guides](http://americanart.si.edu/education/resources/guides).

The museum has been developing its national education program for twenty years. Under this umbrella we offer in-gallery tours, videoconferences, professional development for teachers, and a wide variety of classroom resources. *Oh Freedom!*, for example, offers an introduction to the Civil Rights movement through the unique lens of Smithsonian collections. (<http://africanamericanart.si.edu/>).

We hope you and your students will enjoy our resources and *The Civil War and American Art*.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Broun  
The Margaret and Terry Stent Director



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On the covers:

Winslow Homer, *Prisoners from the Front*, 1866  
(see p. 26).

Eastman Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*, 1862 (see p. 22).

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is home to one of the largest collections of American art in the world. Its holdings—more than 41,000 works—tell the story of America through the visual arts and represent the most inclusive collection of American art in any museum today. It is the nation's first federal art collection, predating the 1846 founding of the Smithsonian Institution. The museum celebrates the exceptional creativity of the nation's artists whose insights into history, society, and the individual reveal the essence of the American experience.

For more information or a catalogue of publications, write:

Office of Publications, Smithsonian American Art Museum, MRC 970, PO Box 37012, Washington, DC 20013-7012

Visit the museum's website at [AmericanArt.si.edu](http://AmericanArt.si.edu).

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The exhibition will travel to  
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New York City  
May 21–September 2, 2013

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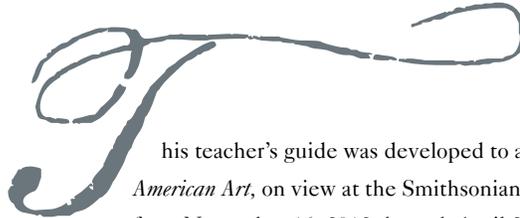
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# About This Resource



This teacher's guide was developed to accompany the exhibition *The Civil War and American Art*, on view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., from November 16, 2012 through April 28, 2013. The show examines the range of artwork created before, during, and following the Civil War, in the years between 1852 and 1877.

The Civil War redefined America and forever changed American art. War's grim reality, captured through the new medium of photography, was laid bare. American artists could not approach the conflict with the conventions of European history painting, which glamorized the hero on the battlefield. Instead, many artists found ways to weave the war into works of art that considered the human narrative—the daily experiences of soldiers, slaves, and families left behind. Artists and writers wrestled with the ambiguity and anxiety of the Civil War and used landscape imagery to give voice to their misgivings as well as their hopes for themselves and the nation. Curator Eleanor Jones Harvey examines the implications of the war on landscape and genre painting and photography, as represented in some of the greatest masterpieces of nineteenth-century American art.

This teacher's guide will help prepare students for a field trip to the exhibition, provide gallery-based activities, and help them synthesize their knowledge when they return to the classroom. It includes a set of teaching assets for each of twelve featured artworks from the show. Assets include art reproductions, background information, related primary source documents, as well as looking and linking questions. The guide also includes activities and teacher-created lesson plans that demonstrate how the artworks can be used to teach Civil War history.

This guide includes:

- ★ Booklet containing introductory material about the featured artworks, related primary source documents, activities, and teacher-created lesson plans
- ★ Flash drive with featured artworks and resources from this guide
- ★ Twelve reproductions of featured artworks from the exhibition

If you have any questions or comments, please contact [AmericanArtEducation@si.edu](mailto:AmericanArtEducation@si.edu).

Winslow Homer  
*The Veteran in a New Field* (detail), 1865  
oil on canvas, 24 1/8 × 38 1/8 in.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Bequest of Miss Adelaide Milton de Groot  
(1876–1967), 1967



# Planning Your Trip to the Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is located at 8th and G Streets, NW, above the Gallery Place Metro stop and near the Verizon Center. The museum is open from 11:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Admission is free.

Visit the exhibition online at [http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/archive/2012/art\\_civil\\_war](http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/archive/2012/art_civil_war).

## **GUIDED SCHOOL TOURS**

Tours of the exhibition with American Art Museum docents are available Monday through Friday, starting at 10:00 a.m. To schedule a tour contact the tour scheduler at (202) 633-8550 or [AmericanArtMuseumTours@si.edu](mailto:AmericanArtMuseumTours@si.edu). The docent will contact you in advance of your visit. Please let the docent know if you would like to use materials from this guide or any you design yourself during the visit. You could also combine a guided tour with a self-guided activity, as long as the activity takes place after 11:30 a.m., when the museum opens.

## **SELF-GUIDED SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

Self-guided school groups may enter the exhibition during regular museum hours, 11:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. We anticipate that *The Civil War and American Art* will be a popular exhibition and cannot guarantee that your group will be able to enter in the timeframe you plan.

If the galleries are crowded, please use the Kogod Courtyard for instruction and bring enough chaperones so that students can explore the exhibition in small groups.

We recommend that you not have more than thirty students in the exhibition at a time. If you are planning a trip for a larger group, consider alternate activities such as lunch in the Kogod Courtyard or the scavenger hunts in the Luce Foundation Center for American Art. To schedule a scavenger hunt for a large group, please contact Luce Center staff at [AmericanArtLuce@si.edu](mailto:AmericanArtLuce@si.edu).

Lunches for self-guided groups can be stored in a closet off the G Street lobby of the building. Ask the security officer on duty for assistance. We do ask that you leave coats and large bags on the bus. Individual lockers are available, but they are limited in number.

Additional information about planning your museum visit can be found online at <http://americanart.si.edu/education/tours/student/planning>.

# The Civil War and American Art Timeline

This timeline provides historical context for the twelve featured artworks in this guide. Entries are color coded. **Black** corresponds with historical events; **blue**, with artworks in the exhibition; and **maroon**, with other cultural events.

As an additional activity, you can assign students to write dates on index cards, annotate them with additional information, and hang them on the wall in chronological order. Display the twelve artwork reproductions from this guide on this classroom timeline and discuss how the events of the war affected and are reflected in the art of the time period.

## PREWAR

1850	
<b>September 18</b>	Congress passes the Fugitive Slave Act, allowing the capture and return of runaways.
1851	
	Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> serialized.
<b>September</b>	Christiana Riot
1852	
	Frederic Edwin Church paints <i>The Natural Bridge, Virginia</i> .
<b>March</b>	<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> published as a book.
1853	
	Robert Duncanson paints <i>Uncle Tom and Little Eva</i> .
1854	
<b>May</b>	The Kansas-Nebraska Act permits each newly-admitted state to determine whether slavery is legal.
1856	
<b>May 24–25</b>	John Brown leads the Pottawatomie Massacre in Kansas.
1857	
	Eastman Johnson paints <i>The Old Mount Vernon</i> .
<b>March 6</b>	The <i>Dred Scott</i> ruling declares slaves to be property, not citizens.
1859	
	John Kensett paints <i>Sunrise among the Rocks of Paradise, Newport</i> .
<b>April</b>	Eastman Johnson exhibits <i>Negro Life at the South</i> .
<b>October 16–18</b>	John Brown raids the arsenal at Harper's Ferry.
<b>December 5</b>	Dion Boucicault's play <i>The Octoroon</i> premieres in New York.

1860 .....

- Spring** Martin Johnson Heade exhibits *Approaching Thunder Storm*.
- Summer** Frederic Edwin Church paints *Meteor of 1860*.
- November 6** President Abraham Lincoln elected.
- December 2** John Brown hanged.  
Brown inspires Whitman to write “Year of Meteors (1859–1860).”
- December 20** South Carolina secedes from the Union.

1861 .....

- January 9** Mississippi secedes.
- January 10** Florida secedes.
- January 11** Alabama secedes.
- January 19** Georgia secedes.
- January 26** Louisiana secedes.
- January 29** Kansas admitted as a free state.
- February 1** Texas secedes.
- February 18** Jefferson Davis provisionally inaugurated as president of the Confederacy.
- March** Sanford Robinson Gifford exhibits *Twilight in the Catskills*.
- March 4** President Abraham Lincoln is inaugurated.

## CIVIL WAR

- April 12–13** Major Anderson surrenders Fort Sumter to the Confederacy.
- April 15** Lincoln calls for 75,000 volunteers to enlist for the Union.
- April 24** Frederic Edwin Church exhibits *The Icebergs*.
- May 6** Arkansas secedes.
- May 20** North Carolina secedes.
- May 23** Virginia secedes.
- May 24** Union Colonel Elmer Ellsworth becomes the first officer killed in the war during the Union capture of Alexandria, Virginia.  
Major General Benjamin Butler declares escaped slaves to be “contraband of war.”
- June 8** Tennessee secedes.
- June 10** Writer-soldier Theodore Winthrop is killed in the Battle of Big Bethel.

<b>July</b>	Frederic Edwin Church exhibits <i>Our Banner in the Sky</i> .
<b>July 21</b>	Confederate victory at First Manassas
<b>November 6</b>	Jefferson Davis elected Confederate president.
<b>December</b>	Albert Bierstadt exhibits <i>Guerrilla Warfare, Civil War</i> .
<b>1862</b> .....	
	Thomas Moran paints <i>Slave Hunt, Dismal Swamp, Virginia</i> .
	Homer Dodge Martin paints <i>The Iron Mine, Port Henry, New York</i> .
	Winslow Homer paints <i>Sharpshooter</i> .
	Eastman Johnson paints <i>A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862</i> .
<b>March–August</b>	Union General George B. McClellan’s unsuccessful Peninsular Campaign
<b>April</b>	Jervis McEntee exhibits <i>The Fire of Leaves</i> .
	Sanford Robinson Gifford exhibits <i>Preaching to the Troops, or Sunday Morning at Camp Cameron near Washington, May 1861</i> and <i>Bivouac of the Seventh Regiment, Arlington Heights, Virginia</i> .
<b>April 6–7</b>	Union victory at Shiloh
	Soldier-artist Conrad Wise Chapman is injured.
<b>April 16</b>	Lincoln signs the Compensated Emancipation Act, ending slavery in the District of Columbia.
<b>May–June</b>	Confederate General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson’s successful Shenandoah Campaign
<b>May 31–June 1</b>	General Robert E. Lee assumes command of the Confederate army.
<b>Summer</b>	Sanford Robinson Gifford paints <i>Basin of the Patapsco from Federal Hill, Baltimore</i> .
<b>August 29–30</b>	Confederate victory at Second Manassas
<b>September 1862– March, 1863</b>	Jasper Cropsey paints <i>Richmond Hill in the Summer of 1862</i> .
<b>September 17</b>	Battle of Antietam
<b>September 19–21</b>	Alexander Gardner and James Gibson photograph corpses at Antietam.
<b>September 22</b>	President Lincoln announces provisional Emancipation Proclamation.
<b>October</b>	Mathew Brady displays Gardner’s photographs from Antietam.
<b>December 13</b>	Confederate victory at the Battle of Fredericksburg
	Walt Whitman goes to Fredericksburg to find his wounded brother. Afterward, he follows the Federal troops to Washington, D.C.

1863

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Sanford Robinson Gifford paints *A Coming Storm*.

Eastman Johnson paints *The Lord Is My Shepherd*.

Alexander Gardner publishes *Catalog of Photographic Incidents of the War*.

**January 1** Emancipation Proclamation liberates slaves in the Confederate states.

**March** Frederic Edwin Church exhibits *Cotopaxi*.

**April** Winslow Homer exhibits *Home, Sweet Home*.

Sanford Robinson Gifford exhibits *Fort Federal Hill at Sunset, Baltimore*.

**May 1–4** Confederate victory at Chancellorsville, Virginia. Stonewall Jackson dies.

**May** Andrew J. Russell photographs Marye's Heights during the Battle of Chancellorsville.

**July** Conrad Wise Chapman begins painting the fortifications of Charleston, South Carolina.

**July 1–3** Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg

**July 4** Union victory at Vicksburg, Mississippi, after a 48-day siege

**July 5–7** Alexander Gardner and Timothy H. O'Sullivan photograph the unburied dead at Gettysburg.

**July 13–16** New York City draft riots

**July 18** Robert Gould Shaw's Massachusetts 54th Infantry massacred at Fort Wagner, South Carolina.

**November 19** President Lincoln delivers his Gettysburg Address.

**November 23–25** Union victory at Chattanooga

1864

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Sanford Robinson Gifford paints *The Camp of the Seventh Regiment near Frederick, Maryland, July, 1863*.

Winslow Homer paints *The Brierwood Pipe*.

Winslow Homer paints *Defiance: Inviting a Shot Before Petersburg*.

**March 9–10** Ulysses S. Grant assumes command of the Armies of the United States.

**March** Union League Club raises 20th New York Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops.

**May** New York Metropolitan Fair begins. Many artists donate works to benefit the U.S. Sanitary Commission.

**May 5–6** Generals Grant and Lee engage at the Battle of the Wilderness.

**June 1–3** Confederate victory at the Battle of Cold Harbor

<b>June 21</b>	Union Brigadier General Francis Channing Barlow captures a brigade of Confederates.  <i>This event is represented in Winslow Homer's <a href="#">Prisoners from the Front</a>.</i>
<b>June 28</b>	President Lincoln repeals the Fugitive Slave Act.
<b>June 30</b>	President Lincoln sets aside Yosemite as a federally protected park.
<b>July 30</b>	Confederate victory at the Battle of the Crater
<b>September 2</b>	William Tecumseh Sherman occupies Atlanta.
<b>September–November</b>	<i>George Barnard photographs occupied Atlanta.</i>
<b>October</b>	<i>Winslow Homer exhibits <a href="#">Skirmish in the Wilderness</a>.</i>
<b>October 19</b>	General Phil Sheridan's "ride" wins Union victory at the Battle of Cedar Creek.
<b>November 8</b>	Lincoln is reelected president.
<b>November 15</b>	Sherman begins his "March to the Sea."  <i>George Barnard accompanies Sherman's troops to Savannah.</i>
<b>December</b>	<i>Eastman Johnson paints <a href="#">Christmas-Time, The Blodgett Family</a>.</i>
<b>December 21</b>	Sherman occupies Savannah, Georgia.

1865 .....

<b>January 31</b>	Congress passes the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery.
<b>February 17</b>	Sherman's troops occupy Columbia, South Carolina.
<b>March</b>	Freedman's Bureau established.  <i>Frederic Edwin Church displays <a href="#">Aurora Borealis</a> in his studio.</i>  <i>George Barnard photographs ruins of Charleston.</i>
<b>March 4</b>	President Lincoln is inaugurated for a second term.
<b>March 29</b>	The Appomattox Campaign begins at Petersburg, Virginia.
<b>April 2</b>	The Confederate government flees Richmond, Virginia.
<b>April 9</b>	Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox Court House.

## POSTWAR

<b>April 14</b>	John Wilkes Booth assassinates President Lincoln.
<b>April 15</b>	President Andrew Johnson inaugurated. Reconstruction begins.
<b>April</b>	<i>Sanford Robinson Gifford's <a href="#">A Coming Storm</a> is displayed at the National Academy of Design. Its first owner, celebrated Shakespearean actor Edwin Booth, is the brother of John Wilkes Booth.</i>

	Albert Bierstadt exhibits <i>Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California</i> .
	Winslow Homer exhibits <i>The Bright Side</i> .
	Eastman Johnson paints <i>Card Players, Fryeburg, Maine</i> .
	John Reekie photographs skeletons at Cold Harbor.
<b>May 10</b>	President Johnson declares the war over.
<b>May</b>	President Johnson announces Presidential Reconstruction, offering amnesty to all Southerners who swear loyalty to the Union. States can be readmitted if they ratify the Thirteenth Amendment.
<b>July 7</b>	Four conspirators in Lincoln's assassination are hanged.
<b>November</b>	Winslow Homer exhibits <i>The Veteran in a New Field</i> .
<b>1866</b>	.....
	Winslow Homer exhibits <i>Near Andersonville</i> and <i>Trooper Meditating Beside a Grave</i> .
	Frederic Edwin Church paints <i>Rainy Season in the Tropics</i> .
<b>January</b>	Alexander Gardner publishes <i>Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War</i> .
<b>March–April</b>	George Barnard returns to the South to take photographs.
<b>April 16</b>	Winslow Homer exhibits <i>Prisoners from the Front</i> .
<b>August 17</b>	Herman Melville publishes <i>Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War</i> .
<b>November</b>	George Barnard publishes <i>Photographic Views of Sherman's Campaign</i> .
<b>1867</b>	.....
	Conrad Wise Chapman paints <i>The Fifty-ninth Virginia Infantry—Wise's Brigade</i> .
<b>May</b>	Americans exhibit artworks in the Paris Exposition, including Frederic Edwin Church, <i>Rainy Season in the Tropics</i> ; Winslow Homer, <i>Prisoners from the Front</i> and <i>The Bright Side</i> ; and Eastman Johnson, <i>Negro Life at the South</i> .
<b>1868</b>	.....
	John Kensett paints <i>Paradise Rocks: Newport</i> .
<b>February–May</b>	President Andrew Johnson impeached by the House but acquitted by the Senate.
<b>June 22</b>	Arkansas is readmitted to the Union.
<b>June 25</b>	Florida is readmitted.
<b>July 4</b>	North Carolina is readmitted.
<b>July 9</b>	South Carolina and Louisiana are readmitted.

**July 13** Alabama is readmitted.

**July 28** The Fourteenth Amendment guaranteeing citizenship to all who are U.S.-born is ratified.

**November 3** Ulysses S. Grant elected president.

**1869** .....

The Union League Club commissions Edward Lamson Henry to paint *Presentation of the Colors 1864*.

Edward Lamson Henry paints *The Old Westover House*.

Clarence King and Timothy O'Sullivan embark on the 40th parallel survey.

**1870** .....

**January 26** Virginia is readmitted.

**February 23** Mississippi is readmitted.

**March 30** The Fifteenth Amendment is ratified, allowing all male citizens the right to vote.

**March** Texas is readmitted.

**July 15** Georgia, the last Confederate state, is readmitted to the Union.

**1872** .....

Eastman Johnson paints *The Girl I Left Behind Me*.

**November 5** President Grant reelected over Horace Greeley.

**1873** .....

Julian Scott paints *Surrender of a Confederate Soldier*.

**1876** .....

Winslow Homer visits Virginia and paints *A Visit from the Old Mistress*.

The Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia celebrates the 100th anniversary of the United States.

Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* shown at the Centennial Exhibition.

**1877** .....

End of Reconstruction. Last Union Troops withdrawn from the South.

**March** Winslow Homer exhibits *The Cotton Pickers* and *Dressing for the Carnival*.



# How to Read an Artwork as a Primary Source

Each detail represents a decision the artist made, so everything is potentially important. Make a long list of observations.

Remember: this is not the time to “figure out” what’s going on—just look. You are collecting evidence to use later.



## STEP ONE: OBSERVE

Look closely.

- ★ Spend one to three minutes just looking. Stay silent and focused.
- ★ Pay close attention to your first impressions and your initial reactions to the piece. Where does your eye go first? How does the artwork make you feel?
- ★ Focus *only* on the artwork itself. Do not consider any available background information—including artist, title and date—at this stage.

### *Observation Example:*

- ★ An African-American woman and girl are seated in a dim room with cracked brick walls and a single door with a window. Their clothing is simple but not ripped or torn.
- ★ The woman’s head is covered and she wears an apron. She has bent shoulders and wrinkles. She looks down, with eyes closed and hands clasped.
- ★ The girl has uncovered hair and rounded cheeks. She sits very close to the older woman. She looks down and points to a large book open in her lap.

Remember: interpretations are not necessarily right or wrong, and not everyone will interpret an artwork in the same way. An excellent interpretation is one that is supported by the evidence found in observations.

Think deeply about the meaning of the artwork. Artists use images to represent big ideas such as freedom, tolerance, or love. What could the artist be trying to say in the images you see?

## STEP TWO: INTERPRET

Allow observation to lead to interpretation.

- ★ Use your observations as evidence to build your interpretation of what is going on in the artwork. If observations are what you see, interpretations are what you think based on what you see.
- ★ Reconsider your first impression of the work. How did the artist point out areas of importance? What factors contribute to the mood? You don’t need to be an expert in the elements of art to notice that an artist has made something important by shining a light on it or created a sad picture by using lots of grey and dark blue. Trust your instincts.



Remember: attitudes change throughout history. Use your knowledge of the time period when the artwork was created to consider how people might have understood it differently then. For example, a smoke stack can look like pollution to a modern viewer but probably seemed like progress to someone living during the Industrial Revolution.

Pay close attention to anything that conflicts with your knowledge of history. These can be valuable clues to the point of view of the artist and the time period.



#### *Interpretation Example:*

- ★ Only the basic needs of clothing and shelter are met. Their clothing, such as the apron, is appropriate for manual labor. Because the chairs are so close to the door, it looks like the entire room is very small.
- ★ The difference in ages and their closeness implies that they might be a grandmother and a granddaughter.
- ★ The grandmother's clasped hands make her look like she is praying, so the book is probably the Bible.

### **STEP THREE: CONNECT**

Relate the artwork to your own experience and knowledge.

- ★ Consider your observations and interpretations. Draw from your own experience and knowledge to gain more understanding.
- ★ Can you identify the setting? The subject matter? Are there any clues that could tell you why the work was created, or for whom was it created? Remember to defend these claims using observations.
- ★ There may be some questions you have that are not answered by the artwork itself. What are these questions? Where could you find the answers?
- ★ Consider any background information you have about the artwork, including information such as title, artist, and date. (This information is often included in a gallery label. See the label for this artwork below.) How does this information fit with your interpretation of the artwork at this stage? What ideas can you enrich or discard?

#### *Connections Example:*

- ★ Painted around 1877, after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. The book is important in this context because enslaved people were not allowed to learn how to read. Literacy for freedmen and women, and the opportunities it could provide, was an important result of abolition.
- ★ The artist is Northern. Perhaps this scene was reassuring for supporters of abolition? It demonstrates that the girl may have more opportunities in life than her grandmother.
- ★ The title, *Sunday Morning*, supports the theory that the girl is reading the Bible.
- ★ The house is small and in poor condition, but is solid. The light shining through may imply hope for the future.

Details about this sample artwork that would be displayed on a gallery label:

artist: Thomas Waterman Wood

title: *Sunday Morning*

execution date: about 1877

medium: oil on paperboard mounted on canvas

dimensions: 14 × 10 1/8 in.

credit line: Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Francis P. Garvan

## STEP FOUR: CONCLUDE

Draw conclusions and formulate big questions for further investigation.

- ★ Based on the information and ideas you have gathered, are there interpretations you need to change or discard? What is the main idea of the artwork?
- ★ The artwork may raise big questions for you, some that could have many complex answers. What are some answers you can think of? Weigh different options. It may be helpful to write about this process or discuss it with a classmate.
- ★ What are the implications of our discoveries/questions? Where can we go to learn more?



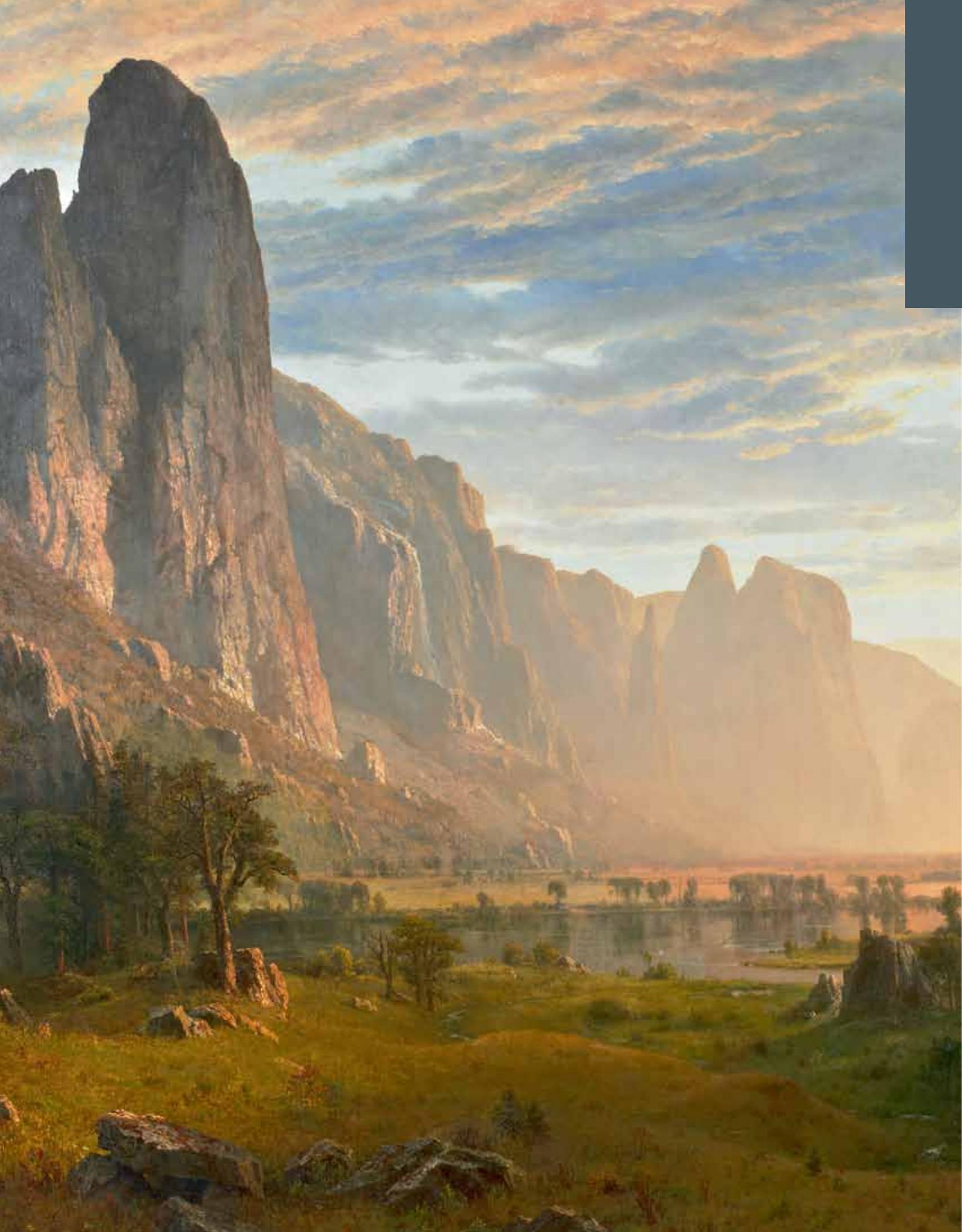
### *Conclusion Example:*

A main idea for this artwork could be as follows:

A simple scene of a family reading the Bible has significance because of the importance of literacy to freedom and progress after the abolition of slavery.

Big Questions:

- ★ What opportunities would the young girl have had in this time period?
- ★ What significance did freed African Americans see in the messages of the Bible?



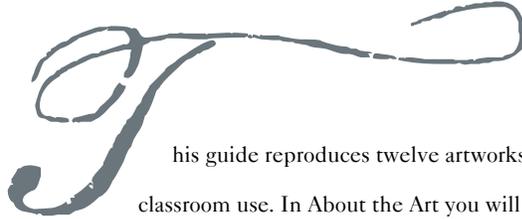
Albert Bierstadt

*Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California* (detail), 1865

oil on canvas, 64 ½ × 96 ½ in.

Birmingham Museum of Art; Gift of the Birmingham Public Library

# About the Art



This guide reproduces twelve artworks from the exhibition *The Civil War and American Art* for classroom use. In About the Art you will find historical context and interpretations for each artwork based on the exhibition catalogue by Eleanor Harvey.

Here the artworks, grouped by genre (scenes from everyday life) and landscape, are presented in roughly chronological order. Guided looking questions help teach visual literacy and spark discussions. To make strong connections with Civil War history, we also include primary source documents, such as diary entries, interviews, and art reviews. While students of all ages can readily relate to scenes of everyday life, landscape paintings also provide a unique, metaphorical lens for studying the Civil War. Excerpts from sermons, speeches, and poetry help students discover that storms, volcanoes, and meteors were commonly used in the period to describe the sectional conflict, slavery, and even fiery abolitionist John Brown. Linking questions offer ways to tie the primary sources to the artworks and their background information.

Finally, we include suggestions for making connections among several related artworks in this guide and point you to corresponding resources in the Activities and Lesson Plan sections. This collection of assets is designed for flexibility, so that a wide variety of teachers can integrate the artworks into their Civil War units.

To learn historical context about more of the paintings in the exhibition, consult the catalogue: Eleanor Harvey, *The Civil War and American Art* (Washington, DC and New Haven, CT: The Smithsonian American Art Museum in association with Yale University Press), 2012.

Also see the exhibition website at [http://AmericanArt.si.edu/exhibitions/archive/2012/art\\_civil\\_war/](http://AmericanArt.si.edu/exhibitions/archive/2012/art_civil_war/).



# *Negro Life at the South*

Eastman Johnson

*Negro Life at the South*, 1859

oil on linen, 37 × 46 in.

The New-York Historical Society, The Robert  
L. Stuart Collection

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

- ★ How would you describe this setting?
- ★ Look carefully at the groupings of people. What are they doing?
- ★ How many people can you count? How are they similar to or different from each other?
- ★ Does everyone belong in this community or are there outsiders in the scene?
- ★ Who is free and who is enslaved? How can you tell?



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

When Eastman Johnson first exhibited his painting *Negro Life at the South* in the spring of 1859, he placed the issue of slavery front and center as war loomed. Here he depicts a young mulatto couple courting in the lower left corner, while a darker-skinned woman holds a small child in the open window above their heads. They listen to the notes of a somber banjo player, as does a small boy holding a broken pull-toy. An older, dark-skinned woman guides a young boy in a dance. Two young girls, one perched on a short ladder, the other beckoning toward the open gate joining the two properties, gaze on a white woman who is entering the yard. Behind her is a black woman in a turban.

Johnson's masterful portrayal places the slave quarters next to the master's house, an unorthodox architectural relationship that sets the tone for reading the entire painting as a series of connections between the two dwellings and their residents. Ordinarily urban slave quarters faced the back yard of the owner's house, joined by an alley running between the back of each domicile. Adjacency here speaks to a closer relationship between the two structures. The neatly kept brick home stands in stark, deliberate contrast to the deteriorating wood and chipped plaster next door.

The fence that both divides and connects the two houses is breached in two places: by the open gate, through which the two women arrive, and above, by a wooden ladder perched on the mossy roof of the slave quarters and resting against the brick wall of the master's house, near one of the upstairs bedroom windows. Out of the adjacent window on the same corner, a bolt of light blue fabric descends, as though suggesting there is a way into and out of the master's house without using the front door. The cock that crows in the tree, level with those two bedroom windows, calls to his mate to join him for the night. Indeed, it would seem that the lord and master had called to one of his female slaves to join him in a tryst. Johnson artfully places the white cat slinking through the open window into the bedrooms of the slave quarters. Leaning out of the corresponding window on the other side of the chimney is the darker skinned woman holding a much lighter-skinned baby. Johnson's upper half of the painting carries a subtle narrative of blood connections between slave and master, resulting in at least one of the light-skinned offspring.

But it is in the appearance of the young white girl, furtively stepping through the doorway into the slave yard, that Johnson has actually focused his painting. No one in the yard is surprised to see her; no one stops what he or she is doing to acknowledge her arrival. She comes because Johnson strongly implies that part of her belongs here, too, that like the young mulatto girl and baby, she, too, is of mixed race. Able to pass for white, she lives as a free woman in the master's house. Should her secret be discovered, her status would change dramatically, closing permanently that passage between these two worlds. Perhaps that accounts for the older black woman following the young white girl. She appears to be a house servant and quite possibly is the young girl's mother. She checks to make sure her young mistress is not observed as she ducks into the yard next door to engage with the other side of her family, the unspoken aspect of slaveholding society. Only the dog in Johnson's painting seems to call out the white girl—he of the mixed brown and white spots, here seeming to sniff out a fellow mixed traveler.

With *Negro Life at the South*, Johnson has painted a referendum on the definition of race on the eve of Civil War. When we rejoin the two halves of the painting, we appreciate how deftly Johnson has woven into this image open-ended yet pointed questions about what constitutes the definition of race. Humanizing his black subjects, Johnson raised questions about the morality of slavery. It is Eastman Johnson's particular gift to elevate a quotidian scene, investing in it historical and topical relevance of such acute sensibility that a simple genre painting becomes a national referendum on humanitarian and political issues.

## PRIMARY SOURCES FOR NEGRO LIFE AT THE SOUTH

*Abraham Lincoln related the nation to “a house divided” by the issue of slavery during his speech accepting the Illinois Republican Party’s nomination for State Senator, in Springfield, Illinois, June 16, 1858.*

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” I believe this government cannot **endure**, permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will **cease** to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the **opponents** of slavery will **arrest** the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South.

endure (v)—to continue

cease (v)—to end

opponent (n)—enemy

arrest (v)—to stop

Abraham Lincoln, “House Divided” Speech. Info USA. U.S. Department of State. <http://infousa.state.gov/government/overview/22.html>. Accessed November 5, 2012.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What does Lincoln warn will happen to the “house divided” if the issue of slavery is not addressed?
- ★ How does Eastman Johnson’s painting represent a “house divided?” How do the two halves differ?
- ★ If Johnson had Lincoln’s speech in mind when he painted this scene, what message might he trying to send about slavery? What evidence can you find in the artwork to support your conclusion?

.....

*In 1852, abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a novel intended to convince Americans that slavery should be outlawed. One of her characters, George Harris, has a white father and a black mother. George, who has pale skin and is told he could “pass” for a Spanish man, has to choose which race to identify with.*

“I feel somewhat at a loss, as to my future course. True, as you have said to me, I might **mingle** in the circles of the whites, in this country, my shade of color is so slight, and that of my wife and family scarce **perceptible**. Well, perhaps, on **sufferance**, I might. But, to tell you the truth, I have no wish to.

“My sympathies are not for my father’s race, but for my mother’s. To him I was no more than a fine dog or horse: to my poor heart-broken mother I was a *child*; and, though I never saw her, after the cruel sale that separated us, till she died, yet I *know* she always loved me dearly. I know it by my own heart. When I think of all she suffered, of my own early sufferings, of the **distresses** and struggles of my heroic wife, of my sister, sold in the New Orleans slave-market, —though I hope to have no unchristian sentiments, yet I may be excused for saying, I have no wish to pass for an American, or to identify myself with them.

“It is with the oppressed, enslaved African race that I cast in my lot; and, if I wished anything, I would wish myself two shades darker, rather than one lighter.”

mingle (v)—to mix

perceptible (adj)—noticeable

sufferance (n)—hardship

distress (n)—suffering

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (London: Routledge, 1852), 463.

Google Book Search. <http://books.google.com/books?id=UmcJAAAAQAAJ>. Accessed June 22, 2012.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ Why does George choose to identify as an African American, even though he may have an easier life “passing” as a white man?
- ★ Could any of Eastman Johnson’s characters be of mixed race? Could any be “passing” for white? How might that possibility affect your interpretation of the artwork?

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Consider the artworks in this guide that depict African Americans. How can you connect or sequence their stories in the context of Civil War events? Discuss how the following words apply to each scene or figure: freedom, choice, opportunity.

- ★ Johnson, *Negro Life at the South*, 1859
- ★ Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*, 1862
- ★ Homer, *A Visit From the Old Mistress*, 1876
- ★ Homer, *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876

## RELATED RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

- ★ Lesson Plan (grades 6–8)  
Perspectives on Slavery  
Pages 79–81
- ★ Activity  
Spotlight on *Negro Life at the South*  
Pages 71–74



# *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*

Eastman Johnson

*A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves,*

*March 2, 1862, 1862*

oil on board, 21 ½ × 26 in.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond,

The Paul Mellon Collection

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What action do you see in this painting?
- ★ What mood does the artist create? How does he do this?
- ★ How many people can you identify? How are the two adult figures similar to and different from each other?
- ★ What directions do the adults face? What might that say about their thoughts or feelings?



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

Eastman Johnson's *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862* presents a tense moment as a black family makes a break for the Union lines, hoping to achieve freedom. Johnson set his narrative in the chilly predawn glow, the eerie bluish tints tinged with pink as the sun begins to rise. In the murky light, a black family aboard a dark bay horse makes their break for freedom. *A Ride for Liberty* has everything to do with capturing the gripping saga of a black family escaping from enslavement, but it contains the added dimension of uncertainty, of not knowing what reception these fugitives would receive. Better than any other painting, it captures the moment when the full scope of the slavery question begins to loom in the foreground.

*A Ride for Liberty* valorizes the risks blacks were willing to take to reach freedom and raises sympathy for their plight once they did reach Union lines and the “free states.” The painting also offers up a more subtle lesson in the politics of skin tone. The artist quite consciously places both adult figures in profile, facing different directions. In doing so he bifurcates the canvas, twinning the composition over a central dividing line between them. The dark-skinned, ethnically pronounced features of the man mark his African descent. His body is tense. Johnson emphasizes his determination to reach the relative safety of Union lines. He leans forward over the horse's withers, and we strain with him as he urges his horse forward. His wife sits upright, her body turned as she gazes back from whence they have come. Her features are more delicate, her skin color lighter even in the ghost light of dawn. Johnson's painting centers on a dramatic moment wherein a family faces the uncertainty of their fate—and by extension the fate of all enslaved Americans. Their predawn ride also evokes two biblical stories often associated with escaped slaves: the Flight into Egypt from the Gospel of Matthew, and Moses freeing the Israelites from the book of Exodus. Johnson has interwoven so many layers of meaning in this painting, which is at its core a testament to determination, longing, and hope.

Johnson painted two nearly identical versions of the composition for *A Ride for Liberty*. He never publicly displayed either version of this painting, and it is likely that politics played a role in that decision. Even in the North, slavery and adherence to the Fugitive Slave Act remained a divisive issue. New York was home to large population of Northern Democrats, few of whom were interested in seeing provocative reminders of the evils of slavery. Cotton and sugar investments were behind the fortunes of two of Johnson's patrons. By 1862, a subject like *A Ride for Liberty* might have been admired by abolitionists, who constituted a minority, but it remained controversial for a deeply divided public.

## PRIMARY SOURCE FOR A RIDE FOR LIBERTY—THE FUGITIVE SLAVES, MARCH 2, 1862

*In 1861, Harriet Jacobs published an autobiography titled Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl under the name Linda Brent. In the book, she recounts her experiences as a former slave and the steps she took to protect her children and her own future. After Jacobs goes into hiding, she sends her daughter to safety in the North with the help of friends and family. Harriet joins her daughter after hiding for seven years, and they are later met by Harriet's son. Her emotional account of her journey provides insight into the experience of a fugitive slave.*

I had lived too long in bodily pain and **anguish** of spirit. Always I was in dread that by some accident, or some **contrivance**, slavery would succeed in snatching my children from me. This thought drove me nearly **frantic**, and I determined to steer for the North Star at all **hazards**....

The **anticipation** of being a free woman proved almost too much for my weak **frame**. The excitement **stimulated** me, and at the same time **bewildered** me. I made busy preparations for my journey, and for my son to follow me....

The next morning [at the end of the journey by ship to Philadelphia] I was on deck as soon as the day dawned. I called to Fanny to see the sun rise, for the first time in our lives, on free soil; for such I *then* believed it to be. We watched the reddening sky, and saw the great orb come up slowly out of the water, as it seemed. Soon the waves began to sparkle and everything caught the beautiful glow. Before us lay the city of strangers. We looked at each other, and the eyes of both were moistened with tears. We had escaped from slavery, and we supposed ourselves to be safe from the hunters. But we were alone in the world, and we had left dear ties behind us; ties cruelly **sundered** by the demon Slavery.

anguish (n)—anxiety

contrivance (n)—trick or plot

frantic (adj)—wild with worry

hazard (n)—danger

anticipation (n)—act of expecting

frame (n)—body

stimulate (v)—to excite

bewilder (v)—to confuse

sundered (adj)—separated

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. L. Maria Child (Boston, 1861) 227–228, 241. Google Book Search. <http://books.google.com/books?id=VNK0QUMnoCkC>. Accessed June 22, 2012.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ Describe Harriet's state of mind at the beginning and end of the journey.
- ★ What did she leave behind?
- ★ What challenges must she face in the North?
- ★ How would Harriet have interpreted *A Ride for Liberty*?

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Consider the artworks in this guide that depict African Americans. How can you connect or sequence their stories in the context of Civil War events? Discuss how the following words apply to each scene or figure: freedom, choice, opportunity.

- ★ Johnson, *Negro Life at the South*, 1859
- ★ Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*, 1862
- ★ Homer, *A Visit From the Old Mistress*, 1876
- ★ Homer, *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876

## RELATED RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

- ★ Lesson Plan (grades 6–8)  
Perspectives on Slavery  
Pages 79–81



# *Prisoners from the Front*

Winslow Homer

*Prisoners from the Front*, 1866

oil on canvas, 24 × 38 in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs.

Frank B. Porter, 1922

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What might be happening in this painting? What details provide clues?
- ★ What mood does the artist create? How does he do this?
- ★ What do you notice about Winslow Homer's placement of the people? What message do you think this composition communicates?
- ★ Look carefully at the figures, their stances, and facial expressions. What do you think each character might be thinking or feeling?



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

In 1866, a full year after the war ended, Homer painted *Prisoners from the Front*, the Civil War painting that would define his career for years. It received stirring accolades when it was first displayed and was widely reviewed as a painting about Northern triumph over a South in disarray. A young Union general, easily recognized at the time as a portrait of Francis Barlow, inspects the three Confederate prisoners that his troops bring to him. For many viewers, this composition portrayed the crowning achievement in Barlow's illustrious military career, when he and his troops captured a brigade of Confederates during the Battle of Spotsylvania in 1864.

Homer's bleak landscape carries as much significance as the figural group on which most viewers focused. Across the South, the devastation to the actual landscape mirrored the physical and psychological damage done to the men who fought. That damage stretched well beyond the destruction of crops and homes to the infrastructure of the Southern economy and no fewer than four of its major cities. Homer's painting presents the landscape as a casualty of the war—as significant a loss as that of trust and regard between the people of the North and the South. Homer's underlying message seems all too clear: this is the price we pay, not just in principle, but in fact. Until this mess is fixed—until nature can regenerate what has been damaged and mankind can do the same—we are not done with this conflict, and we cannot simply walk away. Through the resentment on the other prisoners' faces, the blasted Virginia landscape—which was so often described as Edenic in its prewar beauty—Homer emphasizes that the damage wrought by the war was not solely of the intellectual kind, but cut to the heart of landscape as home—as a reflection of self. The damage done there stands in for the damage done to the South as a place, as a political body, and as a group of Americans whose physical wounds would heal faster than those inflicted upon their psyches.

## PRIMARY SOURCE FOR PRISONERS FROM THE FRONT

*Homer was an eyewitness to events such as confrontations between Union officers and Confederate prisoners of war. It is likely that he arranged the figures in his compositions in order to best tell the story rather than faithfully illustrating a specific event. Even so, his painting bears a resemblance to an account of a similar incident told from the point of view of a Confederate soldier who was taken prisoner during another battle at Petersburg.*

The enemy trooped over the earth-work behind me, the **foremost** presenting his loaded **carbine**, demanded my surrender with an unrepeatable violence of language that suggested bloodshed, and all avenue of escape being cut off, I yielded with what grace I could to my fate, captive to the bow and spear of a hatchet-faced member of the 1st District Cavalry, greatly enamored of this honorable opportunity of going to the rear.

He **conveyed** me to Major Wetherell, the Provost Marshal of General Kautz's command, who was gathering the **animate** and inanimate spoils of the day,—the latter consisting of our muskets, all of which, with utter disregard for their age and **manifest** infirmities, he **incontinently** smashed. At this point I had the satisfaction of seeing a **Yank**, whose haste to destroy our guns was so great, that he would not take time to withdraw the load, blow a hole in his thigh—an accident whereon his Yankship is probably **moralizing** to this hour.

One by one, other captives began to fall in and were arranged in line, and a more varied collection in the same compass, could not well be imagined. An inexcusable weakness, for looking at the ridiculous side of everything, overcame, for a moment, my **apprehensions** for the safety of the city, and my sorrow and shock over the loss of my friends, though the latter sentiment, has alas! received rude treatment many a time, and **oft** during this blood war.

Several of my comrades were many years over fifty, while some had not passed their second decade, and their **pursuits** were as diverse as their ages. Although, so few in number, I noticed among my fellow-captives, tradesmen and farmers, **clerks** and school-masters, merchants and **millers**, manufacturers, and **magistrates**, a city **chamberlain**, a member of the legislature, and **chaplain!** In the matter of uniform and soldierly appearance, we were [a] **motley** crew.

foremost (adj)—most important

carbine (n)—type of gun

convey (v)—to bring to

animate (adj)—alive

manifest (adj)—obvious

incontinently (adv)—without control

Yank (n)—Northerner; Yankee

moralize (v)—to give advice

apprehension (n)—concern

oft (adv)—often

pursuit (n)—job

clerk (n)—office worker

miller (n)—person who grinds grain into flour

magistrate (n)—law officer or judge of lower rank

chamberlain (n)—treasurer

chaplain (n)—member of the clergy who gives services for soldiers or prisoners

motley (adj)—diverse

Anthony M. Keiley, *Prisoner of War, or Five Months among the Yankees* (Richmond, VA: West & Johnston), 11–12. Duke University Libraries Internet Archive. <http://archive.org/details/prisonerofwarorf00keil>. Accessed November 9, 2012.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What do these sources, text and image, tell us about the two armies and their attitudes toward each other?
- ★ How do the Union soldiers assert their authority? How do the Confederate prisoners react?
- ★ Consider the relationship described in these sources between the two sides. What problems did these feelings create when the war ended?

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Compare this work to the others by Homer in this guide in order to better understand his war experiences and his interest in documenting the South during Reconstruction:

- ★ Homer, *The Veteran in a New Field*, 1865
- ★ Homer, *A Visit from the Old Mistress*, 1876
- ★ Homer, *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876

Have students create tableaux based on *Prisoners from the Front* and *A Visit from the Old Mistress*, paying special attention to the figures' stances, the direction of their gazes, and how they relate

to one another. Once the students have taken their poses, have each share what their character is thinking. To conclude, ask students how Homer used a similar composition in these two works to explore conflict and authority during this time period.

(The exhibition includes other important works by Winslow Homer including *Sharpshooter* of 1863. Find out more about Homer's experiences with sharpshooters as part of the *Posters to Go* project at [http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/Posters\\_to\\_Go.pdf](http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/Posters_to_Go.pdf).)

## RELATED RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

- ★ Activity  
Artwork Conversations  
Pages 66–67

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ★ Information from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including related essays and the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History  
<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/20011490>



# *The Veteran in a New Field*

Winslow Homer

*The Veteran in a New Field*, 1865

oil on canvas, 24 1/8 × 38 1/8 in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest

of Miss Adelaide Milton de Groot

(1876–1967), 1967

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What action is taking place in this artwork?
- ★ How would you describe this setting?
- ★ What mood does the artist create? How does he do this?
- ★ Look carefully at all the props in the painting. How do they help identify the figure?
- ★ The man has left his army jacket and canteen on the ground and picked up a scythe (a tool to harvest wheat). How might he feel after exchanging the tools of war for the tools of life on the farm?



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

Winslow Homer created a painting in which landscape and figure merge into a meditation on the difficulties of returning home. Painted during the summer of 1865, after the war's end, *The Veteran in a New Field* is foremost about re-engaging with civilian society and providing sustenance for family and community. Homer's veteran is back at work in his fields, scythe in hand, reaping that summer's bountiful harvest. He stands in his shirtsleeves, his army jacket and canteen discarded on the ground behind him. His straw hat shelters his head from the noontime sun, and the uncut wheat, standing nearly as tall as the soldier, gleams in the light.

Wheat was a ripe metaphor for renewal and fulfillment. The idea of a reaper, in this case returning to a harvest of plenty rather than a harvest of death, comforted many contemporary viewers. Originally, Homer's veteran held a modern cradled scythe, an implement common to wheat harvesting for over a century. Homer would also paint out the trees that once hovered over the edge of the wheat field. These thoughtful and deliberate adjustments render Homer's soldier a more timeless and foreboding figure whose scythe associates him with the grim reaper. Made metaphorical in its meaning, the old-fashioned scythe reminds all of us that returning from war is not as easy as resuming farm tasks.

The majority of Civil War battles were fought in corn and wheat fields. Homer's veteran moves away from us deeper into the wheat field. As he does so the cut wheat stacks up behind his legs, trapping him between the harvest and the standing stalks. The only way for this veteran to move forward is to scythe the wheat, much as the soldiers mowed down their enemies. He cannot retreat, for the cut stalks behind him block his backward step. Wheat fills his field of vision, just like the memories that fill his head. Every time he swings his scythe in this unending field of wheat, memories of soldiers—from both sides—being mowed down in rows haunt him.

Homer's metaphorical and symbolic intentions are profound and deliberate. However, there is an autobiographical quality to this painting that carries more subtle reverberations of meaning. We do not see this veteran's face, for he is everyman. But we do see his canteen and jacket marking the soldier's garb as from Francis Barlow's regiment, the same division Homer spent time shadowing during the conflict. These emblems tie this unnamed veteran to Homer himself. Homer's veteran, like the artist, has shed the outer layer of his wartime experience, but he cannot shed his memories so easily. A veteran of the field if not of the front lines, Homer returned, in his mother's words, "so changed that his best friends did not know him."

## PRIMARY SOURCES FOR THE VETERAN IN A NEW FIELD

*During the Civil War, Winslow Homer traveled with the Union army, shadowing Francis Barlow's regiment. Barlow is the soldier depicted in Prisoners from the Front, one of many paintings in which Homer chronicled the war. The red cloverleaf insignia clearly visible in Prisoners from the Front also marks the uniform jacket and canteen on the ground in this artwork.*

*Homer experienced the horrors of battle firsthand, even though he did not fight. Use these sources below to consider how Homer's wartime experiences might have influenced his composition depicting a veteran returning home.*

Excerpt from a letter from Major General Joseph Hooker to Brigadier General S. Williams, November 8, 1862, describing the fallen soldiers after the battle of Antietam.

Every stalk of corn in the northern and greater part of the field was cut as closely as could have been done with a knife, and the **slain** lay in rows precisely as they stood in their **ranks** a few minutes before.

slain (n)— persons killed

ranks (n)—battle lines

Hooker to Brigadier General S. Williams, Assistant Adjutant-General, Army of the Potomac. Washington, D. C., November 8, 1862. Recorded in United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series 1, vol. 19, Antietam, part 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891), 213–219.

*Excerpt from a postwar novel by Henry Ward Beecher.*

War ploughed the fields of Gettysburg, and planted the **furrows** with men. But, though the seed was blood, the harvest shall be peace, **concord**, liberty, and universal intelligence.

furrow (n)—groove made in the ground

concord (n)—agreement

Henry Ward Beecher, *Norwood, or Village Life in New England* (New York: Charles Scribner & Company, 1867) 493–494.

*Fragment of a letter from Winslow Homer's mother, Henrietta Homer, describing the artist's return at the end of the war in a letter to Winslow's younger brother, Arthur.*

Winslow went to the war front of Yorktown & camped out about two months. He suffered much, was without food 3 days at a time & all in camp either died or were carried away with **typhoid** fever—plug tobacco & coffee was [sic] the Staples....He came home so changed that his best friends did not know him, but is well & all right now.

typhoid (n)—an infectious disease

Henrietta Homer to Arthur Homer, June 7, 1862; quoted in Gordon Hendricks, *The Life and Work of Winslow Homer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979), 50.

Timothy H. O'Sullivan

*A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, July 1863*

albumen print, 6 ¾ × 8 ⅞ in.

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Va., Museum purchase and partial gift of Carol L. Kaufman and Stephen C. Lampl in memory of their parents Helen and Carl Lampl



## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ How do the written sources and the photograph connect war to the planting and harvesting of crops? Why did Homer paint his returning veteran in a wheat field?
- ★ Based on these descriptions of the war and of Homer's own return, how would you describe the state of mind of the veteran?

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Compare this work to the others by Homer in this guide in order to better understand his war experiences and his interest in documenting the South during Reconstruction:

- ★ Homer, *Prisoners from the Front*, 1866
- ★ Homer, *A Visit from the Old Mistress*, 1876
- ★ Homer, *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876

(The exhibition includes other important works by Winslow Homer including *Sharpshooter* of 1863. Find out more about Homer's experiences with sharpshooters as part of the *Posters to Go* project: [http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/Posters\\_to\\_Go.pdf](http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/Posters_to_Go.pdf).)

## RELATED RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

- ★ Activity  
Genre Painting: Scenes of Everyday Life  
Page 68

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ★ Information from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including related essays and the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History  
<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/20011502>



# *A Visit from the Old Mistress*

Winslow Homer  
*A Visit from the Old Mistress*, 1876  
oil on canvas, 18 × 24 in.  
Smithsonian American Art Museum,  
Gift of William T. Evans

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What might be going on in this painting?
- ★ What mood does the artist create? How does he do this?
- ★ What do you notice about Winslow Homer's placement of the people? What message do you think this composition communicates?
- ★ Look carefully at the stances and expressions of the figures. What do you think each character might be thinking or feeling?
- ★ The title of this work is *A Visit from the Old Mistress*. With that in mind, what do you think the scene shows?
- ★ This scene takes place during Reconstruction, after slavery was abolished. How would this scene be different if it took place before Emancipation?
- ★ Why do you think Homer included a young child?



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

Tension and frustration lurk close to the dark surface of Homer's 1876 painting *A Visit from the Old Mistress*. Three black women, one holding a small child, form a frieze arrayed in opposition to the rigid figure of an older white woman. That they share the space is awkward enough; that the door through which they entered is shut, and blocked by one of the black women, adds to the sense of unresolved tension between these protagonists. The former mistress, apparently now a widow, is dressed prophetically in black and white; no shades of grey leaven the stern polarities of her garb. Her stare is equally cold and direct, matched by the returned gaze of the black woman closest to her. This freedwoman now stands with her back to the door, her demeanor one of relaxed defiance. These two figures, equal in height and matched in perceived dominance, convey a tone of wary adversarial uncertainty.

The end of the war unraveled the power white slaveholding women held over their black, predominantly female, house slaves. Homer's mistress may be experiencing one of the most common postwar adjustments: confronting her formerly enslaved black women with whom she must now negotiate for their labor. The tensions attendant on that change alone surfaced in countless diaries kept by Southern women having to rethink their everyday lives. In Homer's painting, the three black women are not happy to see their former mistress. Here the artist echoes the moment of disconnect described by one former slaveholding woman who wrote, "It seemed humiliating to be compelled to bargain and haggle with our own former servants about wages." That irritation makes profoundly clear how deeply some of these white women misunderstood and underestimated the effects of slavery and how little they had comprehended the minds of those who had been enslaved.

*A Visit from the Old Mistress* projects the dismay felt by an overwhelming majority of former slaveholders who discovered that their slaves did not in fact love them or wish to be enslaved, no matter how benign the owner might have been. Ella Clanton Thomas of Georgia wrote in her diary of formerly enslaved people, "Those we loved best, and who loved us best—as we thought, were the first to leave us." One woman wrote to her sister that her former slaves had left "to assume freedom without bidding any of us an affectionate adieu." They wrote with apparently genuine shock and a sense of betrayal when inevitably their newly freed slaves left for the promise of emancipation or remained to assert their freedom where they already lived. The animosity evident between this white woman and her former slaves in *A Visit from the Old Mistress* shows that Homer understands this disconnect and has found a powerful way to make it visible. The mistress has returned, expecting to be greeted by the formerly enslaved people who loved her, only to find herself mistaken. They are not happy to see her, and the painting seethes with hostility, anger, and bitterness. Homer's composition highlights an issue that had not yet been resolved: the understanding that both black and white carried baggage from slavery and the war years. Only when that pain was acknowledged could the nation move toward integration.

In composition, this painting bears a strong affinity to Homer's *Prisoners from the Front* (see pages 26–29), painted ten years earlier. Together, Homer's two paintings frame the key issues of sectional hatred and racial inequality that continued long after April 1865. Homer's unflinching rendering of the aftermath of the Civil War reminds us that despite desperate and well-intentioned efforts to present postwar America as unified and happy, the damage lingered, simmering close to the surface. No one was off the hook; there was no moral high ground in the antipathy expressed between Northern and Southern soldiers and between a mistress and her former property.

## PRIMARY SOURCE FOR A VISIT FROM THE OLD MISTRESS

*Emancipation did not solve all of the problems faced by African Americans. Many continued to work the fields as sharecroppers or to perform household labor—similar to work they had done during slavery. Those that stayed in the South navigated the shifting relationship between the races that would influence Southern history for years to come. The diary of Eliza Frances Andrews describes these changes from the point of view of a former slaveowner.*

Arch has “taken freedom” and left us, so we have no man-servant in the dining room. Sidney, Garnett’s boy, either ran away, or was captured in Virginia. To do Arch justice, he didn’t go without asking father’s permission, but it is a surprise that he, who was so devoted to “Marse Fred,” should be the very first of the house servants to go.

Father called up all his servants the other day and told the men that if they would go back to the plantation in Mississippi and work there the rest of the year, he would give them seven dollars a month, besides their food and clothing; but if they chose to remain with him here, he would not be able to pay them wages till after Christmas. They were at liberty, he told them, either to stay with him for the present, on the old terms, or to take their freedom and hire out to somebody else if they preferred; he would give them a home and feed them till they could do better for themselves.

In the **altered** state of his fortune it will be impossible for him to keep up an **establishment** of twenty or thirty house servants and children, who are no longer his property. The poor ignorant creatures have such **extravagant** ideas as to the value of their services that they are sadly **discontented** with the wages they are able to get. There is going to be great suffering among them, for Southerners will not employ the faithless ones if they can help it, and the Yankees cannot take care of all the idle ones, though they may force us to do it in the end.

I feel sorry for the poor negroes. They are not to blame for taking freedom when it is brought to their very doors and almost forced upon them. Anybody would do the same, still when they go I can’t help feeling as if they are deserting us for the enemy, and it seems **humiliating** to be **compelled** to bargain and **haggle** with our own servants about wages. I am really attached to father’s negroes, and even when they leave us, as Alfred, Arch, and Harrison have done, cannot help feeling interested in their **welfare** and hoping they will find good places.

altered (adj)—changed

establishment (n)—household

extravagant (adj)—fancy

discontented (adj)—unhappy

humiliating (adj)—embarrassing

compel (v)—to make someone do something

haggle (v)—to argue over a price

welfare (n)—well-being

Eliza Frances Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1864–1865* (New York: D. Appleton, 1908), 318–319. Documenting the American South website. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/andrews/andrews.html>. Accessed October 5, 2012.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What surprised Eliza about the actions of the freedmen?
- ★ How did she feel about the changes caused by emancipation?

- ★ Based on Eliza’s experience, how would you describe the thoughts and feelings of the figures in *A Visit from the Old Mistress*?

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Consider the artworks in this guide that depict African Americans. How can you connect or sequence their stories in the context of Civil War events? Discuss how the following words apply to each scene or figure: freedom, choice, opportunity.

- ★ Johnson, *Negro Life at the South*, 1859
- ★ Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*, 1862
- ★ Homer, *A Visit From the Old Mistress*, 1876
- ★ Homer, *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876

Have students create tableaux based on *Prisoners from the Front* and *A Visit from the Old Mistress*, paying special attention to the figures’ stances, the direction of their gazes, and how they relate to one another. Once the students have taken their poses, have each share what their character is thinking. To conclude, ask students how Homer used a similar composition in these two works to explore conflict and authority during this time period.

## RELATED RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

- ★ Lesson Plan (grades 3–5)  
Finding a New Balance: Life after the Civil War  
Pages 76–78
- ★ Activity  
Artwork Conversations  
Pages 66–67

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ★ Lesson Plan  
A House Divided: Reconstruction  
How might history have been different if alternate plans for the Reconstruction of the South had been put into practice?  
<http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/Reconstruction.pdf>
- ★ Teacher Resource  
*Posters to Go*  
What can a work of art reveal about a period of American history?  
[http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/Posters\\_to\\_Go.pdf](http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/Posters_to_Go.pdf)



# *The Cotton Pickers*

Winslow Homer

*The Cotton Pickers*, 1876

oil on canvas, 24 1/16 × 38 1/8 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Acquisition made possible through Museum Trustees: Robert O. Anderson, R. Stanton Avery, B. Gerald Cantor, Edward W. Carter, Justin Dart, Charles E. Ducommun, Camilla Chandler Frost, Julian Ganz, Jr., Dr. Armand Hammer, Harry Lenart, Dr. Franklin D. Murphy, Mrs. Joan Palevsky, Richard E. Sherwood, Maynard J. Toll, and Hal B. Wallis

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What do you think is happening in this painting?
- ★ What mood does the artist create? How does he do this?
- ★ What do you notice about Winslow Homer's placement of the people? What message do you think this composition communicates?
- ★ What do you think each character might be thinking or feeling?
- ★ This scene takes place during Reconstruction, after slavery was abolished. How does that knowledge affect your understanding of the artwork?



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

Painted in 1876, Winslow Homer's *The Cotton Pickers* debuted in March 1877. Homer's figures fill the foreground of the painting, the cotton extending to mid-thigh. The artist has drawn clear distinctions between the two women and encapsulated in them a question about the future each woman faces. The young woman on the left looks down at her work, her fingers gently trailing against the soft bolls. Cotton surrounds her, flowing from her basket, encircling her skirts. Absorbed in her thoughts, she is far distant from the here and now, though her world is circumscribed by the work she has done in the fields. Her companion radiates a far different demeanor. Head up, eyes alert, she gazes with determination at what lies beyond the cotton fields. Her sack holds the cotton she has harvested but might as easily double for a sack for her belongings should she dare to step forward and out of the field. She appears to be contemplating just such action, taking advantage of opportunity and initiative to chart a new path, a new future.

Homer has made it clear these are real, functioning, complete people—no longer three-fifths a person, no longer a lesser race. Homer frames a question for emancipated blacks: are you ready for the future? Will you take up the challenges and opportunities that seemed impossible just ten years earlier, and can you take advantage of the opportunities that are now possible? And for his predominantly white viewers, he begs the question, are you ready for a future with these people a full part of it? Are you ready for them to step into your space? Are you willing to embrace their struggle for freedom as you cherish your own?

Homer imbues his black protagonists with intelligence, gravity, and character, providing an avenue of sympathy for his predominantly Northern audience. His portrayals made it easier for his viewers to envision themselves in these people's shoes, facing their choices with a similarly analytical mien.

Frederick Douglass described an enslaved person as “a creature of the past and present” who craved “a future with hope in it.” Homer's cotton pickers stop in their tracks, each contemplating her past, her present, and her future. One may remain lost in the past and the present, surrounded by a sea of cotton. The other craves what the future holds. Stalks of cotton snag her apron and appear to slow her progress, but providentially Homer has placed her in front of a break in the row of cotton plants. She needs only to take the next step to free herself of her past and engage in the space we occupy. Homer's message is clear—it will be up to each individual to determine what kind of future lies ahead.

## PRIMARY SOURCE FOR *THE COTTON PICKERS*

*In 1941, the Works Progress Administration funded an oral history project that interviewed African Americans about their experiences before and after the Civil War. Minnie Fulkes, a woman living in Virginia, provided this account of her life.*

If I aint made a mistake, I think it wuz in April when de war surrendered an' **muma** an' all us wuz turned aloose in May. Yes dat ol' **wench**, a ol' **heifer**, oh child, it makes my blood bile when I think 'bout it. Yes she kept muma ig'runt. Didn't tell her nuthing 'bout being free 'til den in May.

Den her mistess, Miss Betsy Godsey, tol' her she wuz free, an' she (muma) coul' cook fer her jes th' same dat she would give her something to eat an' help clothe us chillun, dat wuz ef muma continual' to sta wid her an' work.

You see, we didn't have nuthin' an' no whar to go, um, um, um so we all, you know, jes took en stayed 'til we wuz able wid God's help to pull us selves together. But my God it wuz 'ginst our will, but, baby, couldn't help ourselves.

My fathers master tol' him he could farm one half fer th' tother an' when time rolled 'roun' fer dem 'viding crops he took an' give to him his part like any honest man would do. Ah,

Lord child, dem wuz terrible times too, oh! it makes me shudder when I think of some slaves had to stay in de woods an' git long best way dey could after freedom done bin' clared; you see slaves who had mean master would rather be dar den whar dey lived. By an' by God opened a way an' dey got wid other slaves who had huts. You see, after th' render no white folks could keep slaves. Do yo' know even now, honey, an' dat done bin way bac' yonder, dese ol' white folks think us poor colored people is made to work an' slave fer dem, look! dey aint give you no wages worth nuthin'. Gal cook all week fer two an' three dollars. How can you live off it, how kin, how kin yo'?

My father waited on soldiers and after de s'render dey carried him an' his brother as fer as Washington D.C. I think we all use to say den, "Washington City." Aint you done heard folks talk 'bout dat city? 'Tis a grade big city, daus whar de President of dis here country stay; an' in bac' days it wuz known as 'vidin' lin' fer de North an' South. I done hear dem white folks tell all 'bout dem things—dis line. As I wuz tellin' you, his brother wuz kept, but dey sent father bac' home. Uncle Spencer wuz left in Prince Williams County. All his chillun ar' still dar. I don't know de name of Yankee who carried him off.

Lord, Lord, Honey, dem times too over sad, 'cause Yankees took lots of slaves away an' dey made homes. An' whole heap of families lost sight of each other. I know of a case whar after hit wuz ten years a brother an' sister lived side by side an' didn't know dey wuz blood kin...

I married when I wuz 14 years old...I didn't never go to school. Had to work an' am working now an' when hit breaks good weather, I go fishing. And who works dat big garden out dar? No body but me.

You know I'm mother of eleven chillun', an' 'tis seven living an' four of dem ded.

muma (n)—mother

wench (n)—country girl, insulting term for a woman

heifer (n)—female cow, insulting term for a woman

Works Progress Administration, *Slave Narratives: a Folk History of Slavery in the United States*, From *Interviews with Former Slaves*, volume 17, Virginia Narratives (Washington, DC: Works Progress Administration, 1941), 11–15. Project Gutenberg.  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28973/28973-h/28973-h.htm>. Accessed June 22, 2012.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What happened to Minnie after the Civil War? What choices did other people she knew make?
- ★ Why did some African Americans stay in the South, and why did others move to the North?
- ★ Based on your observations of the two women in Homer's *The Cotton Pickers*, which decision do you think each of them will make? What details make you say that?

## SUGGESTED ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Consider the artworks in this guide that depict African Americans. How can you connect or sequence their stories in the context of Civil War events? Discuss how the following words apply to each scene or figure: freedom, choice, opportunity.

- ★ Johnson, *Negro Life at the South*, 1859
- ★ Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*, 1862
- ★ Homer, *A Visit From the Old Mistress*, 1876
- ★ Homer, *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876

## RELATED RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

- ★ Lesson Plan (grades 6–8)  
Perspectives on Slavery  
Pages 79–82
- ★ Activity  
Genre Painting: Scenes of Everyday Life  
Page 68



# *Approaching Thunder Storm*

Martin Johnson Heade

*Approaching Thunder Storm*, 1859

oil on canvas, 28 × 44 in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Erving Wolf Foundation and Mr. and Mrs. Erving Wolf, in memory of Diane R. Wolf, 1975

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

(These questions can be used with all landscape paintings in the exhibition.)

- ★ How would you describe this place? Is it located in the United States of America or abroad?
- ★ What weather, natural phenomena, or landscape features can you identify in the artwork?
- ★ What color(s) are most important in the painting?
- ★ How would you describe the mood of the artwork based on the colors, the weather, and other features of the scene?
- ★ Are there people in the landscape? Does anyone live in this place? How do the human figures (or lack thereof) affect your impression of the scene?
- ★ Imagine yourself in this landscape. What do you see, hear, smell, or taste? Do you feel anything on your skin?
- ★ When was the work painted? How might it reflect historical events or trends at that stage of the Civil War?



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

In the spring of 1860 Martin Johnson Heade displayed his newest painting of a darkening sky over an inlet near Point Judith, Rhode Island. He titled the work *Approaching Thunder Storm*. Its stark contrasts and queasy weather attracted attention, as viewers and reviewers struggled to make sense of the disquieting picture. On a strip of sand running across the foreground, a man and his dog sit quietly as a storm blackens the entire sky. A thin coral streak of lightning, barely visible, splits the darkness, prefiguring the thunder and rain to come. Two boats on the water make haste for the safety of the shore, but overall the scene conveys an otherworldly calm in the face of an imminent disaster, as though the observers on shore are mesmerized by the approaching storm, unable to respond. Heade's seated figure contributes to the perplexing nature of this painting. He occupies a prominent place in the composition, but he is remarkably passive in demeanor, as though he is a powerless spectator to the impending drama.

Summertime is often a season of extremes. Hot, sultry days give way to brief and sometimes violent storms in the afternoons, the cycle repeating itself over the course of days or even weeks. The summer of 1860 embodied that instability, save that these storms were political in nature. The unsettled weather seemed fraught with portent for unsettling events. But running as a strong undercurrent throughout the arguments for and against disunion was the emotional issue of slavery and abolition.

As a presidential candidate in 1860 Lincoln had spoken of a "coming storm," when God would run out of patience on the issue of slavery. The metaphor was popular with many abolitionist preachers, but at least two of them went a step further, purchasing Heade's thunderstorm paintings from this moment. Charismatic abolitionist preacher Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887) already owned one of Heade's 1859 thunderstorm paintings when his colleague Noah Schenck acquired *Approaching Thunder Storm* shortly after it first went on public view. Their fondness for Heade's thunderstorms confirms that perceptive viewers often saw parallels among these paintings, current events, and their religious beliefs. Schenck may have had his newly acquired painting in mind when he delivered a sermon in May 1861, in which he exhorted his flock to see in the storms both political upheaval and each man's spiritual duty. He said, "From the storms which sweep the political horizon, it is held, Christ's officers should . . . go forth to the fulfillment of their plainly revealed duty, and breast the storms which sweep across the spiritual horizon."

## PRIMARY SOURCE FOR APPROACHING THUNDER STORM

*Debate over slavery divided the nation in the 1850s, and it was the key issue in the presidential election of 1860. Lincoln established his position during an address at the Cooper Union in New York City in February 1860. He told the country that slavery was "an evil not to be extended, but to be tolerated and protected only because of and so far as its actual presence among us makes that toleration and protection a necessity." In another address during the same campaign, he likened the threat of war to a coming storm.*

I See the Storm Coming, with God's Help I Shall Not Fail

(A quiet talk in the State House, Springfield, Ill., during the campaign of 1860)

I know there is a God, and that He hates injustice and slavery. I see the storm coming, and I know that His hand is in it. If He has a place and work for me—and I think He has—I believe I am ready.

I am nothing, but truth is everything. I know I am right because I know that liberty is right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God.

I have told them that “a house divided against itself cannot stand,” and Christ and reason say the same; and they will find it so. **Douglas** don’t care whether slavery is voted up or voted down, but God cares and humanity cares, and I care; and with God’s help I shall not fail.

I may not see the end; but it will come, and I shall be **vindicated**; and these men will find that they have not read their Bibles **aright**.

Douglas, Stephen (proper n)—American politician who ran against Abraham Lincoln in the 1860 presidential election

vindicate (v)—to prove someone right or not guilty

aright (adv)—correctly

Abraham Lincoln, *Words of Lincoln*, ed. Osborn H. Oldroyd (Washington, DC: Osborn Oldroyd, 1895), 49. Google Book Search. <http://books.google.com/books?id=GQA1h7mJsuoC>.

Accessed June 22, 2012.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ Based on this speech in Springfield, Illinois, what actions do you think Lincoln would take against slavery if he were to be elected president? Compare this speech with the position he established during the Cooper Union address. How does it differ?
- ★ Imagine you are living in 1860 and you see Heade’s painting after hearing Lincoln refer to a “storm coming.” How might Lincoln’s speech change the way you view the landscape painting?

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Compare this landscape with others from the Civil War era:

- ★ Bierstadt, *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865
- ★ Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862
- ★ Church, *Aurora Borealis*, 1865
- ★ Church, *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866
- ★ Gifford, *A Coming Storm*, 1863

## RELATED RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

- ★ Activity  
Landscape and Mood  
Pages 69–70
- ★ Lesson Plan (grades 9–12)  
The End of Eden—Landscape and the Impact of the Civil War  
Pages 83–85

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ★ Information from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including related essays and the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History  
<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/20011406>



# Cotopaxi

Frederic Edwin Church

*Cotopaxi*, 1862

oil on canvas, 48 × 85 in.

Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society

Purchase, Robert H. Tannahill Foundation Fund,

Gibbs-Williams Fund, Dexter M. Ferry Jr. Fund,

Merrill Fund, Beatrice W. Rogers Fund, and

Richard A. Manoogian Fund

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

(These questions can be used with all landscape paintings in the exhibition.)

- ★ How would you describe this place? Is it located in the United States of America or abroad?
- ★ What weather, natural phenomena, or landscape features can you identify in the artwork?
- ★ What color(s) are most important in the painting?
- ★ How would you describe the mood of the artwork based on the colors, the weather, and other features of the scene?
- ★ Are there people in the landscape? Does anyone live in this place? How do the human figures (or lack thereof) affect your impression of the scene?
- ★ Imagine yourself in this landscape. What do you see, hear, smell, or taste? Do you feel anything on your skin?
- ★ When was the work painted? How might it reflect historical events or trends at that stage of the Civil War?



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

Frederic Edwin Church's "Great Picture" of 1862 is a monumental image of Cotopaxi, a volcano in Ecuador. Earlier, Church had painted this volcano as part of a South American paradise, but here it is on fire, and coming apart at the seams. By 1862, volcanoes were widely invoked as metaphors for the war's societal upheavals. Some abolitionists even described slavery as America's "moral volcano."

Church had made two trips to South America, traveling through Colombia and Ecuador in 1853 and 1855. His earlier images of *Cotopaxi* had been inspired by a vision of a universe in harmony. In the 1855 view of Cotopaxi (shown at right), the snow-capped peak framed against a clear blue sky puffs peacefully, reinforcing the Edenic associations many in North America ascribed to the southern continent. But now Church painted a more monumental and apocalyptic vision of this American Eden. At four feet by seven feet, it was the largest of the ten canvases he had already completed of this subject.

Under Church's brush, *Cotopaxi* erupted as the nation moved into the bloodiest year of the war. This painting presents a panoramic sweep of the Andean plateau, dominated by the cinder cone of the powerful volcano. The smoke and ash rolling from the caldera drift down the side of the mountain, nearly obliterating the surrounding landscape in a superheated wave. The landscape is literally fracturing, flowing underfoot, reflecting the tumult of an unstable nation in a war with no end in sight. In art reviews at the time, the cross of light formed by the haze over the setting sun was deemed to be an omen of redemption. It left hope—albeit dimmed by brimstone—that when the smoke cleared, the light would in fact confirm that God had not abandoned America. In the most favorable reviews, *Cotopaxi* was described as a beacon of hope despite its invoking the dramatic horrors of the war. Although *Cotopaxi* is not a painting specifically about the Civil War, it is a landscape suffused with the fear and great national dread that accompanied it.



Frederic Edwin Church  
*Cotopaxi*, 1855  
oil on canvas, 28 × 42 in.  
Smithsonian American Art Museum,  
Gift of Mrs. Frank R. McCoy

## PRIMARY SOURCE FOR COTOPAXI

*Frederick Douglass used volcanic imagery to describe the moral horrors of slavery during his June 1861 address titled "The American Apocalypse."*

The explanation of the power of anti-slavery is to be found in the inner and **spontaneous consciousness**, which every man feels of the **comprehensive** and **stupendous** criminality of slavery. There are many wrongs and abuses in the world that shock and wound the **sensibilities** of men. They are felt to be narrow in their **scope**, and temporary in their **duration**, and to require little effort for their removal. But not so can men regard slavery. It **compels** us to recognize it, as an ever active, ever increasing, all comprehensive crime against human nature. It is not an earthquake swallowing up a town or city, and then leaving the solid earth undisturbed for centuries. It is not a **Vesuvius** which, belching forth its fire and lava at intervals, causes ruin in a limited territory; but slavery is felt to be a moral volcano, a burning lake, a hell on the earth, the smoke and stench of whose torments ascend upward forever. Every breeze that sweeps over it comes to us tainted with its foul **miasma**, and weighed down with the sighs and groans of its victims. It is a **compendium** of all the wrongs which one man can inflict upon a helpless brother. It does not cut off a right hand, nor pluck out a right eye, but strikes down at a single blow the God-like form of man. It does not merely restrict the rights, or lay heavy burdens upon its victims, grievous to be borne; but makes deliberate and constant war upon human nature itself, robs the

slave of personality, cuts him off from the human family, and sinks him below even the **brute**. It leaves nothing standing to tell the world that here was a man and a brother.

spontaneous (adj)—unplanned

consciousness (n)—awareness; thoughts and feelings

comprehensive (adj)—including many things; thorough

stupendous (adj)—very large

sensibility (n)—feeling

scope (n)—ability to see, think, or act; range

duration (n)—length of time something lasts

compel (v)—to force or make someone do something

Vesuvius (proper n)—volcano in Pompeii, Italy

miasma (n)—harmful fumes

compendium (n)—list

brute (n)—beast or animal

Frederick Douglass, “‘The American Apocalypse,’ An Address Delivered in Rochester, NY June 1861,” *Douglass’ Monthly* 4 (1861): 485.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ Douglass uses volcanic imagery to describe slavery. What insight does his imagery provide?
- ★ An erupting volcano can be seen as a warning or omen. Why does Douglass think that Americans cannot allow slavery to continue? What might Church be forecasting about the nation, the institution of slavery, or about the Civil War?

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Compare this landscape with others from the Civil War era:

- ★ Bierstadt, *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865
- ★ Church, *Aurora Borealis*, 1865
- ★ Church, *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866
- ★ Gifford, *A Coming Storm*, 1863
- ★ Heade, *Approaching Thunder Storm*, 1859

## RELATED RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

- ★ Activity  
Landscape and Mood  
Pages 69–70
- ★ Lesson Plan (grades 9–12)  
The End of Eden—Landscape and the Impact of the Civil War  
Pages 83–85



# A Coming Storm

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

(These questions can be used with all landscape paintings in the exhibition.)

- ★ How would you describe this place? Is it located in the United States of America or abroad?
- ★ What weather, natural phenomena, or landscape features can you identify in the artwork?
- ★ What color(s) are most important in the painting?
- ★ How would you describe the mood of the artwork based on the colors, the weather, and other features of the scene?
- ★ Are there people in the landscape? Does anyone live in this place? How do the human figures (or lack thereof) affect your impression of the scene?
- ★ Imagine yourself in this landscape. What do you see, hear, smell, or taste? Do you feel anything on your skin?
- ★ When was the work painted? How might it reflect historical events or trends at that stage of the Civil War?

Sanford Robinson Gifford

*A Coming Storm*, 1863, retouched and redated in 1880

oil on canvas, 28 × 42 in.

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the McNeil Americana Collection



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

Amidst the aftershocks of President Lincoln's assassination, the National Academy of Design opened its spring exhibition, having been delayed in deference to Lincoln's death. On the walls was a painting Sanford Gifford had completed in 1863 titled *A Coming Storm*. Clouds heavy with rain sweep across the scene, darkening the surface of the water below. Framed against the autumnal foliage, tiny figures people the left shore, their forms dwarfed by the large, angular boulders along the lake's edge. The weather is in motion, a swirling vortex of dark clouds blotting out the light that suffuses the middle distance. What made this painting stand out were the circumstances surrounding its display. Gifford's painting bore the notation that it was owned by the Shakespearean actor Edwin Booth, brother to the president's assassin. Edwin was well-known and well-liked among the artists and writers who rallied around him in support. Gifford's painting became a touchstone for grieving New Yorkers who flocked to see it on display.

Gifford had painted *A Coming Storm* during the winter of 1863 after finishing his third and final tour with the Seventh Regiment. After Lincoln's assassination, the poignant connection between Gifford's storm, Edwin Booth's personal anguish, and the nation's grief lent deeper meaning to this painting. In fact Herman Melville, by then a friend of Gifford's, was prompted to write a poem specifically about the triangulation of painting, owner, and fallen president. Melville's verse, part of his *Battle Pieces* collection, cemented the connection between Gifford's painting and the tragedy of the war. Melville titled his poem "The Coming Storm. A Picture by S. R. Gifford, and owned by E. B. Included in the N. A. Exhibition, Apr. 1865."

Melville's turn of phrase interpreted Gifford's storm as emblematic of Edwin's emotional state as well as that of the nation. He was not alone in doing so. A reviewer in the *New York Leader* also could not envision this painting outside of its newly assigned elegiac context, writing, "The gem of the whole collection, *The Coming Storm*, No. 85, by S. R. Gifford, is the property of Edwin Booth, who little thought when he became its possessor of the coming storm, under which he, together with our whole country, is bent in mourning. . . . The awful silence of the picture can be *felt*—ay, *felt*—in all its mingled grandeur and wild, unearthly mournfulness."

## PRIMARY SOURCES FOR A COMING STORM

*John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865. Soon thereafter, A Coming Storm was on view in the National Academy of Design in New York. After the assassination, the painting received extra attention because it was owned by John Wilkes Booth's brother, Edwin Booth, a celebrated actor best known for his portrayal of Shakespeare's Hamlet. A reference to the owner appears in a review of the exhibition.*

The gem of the whole collection, *The Coming Storm*, No. 85, by S. R. Gifford, is the property of Edwin Booth, who little thought when he became its **possessor** of the coming storm, under which he, together with our whole country, is bent in **mourning**. Close on the shores of a lake, a single, huge, mossy boulder rises on a level with the tops of the trees. A drowsy heat **pervades** the storm-weighted atmosphere. A wild gathering of dark, **vaporous** thunder-clouds, with their solemn hush before the black clouds break,

'Hang i' the air.' . . .

The awful silence of the picture can be *felt*—ay, *felt*—in all its **mingled** grandeur and wild, unearthly mournfulness.

possessor (n)—owner  
mourning (n)—sadness, especially grief because of a death  
pervades (v)—spreads through  
vaporous (adj)—a diffused substance in the air such as fog or smoke  
mingled (adj)—mixed

Cara Montane, “Another Woman’s View of the New Academy of Design,” *New York Leader*,  
June 3, 1865, 2.

*Herman Melville’s poem also references Edwin Booth.*

“A Picture by S. R. Gifford, and owned by E. B. Included in the N. A. Exhibition, Apr. 1865.”  
by Herman Melville (1865)

All feeling hearts must feel for him  
Who felt this picture. **Presage** dim—  
Dim **inklings** from the shadowy sphere  
Fixed him and fascinated here.

A demon-cloud like the mountain one  
Burst on a spirit as mild  
As this **urned** lake, the home of **shades**.  
But **Shakspeare’s pensive** child

Never the lines had lightly scanned,  
**Steeped** in fable, steeped in fate;  
The **Hamlet** in his heart was **’ware**,  
Such hearts can **antedate**.

No utter surprise can come to him  
Who reaches Shakspeare’s core;  
That which we seek and **shun** is there—  
Man’s final **lore**.

presage (n)—prediction  
inkling (n)—hint  
urn (n)—container that holds ashes of the dead  
shade (n)—ghost  
Shakespeare, William (proper n)—16th century English poet and playwright  
pensive (adj)—thoughtful  
steeped (adj)—full of or soaked in  
Hamlet (proper n)—main character in one of Shakespeare’s tragedies.

Hamlet’s uncle assassinates Hamlet’s father, the king, and steals his throne.

’ware (adj)—aware of  
antedate (v)—to happen before or sooner  
shun (v)—to avoid or ignore  
lore (n)—myth

Herman Melville, *Selected Poems of Herman Melville*, ed. Robert Penn Warren (Jaffrey, NH:  
Jeffrey A. Godine, 2004), 141. Google Book Search. [http://books.google.com/  
books?isbn=1567922694](http://books.google.com/books?isbn=1567922694). Accessed June 22, 2012.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ How does each source describe the landscape?
- ★ What additional meaning do they assign to the artwork because of its ownership by Edwin, the brother of John Wilkes Booth?
- ★ Melville discusses Edwin Booth's experience as a Shakespearean actor. How does the poem relate tragic plays, particularly *Hamlet* (see glossary), to Edwin Booth in 1865?

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Compare this landscape with others from the Civil War era:

- ★ Bierstadt, *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865
- ★ Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862
- ★ Church, *Aurora Borealis*, 1865
- ★ Church, *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866
- ★ Heade, *Approaching Thunder Storm*, 1859



# Aurora Borealis

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

(These questions can be used with all landscape paintings in the exhibition.)

- ★ How would you describe this place? Is it located in the United States of America or abroad?
- ★ What weather, natural phenomena, or landscape features can you identify in the artwork?
- ★ What color(s) are most important in the painting?
- ★ How would you describe the mood of the artwork based on the colors, the weather, and other features of the scene?
- ★ Are there people in the landscape? Does anyone live in this place? How do the human figures (or lack thereof) affect your impression of the scene?
- ★ Imagine yourself in this landscape. What do you see, hear, smell, or taste? Do you feel anything on your skin?
- ★ When was the work painted? How might it reflect historical events or trends at that stage of the Civil War?

Frederic Edwin Church  
*Aurora Borealis*, 1865  
oil on canvas, 56 × 83 1/2 in.  
Smithsonian American Art Museum,  
Gift of Eleanor Blodgett



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

Artist Frederic Church and Dr. Isaac Israel Hayes, an arctic explorer, had become friends, each man developing an interest in the other's profession. Prior to Hayes's prewar departure for the far north, Church provided sketching lessons to the explorer, hoping he might return with drawings the artist could use for a painting based on his voyage. In fact, Hayes's sketches would play a significant role in 1864, when Church began his *Aurora Borealis*. Because he left during peacetime and returned to a country at war, Hayes's sometimes treacherous voyage reflects interesting parallels to the travails of the country. In hue and weirdly undulating motion, the northern lights in Church's painting give form to Hayes's poetic and yet scientific descriptions. Artist and explorer present the Arctic as the antipode of Eden, the inverse of paradise, an unearthly landscape that functions as an inversion of the landscapes that made Church's reputation.

The war years had already proved to be a bounty for celestial portents. The preponderance of meteors, comets, and auroras made it seem as though the American skies, North and South, were witness to an apocalyptic battle overhead that rivaled the rolling war-dun on the ground. Chief among the phenomena invoking apocalypse and days of judgment was the Aurora Borealis, eerie, silent flickerings of lurid light that rippled across the sky like a nocturnal, unhinged rainbow. They conjured images of nature out of control, appearing and disappearing with no warning. From the 1850s the appearance of the auroras spurred lengthy accounts in local newspapers that combined scientific data with astrological interpretations.

Framed against this backdrop, Church's painting, *Aurora Borealis*, took shape on his easel during the winter and early spring of 1864 to 1865. Under a dark Arctic sky, an explorer's ship lies frozen in the pack ice at the base of a looming cliff. Lights inside the diminutive vessel signal a human presence, and the tiny dogsled making its way toward the ship encourages thoughts of rescue from an icy tomb. Overhead the heavens erupt in a cascade of eerie lights ranging from red to greenish-yellow. Church captured the implied motion of the electric luminescence arcing across the sky. As the ice grips the SS *United States*, and by proxy the nation, the auroras snake across the Arctic winter sky like a grim warning from God, a bleak foreshadowing of doom.

The auroras lent themselves to yet another layer of foreboding, a metaphorical meaning drawn from the Bible evoking the handwriting on the wall from the story of Belshazzar's Feast. A cartoon published by Currier & Ives showed Jefferson Davis identified as the "Modern Belshazzar" recoiling from just such a message intended to presage his downfall. In this idiom the South is cast as a modern Babylon ripe for destruction for its continued advocacy of slavery and its disloyalty to the Union. However, the idea of God sending a warning was not confined to mocking the Confederacy. Northern abolitionists fretted that they too would suffer God's wrath for having allowed the perpetuation of slavery. In Church's *Aurora Borealis*, the eerie and silent nocturnal illumination that sways and ripples across the sky might also be taken for the illuminated words that spelled out Belshazzar's doom. Church's auroras, like the handwriting on the wall, spelled out the nation's apocalyptic fear that the skies warned of imminent judgment. Slavery represented the moral abyss facing all Americans. Fear of a final retribution lay behind much public nervousness expressed over the continued appearance of the auroras during the war years.

## PRIMARY SOURCES FOR AURORA BOREALIS

*Dr. Isaac Israel Hayes delivered this address shortly after returning safely from his arctic explorations in October 1861.*

I trust that you have not forgotten the last occasion upon which I had the honor to meet you in this hall, and I want words to express the pride and gratification with which I am assured, by

your friendly reception of me this evening, that, amid the cares and anxieties which, as patriotic citizens, you must all feel in the war which has threatened the **integrity** of the Union, you have found leisure to extend a welcome to, and to express your sympathy with, myself, my companions, and Howard our little **expedition**.

Since we last met in this hall great changes have taken place. When I left the regions of **eternal** ice, I little dreamed that a powerful rebellion was **desolating** my country, and that civil war was raging among a people which I left **prosperous** and happy. This great national **calamity** alters the relations under which we now meet. Had there been peace, I should have come before you to **solicit a continuance** of your **countenance** and influence in aiding the further **prosecution** of Arctic discovery, but for the present I cannot think of it. The day has come when the Republic has a right to demand the time, the money, the energies, and, if need be, the life upon the battle-field, of even the humblest of her citizens....God willing, I trust yet to carry the flag of our great Republic, with not a single star erased from its glorious Union, to the extreme northern limits of the earth.

integrity (n)—the state of being undivided

expedition (n)—a journey with a specific purpose, such as research

eternal (adj)—lasting forever

desolate (v)—to ruin

prosperous (adj)—successful

calamity (n)—disaster

solicit (v)—to ask for

continuance (n)—act of continuing

countenance (n)—approval, support

prosecution (n)—attempt to finish something

“Arctic Explorations. Lecture of Dr. J. S. Hayes before the New-York Geographical and Statistical Society,” *New York Times*, November 15, 1861, 2. New York Times website. <http://www.nytimes.com/1861/11/15/news/arctic-explorations-lecture-dr-js-hayes-before-new-york-geographical-statistical.html?pagewanted=all>. Accessed October 5, 2012.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What words convey Hayes’s feelings about the Civil War and its impact on the country since he departed for the Arctic?
- ★ How does he connect patriotism and Arctic exploration?

---

*The aurora also appears in poetry from the Civil War, including this work by Herman Melville.*

Aurora-Borealis: **Commemorative** of the **Dissolution** of Armies at the Peace  
by Herman Melville (May, 1865)

What power **disbands** the Northern Lights  
After their **steely** play?  
The lonely watcher feels an awe  
Of Nature’s sway,  
As when appearing,  
He marked their flashed uprearing

In the cold gloom—  
Retreatings and advancings,  
(Like **dallyings** of doom),  
Transitions and **enhancings**,  
And bloody ray.

The phantom-host has faded quite,  
**Splendor** and Terror gone—  
**Portent** or promise—and gives way  
To pale, meek Dawn;  
The coming, going,  
Alike in wonder showing—  
Alike the God,  
**Decreeing** and commanding  
The million blades that glowed,  
The **muster** and disbanding—  
Midnight and Morn.

commemorative (adj)—in honor of something

dissolution (n)—breaking up

disband (v)—to break up

steely (adj)—like steel

dallying (n)—delaying or acting playfully

enhance (v)—to make bigger or brighter

splendor (n)—glory

portent (n)—sign or omen

decree (v)—to order

muster (n)—gathering of soldiers

Herman Melville, *Battle-pieces and Aspects of War*; (New York: Harper, 1866), 149.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ Melville relates the Aurora Borealis to the Union and Confederate armies disbanding at the end of the war. What imagery helps him draw this parallel?
- ★ In the second verse, Melville sets up a series of opposites including ‘portent’ and ‘promise.’ How might people on both sides of the war interpret the Aurora as both a bad omen or a good one?
- ★ Is Church’s *Aurora* one of splendor or terror? What do you see that makes you say that?



A Rebel General startled in his Camp by the Beautiful and Unexpected Display of  
NORTHERN LIGHT.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ How does the illustrator link the Aurora Borealis and the Union Army?
- ★ Based on this engraving and its title, how might the “rebel general” interpret Church’s *Aurora Borealis*? Would those lights represent a good omen or a bad one in his eyes?

Thomas Nast

*A Rebel General Startled in His Camp by the Beautiful and Unexpected Display of Northern Light*  
wood engraving

Published in *Harper's Weekly*, May 25, 1861

Library of Congress

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2012646092/>

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Compare this landscape with others from the Civil War era:

- ★ Bierstadt, *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865
- ★ Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862
- ★ Church, *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866
- ★ Gifford, *A Coming Storm*, 1863
- ★ Heade, *Approaching Thunder Storm*, 1859

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Research Notes on Aurora Borealis:

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=4806>

# *Rainy Season in the Tropics*

Frederic Edwin Church

*Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866

oil on canvas, 56 ¼ × 84 ¼ in.

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco,

Museum purchase, Mildred Anna

Williams Collection

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

(These questions can be used with all landscape paintings in the exhibition.)

- ★ How would you describe this place? Is it located in the United States of America or abroad?
- ★ What weather, natural phenomena, or landscape features can you identify in the artwork?
- ★ What color(s) are most important in the painting?
- ★ How would you describe the mood of the artwork based on the colors, the weather, and other features of the scene?
- ★ Are there people in the landscape? Does anyone live in this place? How do the human figures (or lack thereof) affect your impression of the scene?
- ★ Imagine yourself in this landscape. What do you see, hear, smell, or taste? Do you feel anything on your skin?
- ★ When was the work painted? How might it reflect historical events or trends at that stage of the Civil War?



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

*Rainy Season in the Tropics*, completed not long after the war's end, is saturated with moisture and warmth. The chasm dividing the near and far sides of the landscape is bridged by a double rainbow, reinforcing the beneficence of this meteorological phenomenon. The rainbow bridge suggests that the diminutive man and donkey making their way along the path in the lower right will find safe passage to the other side, where a small white city glistens along the distant bank. *Rainy Season in the Tropics* reached out to a country facing a need for healing but lacking a clear path for achieving that goal.

Church's entire composition speaks to a spiritual transition toward finding peace. The depiction of the man and donkey "crossing over" toward the gleaming city imbues nature with the capacity to heal and provide solace and safe transport. In nineteenth-century religious and secular usage, "crossing over" was an eloquent euphemism for death. Implying that the soul of the departed left earth and crossed over into heaven, the concept provided succor to those left behind even as it helped the dying accept their fate. In a lyrical coincidence of word and image, the setting of *Rainy Season in the Tropics* recalls Stonewall Jackson's last words, "Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees."

Jackson's quotation, endlessly repeated as a fitting epitaph for this deeply spiritual warrior, defined his state of grace for those who mourned him. Everyone touched by the Civil War came away from it changed, often damaged, either through personal tragedy or by association. In Genesis the rainbow was the symbol of God's covenant after the flood. Two days after the war ended at Appomattox Courthouse, the *New York Times* pronounced, "No more deluge of blood...no more brooding darkness....The whole heavens were spanned with the rainbow of promise." *Rainy Season's* dual rainbows were an extra-normal meteorological phenomenon, emphasizing the spiritual overtones of healing and the biblical promise of salvation in crossing over from war to peace and from this world to the next.

## PRIMARY SOURCE FOR RAINY SEASON IN THE TROPICS

*On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee, commander of the Confederate Army, surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant of the Union Army at the McLean house in the village of Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia. The following reaction was published in the New York Times two days later.*

The New Epoch—The Advent of Peace

This continent **quivered** yesterday as never since its **upheaval** from chaos. The lightning flashed peace, and from ocean to ocean, all minds thrilled with the sense of a new order of things. No more **deluge** of blood. No more whirls of ruin. No more **brooding** darkness. The republic rested again, and upon foundations as **eternal** as the hills. The whole heavens were spanned with the rainbow of promise, and every eye saw it.

quiver (v)—to shake

upheaval (n)—dramatic change

deluge (n)—flood

brooding (adj)—gloomy or threatening

eternal (adj)—lasting forever

"The New Epoch—The Advent of Peace," *New York Times*, April 11, 1865.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1865/04/11/news/the-new-epoch-the-advent-of-peace.html>.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ What do rainbows symbolize in art and text at the end of the Civil War?
- ★ Based on the *New York Times* excerpt, how did people in the North feel about the end of the War?
- ★ How might someone who had lived through the devastation of the war respond to *Rainy Season in the Tropics*?

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Compare this landscape with others from the Civil War era:

- ★ Bierstadt, *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865
- ★ Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862
- ★ Church, *Aurora Borealis*, 1865
- ★ Gifford, *A Coming Storm*, 1863
- ★ Heade, *Approaching Thunder Storm*, 1859

## RELATED RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

- ★ Lesson Plan (grades 9–12)  
The End of Eden—Landscape and the Impact of the Civil War  
Pages 83–85



# Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California

## GUIDED LOOKING QUESTIONS

(These questions can be used with all landscape paintings in the exhibition.)

- ★ How would you describe this place? Is it located in the United States of America or abroad?
- ★ What weather, natural phenomena, or landscape features can you identify in the artwork?
- ★ What color(s) are most important in the painting?
- ★ How would you describe the mood of the artwork based on the colors, the weather, and other features of the scene?
- ★ Are there people in the landscape? Does anyone live in this place? How do the human figures (or lack thereof) affect your impression of the scene?
- ★ Imagine yourself in this landscape. What do you see, hear, smell, or taste? Do you feel anything on your skin?
- ★ When was the work painted? How might it reflect historical events or trends at that stage of the Civil War?

Albert Bierstadt

*Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*,  
1865

oil on canvas, 64 ½ × 96 ½ in.

Birmingham Museum of Art; Gift of the  
Birmingham Public Library



## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

Here a majestic sunset floods the valley floor with intense yellow light. This sun-drenched California landscape teems with the elements of life: water, air, trees, and glowing sunlight. Bierstadt's paintings of Yosemite held out the promise of a respite, a place in which all Americans could slough off the trauma of war and sectarian strife, a place of renewal and healing. But unique to Bierstadt's many paintings of Yosemite, this one is unpopulated. *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California* is devoid of animals, birds, or humans. It seems to signal a New Eden after the biblical flood, awaiting the arrival of the ark to usher in a new future for mankind. Bierstadt's reaction to his first view of the Yosemite Valley is recorded in a letter of August 3, 1863 to his friend John Hay, President Lincoln's personal secretary, "We are now here in the garden of Eden I call it. The most magnificent place I was ever in, and I employ every moment painting from nature." *Looking Down Yosemite Valley* places the viewer outside of the scene, looking on at a slight remove. In doing so Bierstadt provides the allure of a new start in a New Eden, but its pristine, unpopulated state leaves the viewer to wonder if he has a right to enter. Bierstadt's painting represented a wartime yearning for sanctuary. But what appears to be the promise of redemption is in fact mostly an escape—not a solution to the nation's problems.

## PRIMARY SOURCES FOR LOOKING DOWN YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

*On June 30, 1864, President Lincoln signed the Yosemite Valley Grant Act, which set aside the area as the nation's first federally protected park. Albert Bierstadt's reaction to his first view of the Yosemite Valley is recorded in a letter of August 3, 1863 to his friend John Hay, President Lincoln's personal secretary.*

We are now here in the Garden of Eden I call it. The most magnificent place I was ever in, I employ every moment painting from nature. . . . We camp out altogether, get no news, and do not care for any for we are perfectly happy with the fine scenery, trout, ducks, deer, etc.

Bierstadt to John Hay; letter at Brown University; cited in Nancy Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise* (Brooklyn, New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1991), 178.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ How is Bierstadt's first impression of Yosemite reflected in this painting?
- ★ Bierstadt likens Yosemite to the Garden of Eden, a biblical paradise from the time when people were free of sin. How does this idea of Eden relate to the Civil War and its effect on people and landscapes in the eastern United States?

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*Thomas Starr King was an eloquent Boston preacher who moved to California in 1860. After visiting Yosemite he praised the area's natural beauty in a sermon to his congregation in San Francisco.*

This purity of nature is part of the **revelation** to us of the **sanctity** of God. It is his character that is hinted in the cleanness of the lake and its haste to reject all **taint**. It is his character that is published in the spotless heavens and the unsoiled snow and the glory of morning on mountain peaks. The purity of nature is the expression of joy and it is a revelation to us that the Creator's holiness is not **repellent** and severe. God tries to win you by his Spirit which clothes the world with beauty to trust him to give up your evil that you may find deeper **communion** with him

and to recognize the charm of goodness which alone is in harmony with the cheer and the purity of the outward world.

revelation (n)—a discovery, or something that is revealed or understood

sanctity (n)—holiness

taint (n)—imperfection

repellent (adj)—driving someone or something away

communion (n)—closeness

Thomas Starr King, *Christianity and Humanity: A Series of Sermons*, (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1878), 313–314. Google Book Search. <http://books.google.com/books?id=KRspcuJZjHEC>. Accessed November 5, 2012.

## LINKING QUESTIONS

- ★ How does King relate God and nature? In his mind, what does Yosemite have to do with good and evil?
- ★ Compare the “purity” of Yosemite to the East’s battle-scarred landscapes and the South’s destroyed cities. What might Yosemite mean to people who had lived through the Civil War?

## ARTWORK CONNECTIONS

Compare this landscape with others in this packet from the Civil War era:

- ★ Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862
- ★ Church, *Aurora Borealis*, 1865
- ★ Church, *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866
- ★ Gifford, *A Coming Storm*, 1863
- ★ Heade, *Approaching Thunder Storm*, 1859

## RELATED RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDE

- ★ Activity  
Landscape and Mood  
Pages 69–70
- ★ Lesson Plan (grades 9–12)  
The End of Eden—Landscape and the Impact of the Civil War  
Pages 83–85







## ACTIVITIES

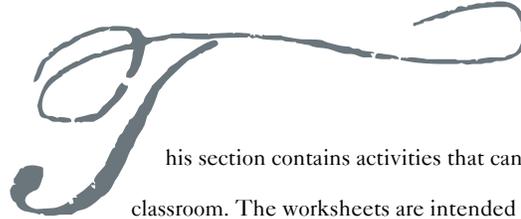
Eastman Johnson

*A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862* (detail), 1862

oil on board, 21 ½ × 26 in.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, The Paul Mellon Collection

# Activities



This section contains activities that can be adapted for use in the museum or in the classroom. The worksheets are intended to encourage students to make connections between the artworks and to consider the historical themes of the exhibition.

To introduce these activities, plan a classroom discussion about the featured artworks using the artwork descriptions and looking questions in the About the Art section of this guide.



## ARTWORK CONVERSATIONS



Winslow Homer, *Prisoners from the Front*, 1866  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Winslow Homer, *A Visit from the Old Mistress*, 1876  
Smithsonian American Art Museum

Winslow Homer used the same composition to paint two moments of conflict during the Civil War and Reconstruction. In *Prisoners from the Front*, a Union general faces down Confederate prisoners of war. In *A Visit from the Old Mistress* the cast has changed to African American women and their former mistress.

Select one of these artworks and complete both sides of the writing worksheet. Step into the shoes of one character on each side of the conflict. Use your prior knowledge of the Civil War and Reconstruction to inform your writing. Even though you may sympathize with one view, do your best to understand and write from both sides.

LEFT SIDE	RIGHT SIDE
Today I had a conversation with _____ _____	Today I had a conversation with _____ _____
about _____ _____.	about _____ _____.
When they faced me, they looked _____ _____	When they faced me, they looked _____ _____
and I felt _____ _____.	and I felt _____ _____.
They think that _____ _____ _____.	They think that _____ _____ _____.
But I think _____ _____ _____.	But I think _____ _____ _____.
I have a difficult relationship with them because _____ _____ _____.	I have a difficult relationship with them because _____ _____ _____.
and _____ _____ _____.	and _____ _____ _____.
I am frightened that _____ _____ _____.	I am frightened that _____ _____ _____.
In the future, I hope for _____ _____ _____.	In the future, I hope for _____ _____ _____.

## GENRE PAINTING: SCENES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

A genre painting depicts a scene from everyday life. The artworks below, *The Veteran in a New Field* and *The Cotton Pickers* by Winslow Homer capture two postwar experiences.



Winslow Homer, *The Veteran in a New Field*, 1865  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Winslow Homer, *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

**Activity:** Think about an emotionally challenging or difficult time in your life.

**Things to think about:** Did this event change you? Who helped you overcome the challenge? How did you feel after it was resolved?

In the box below, illustrate a scene from this difficult time. Make sure to include yourself in the genre drawing.

**Extended activity:** Discuss your illustrations as a class. Could you make a genre mural about life in your school or community? Or could you make one about other historical events?



## LANDSCAPE AND MOOD



Martin J. Heade, *Approaching Thunder Storm*, 1859, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Art can stir a viewer's emotions. That feeling is called *mood*. These landscapes are important because they represent the mood of the country at three different points in the timeline of the Civil War.

Observe how the artist uses the sky and environment to show mood in the painting. Notice the use of color to depict the weather and water in the paintings.

In the box below, sketch a landscape with a distinctive mood. Write down the mood your landscape portrays.



Frederic E. Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862, Detroit Institute of Arts



Albert Bierstadt, *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865, Birmingham Museum of Art

Mood:



Frederic E. Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1855  
Smithsonian American Art Museum



Frederic E. Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862  
Detroit Institute of Arts

Look at Church's painting of the Ecuadorean volcano Cotopaxi in 1855 (left) and contrast it with his 1862 version (right). Why are there two versions? Look closely at the year each painting was completed. In 1855, talk of a Civil War was just beginning. In 1862, the Civil War had already begun. Describe how Church used his paintings to reveal the mood of the country during these time periods.

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If you could create a view of Cotopaxi to represent your experience this year, what would it look like? Sketch it below.

## SPOTLIGHT ON *NEGRO LIFE AT THE SOUTH*

These worksheets are intended to help students unpack one of the more complex artworks in the exhibition, Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South*.



*Negro Life at the South*, Eastman Johnson, 1859, The New-York Historical Society

### SUGGESTED USE

- ★ Project the image in the classroom.
- ★ Divide students into small groups, some of whom will focus on the ENVIRONMENT of the artwork and some of whom will focus on the PEOPLE.
- ★ Once the groups have completed the worksheets, direct them to share their interpretations with the class. Ask students to identify connections between the environment and the people.
- ★ OPTIONAL: examine specific symbols Johnson employed using the SYMBOLISM worksheet, either in groups or as a class.
- ★ Ask students to record their final interpretation of the artwork, citing at least two pieces of visual evidence to support it.

Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* is a complex painting. Begin examining the artwork by focusing on the **ENVIRONMENT**.



The scene is set in slave quarters attached to a house. **Compare and contrast the two buildings.**



One way to move between the main house and the slave quarters is this passageway. **What other entrances and exits can you find in this painting? How are the two parts divided and connected?**



Did you notice the sheet hanging from this window? **If someone exited the window using the sheet, how could they enter the slave quarters without being noticed? Describe the path the artist provides.**

In 1858, Abraham Lincoln declared: "A house divided against itself cannot stand... Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South."

**What "house" is Lincoln describing as "divided" by the issue of slavery? How might Lincoln's quotation relate to the two houses in Eastman Johnson's painting?**

**How has Johnson represented the house for enslaved people in this artwork? What evidence can you find that might tell you about his personal feelings on the issue?**

Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* is a complex painting. Begin examining the artwork by focusing on the **PEOPLE** and completing this worksheet.



**What in this artwork communicates a sense of community among the people?**



Johnson has painted the moment this woman has entered the yard. **Is she a welcome part of the community? How are the other people reacting to her?**



On the opposite side of the painting, Johnson shows another woman of a similar age but darker skin tone. In 1859, she would have been referred to as a mulatto, or a person with black and white heritage. **Can you find other children in this scene who might also be of mixed race?**

It's possible that the woman in the white dress entering the yard is also of mixed race but, because of the light color of her skin, is able to "pass" for white. She may even be the sister of the woman across the yard. **What visual evidence supports that theory?**

Harriet Beecher Stowe explored the idea of "passing" for white in her 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through the character George Harris.

"I might mingle in the circles of the whites, in this country, my shade of color is so slight.... But, to tell you the truth, I have no wish to.

"My sympathies are not for my father's race, but for my mother's. To him I was no more than a fine dog or horse: to my poor heart-broken mother I was a *child*; and, though I never saw her, after the cruel sale that separated us, till she died, yet I *know* she

always loved me dearly. I know it by my own heart. When I think of all she suffered, of my own early sufferings, of the distresses and struggles of my heroic wife, of my sister, sold in the New Orleans slave-market,—though I hope to have no unchristian sentiments, yet I may be excused for saying, I have no wish to pass for an American, or to identify myself with them.

"It is with the oppressed, enslaved African race that I cast in my lot; and, if I wished anything, I would wish myself two shades darker, rather than one lighter."

**How might Stowe's words relate to the two women in Johnson's painting? Based on evidence in the painting and your knowledge of the time period, how do you think the lives and opportunities of the two women at opposite ends of the painting might be different from one another? (Answer on a separate sheet of paper.)**

Advanced Level: After you have discussed the environment and the people in the painting, examine each of the **SYMBOLS** below and consider how they might deepen or support your interpretation of *Negro Life at the South*.



A dog can symbolize many things including love, loyalty, vigilance, and guardianship. **How is this dog reacting to the action in the yard? How might his coloring, mixed brown and white spots, relate to the message of the artwork as a whole? Which symbolic qualities fit best in this situation?**



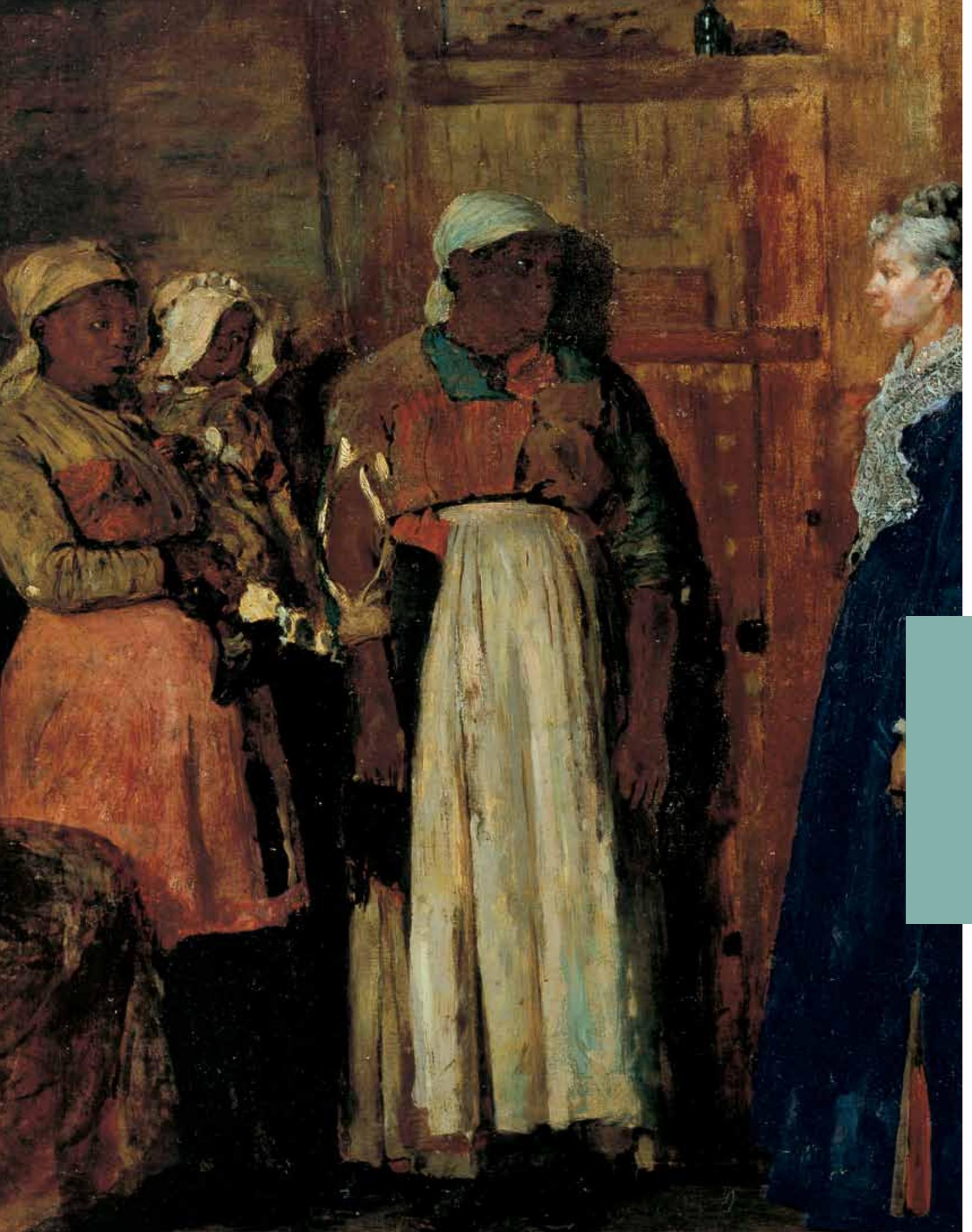
Do you see the white cat entering through an open window into the slave quarters? **How does the cat reveal connections between the two houses and races?**



Notice the rooster on the roof calling to the hen below. **Why did Johnson place them in those locations? Why would he have included this symbol of courtship?**



Leeks are a symbol of slavery used by Frederick Douglass and other abolitionists. The idea comes from the Israelites in the Old Testament who, starving in the wilderness, remember the food they were given as the Pharaoh's slaves: "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions." (book of Numbers 11:5) **Why might Johnson have placed the leeks in the center of the yard?**



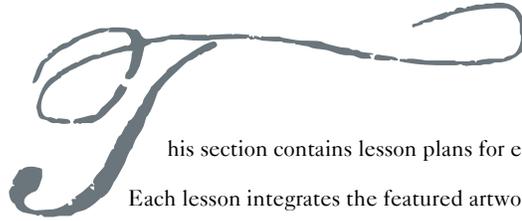
Winslow Homer

*A Visit from the Old Mistress* (detail), 1876

oil on canvas, 18 × 24 in.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of William T. Evans

# Teacher-Created Lessons



This section contains lesson plans for elementary, middle, and high school students. Each lesson integrates the featured artworks from this guide into classroom activities that teach students about the Civil War and hone historical thinking skills.

The ideas for each lesson were set out by teachers who participated in a professional development workshop titled *Understanding the Civil War through American Art and Portraiture* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery.



# Finding a New Balance: Life after the Civil War

**ARTWORK** Winslow Homer, *A Visit from the Old Mistress*, 1876

*This lesson is based on the work of teachers who participated in the workshop titled Understanding the Civil War through American Art and Portraiture. We would like to thank Cynthia Arendt, Theodore Rice, Mary Saulsgiver, and Katrina Shultz for their contributions.*

## OVERVIEW

Students will analyze *A Visit from the Old Mistress* by Winslow Homer (mood, place, subjects, colors, meaning, etc) in order to better understand the changing racial relationships during Reconstruction. Students will be able to identify the artist's purpose and meaning using background knowledge and critical observations of the artist's work. They will practice sequencing events by creating a story with a beginning, middle, and an end.

## AGE GROUP

- ★ Elementary School (grades 3–5, depending on when students study state history)

## STANDARDS OF LEARNING

- ★ National Historical Thinking Standards for Grades K–4
  - Standard 1: Chronological Thinking
  - Standard 2: Historical Comprehension
  - Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation
- ★ Common Core English Language Arts Standards, Grades 3–5
  - Speaking & Listening
  - Comprehension and Collaboration
  - Presentation of Ideas

## LENGTH OF LESSON

Two fifty-minute periods, part of a unit on the Civil War

## RATIONALE

Art reflects the perspective of the historical period in which it was created. When students step into characters from a painting and imagine what came before and after the scene depicted, they gain a historical sense of time and place. Thinking about why the artist chose the scene helps them analyze the artist's perspective and the artwork.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- ★ Understand the shifting relationships between blacks and former slaveowners in the South during Reconstruction;
- ★ Apply background knowledge of the Civil War by looking critically at the composition of a piece of art;
- ★ Identify the artist's purpose.

## MATERIALS

- ✓ Laptop and data projector
- ✓ Pencils and paper for students to take notes, jot down ideas, etc.
- ✓ SMARTBoard (optional)
- ✓ Digital cameras for students (1 per group)
- ✓ Reproductions and About the Art sheets from this Teacher's Guide relating to Winslow Homer, *A Visit from the Old Mistress*, 1876

## LESSON

### 1. Link to Prior Knowledge

- a. Ask the class, "How might you describe the relationship between slaveowners and the people they enslaved prior to and during the Civil War?"
- b. Instruct students to turn to a shoulder partner and share.

### 2. Engage

- a. Project *A Visit from the Old Mistress* by Winslow Homer onto a screen. Prompt students to observe the painting as a detective and look for clues in the painting that the artist wants you to see.
- b. Guided questions:
  - i. What jumps out at you?
  - ii. What's the first thing you see?
  - iii. What's the next thing you see?
  - iv. How does the painting make you feel? Why?
  - v. Can you tell a story from this painting? Where in the story does this painting take place? (the beginning, middle or end?)
  - vi. What emotion does the painting evoke?
  - vii. Why do you think the painter chose this scene?

### 3. Active Learning (sequence activity)

- a. Place students in groups of four or five and give them a copy of Homer's *A Visit from the Old Mistress*.
- b. Ask students to portray the characters in the Homer painting. One student may act as director and be the lead organizer of the project, but all students must contribute ideas. Assign each group to re-create three different scenes using the characters in the painting that represent the beginning, middle, and end of a story. They must decide which part of the story is represented in Homer's painting and imagine their own version of the other two based on what they have learned from *A Visit from the Old Mistress*. The three possible outcomes the group could select for their three scenes are as follows:

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Scene 1	<i>A Visit from the Old Mistress</i>	<i>Beginning</i>	<i>Beginning</i>
Scene 2	Middle	<i>A Visit from the Old Mistress</i>	Middle
Scene 3	End	End	<i>A Visit from the Old Mistress</i>

- c. Assign the director of each group to take a picture of all three scenes using a digital camera.

### 4. Reflection

- a. Direct each group to take turns sharing their three pictures in sequence in front of the class.
- b. Instruct them to explain:
  - i. How they decided where the Homer painting fit in the story
  - ii. Their interpretation of the scenes they created and how they connect to Homer's painting
  - iii. What they learned about race relations during this time period



# Perspectives on Slavery

- ARTWORKS** Eastman Johnson, *Negro Life in at the South*, 1859
- Eastman Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*, 1862
- Winslow Homer, *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876

## OVERVIEW

The Civil War changed African Americans' daily lives and how they envisioned their future. Artists of the time captured some of these experiences and changes. In this lesson, students will look at three paintings to better understand slavery and emancipation around the Civil War period.

## AGE GROUP

- ★ Elementary School (grades 3–5)
- ★ Middle School (grades 6–8)

## STANDARDS OF LEARNING

- ★ National History Standard Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850–1877)
  - Standard 1: The causes of the Civil War
  - Standard 2: The course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people
  - Standard 3: How various Reconstruction plans succeeded or failed
- ★ Common Core Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–8
  - RH.6-8.1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
  - RH.6-8.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
  - RH.6-8.7. Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

## LENGTH OF LESSON

One fifty-minute lesson

## RATIONALE

Examining slavery, emancipation, and the Civil War using multiple perspectives, including those of the artists and their figures, promotes historical thinking and empathy. Students will learn to form interpretations of complex images and support them using visual and contextual evidence.

*This lesson is based on the work of teachers who participated in the workshop titled Understanding the Civil War through American Art and Portraiture. We would like to thank Beverly Capone, Courtney Fish, Kelli Higgins, Gayla Kobialka, Brandt Lapko, Alice Mayoral, Thelma Nevitt, Marina Tyquiengco, and Vickie Tyquiengco for their contributions.*

## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- ★ Interpret artwork within the context of historical events;
- ★ Identify characters, setting, and details within the three artworks;
- ★ Distinguish between what is known (prior knowledge), and what is gained (new knowledge) through guided observation;
- ★ Interpret the artist’s message and cite visual details as evidence to support their interpretations.

## MATERIALS

- ✓ Know Wonder Learn (KWL) Chart
- ✓ Projector
- ✓ Reproductions and About the Art sheets from this Teacher’s Guide relating to the following paintings:
  - Eastman Johnson, *Negro Life at the South*, 1859
  - Eastman Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*, 1862
  - Winslow Homer, *The Cotton Pickers*, 1876

## LESSON

### 1. Link to Prior Knowledge

Pass out a copy of the KWL chart for every student and instruct students to complete the KNOW part of the graphic organizer by answering the question “What do I know about slavery in the Civil War?”

### 2. Engage

Tell students that they will learn about the impact of slavery on the country before, during, and after the Civil War. Provide a brief overview of the African American experience from 1859 to 1876, including enslavement, efforts to achieve freedom, and life during Reconstruction in the South. Direct the students to take notes during this section in the WONDER section of the chart and then add any questions they have about the topic.

### 3. Active Learning

- a. Display the three artworks around the room. Students will use a Gallery Walk to make observations of the three paintings. Give students three minutes to observe each work of art. The goal for this section is to have students make open-ended observations of each piece.
- b. Call the class back together for discussion based on setting, characters, and other details of the artworks. Display each artwork in the following order:
  - i. *Negro Life at the South*, Eastman Johnson, 1859

Guided questions: *Where are the characters? Who are the characters? How are the people feeling? Where is the light in this work? Why do you think the artist is putting the light where he does? Look at the tree: Why does the artist put the tree where he does? What is behind the tree?*

ii. *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*, Eastman Johnson, 1862

Guided questions: *Where are the characters? Who are the characters? How are the people feeling? Whose horse do you think that is? Why? What is the girl holding in her arm? Why is she looking back?*

iii. *The Cotton Pickers*, Winslow Homer, 1876

Guided questions: *Where are the two girls? (setting) Who are these girls? How are they feeling? What are they doing? Are they active? In what direction are they looking? Why did the artist choose a cotton field as his setting?*

Ask students to share their observations for each painting. As they share, prompt students to explain their answers using evidence from the artworks.

#### 4. Reflection

Have students fill out the LEARN section of the chart. Prompt them to include skills as well as knowledge.

#### 5. Assessment

There should be deeper meaning in the LEARN section of the KWL chart. Deeper meaning could be assessed by the student's ability to draw conclusions about the effects of slavery or emancipation during the time period in which the artworks were created. Look for evidence of students' ability to interpret the artists' messages.

#### 6. Extensions

- a. Timeline: Instruct students to hang the three artworks in the classroom in chronological order. Add other major dates, including the start and end of the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Thirteenth Amendment to put the artworks in more context. Assign students to research African American and Civil War history for the years each artwork was painted, so that they can annotate the timeline. Use the final timeline as a classroom tool to discuss the transition from slavery to freedom.
- b. Discussion: The title of the artwork can influence our understanding of the image. Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* was once titled *My Old Kentucky Home*. How would that title affect your interpretation? What title would you give the artwork and why?
- c. Writing Activity: Write a story from the point of view of one of the figures in *The Cotton Pickers* or *Negro Life at the South*. Include details from the artwork, so your readers feel like they are stepping in to the scene.

**Slavery and Emancipation around the Civil War Years**

<b>KNOW</b>	<b>WONDER</b>	<b>LEARN</b>
What do I know about slavery in the Civil War?	What will I learn? What do I want to find out?	What have I learned?

# The End of Eden—Landscape and the Impact of the Civil War

**ARTWORKS** Martin Johnson Heade, *Approaching Thunder Storm*, 1859

Albert Bierstadt, *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865

Frederic Edwin Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862

Frederic Edwin Church, *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866

## OVERVIEW

Students will consider the Civil War's impact on the vision of America as a New Eden. They will analyze four landscape paintings created during the Civil War era in the context of writings by Thomas More, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson.

## AGE GROUP

High School (grades 9–12)

*This lesson is based on the work of teachers who participated in the workshop titled Understanding the Civil War through American Art and Portraiture. We would like to thank Jim Wagner for his contribution.*

## STANDARDS OF LEARNING

- ★ National History Standard Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850–1877)
  - Standard 2: The course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people
- ★ Common Core Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 11–12
  - RH.11-12.1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
  - RH.11-12.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
  - RH.11-12.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text
  - RH.11-12.6. Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.
  - RH.11-12.7. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
  - RH.11-12.9. Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Furthermore, the lesson connects to the International Baccalaureate History of the Americas curriculum objective on the American Civil War.

## LENGTH OF LESSON

One forty-five-minute lesson

## RATIONALE

This lesson teaches the human and material cost of the Civil War by examining its devastation to American landscape and identity. Students will analyze, integrate, and evaluate ideas from multiple primary sources, both text and image, in order to develop a historical argument.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- ★ Identify basic elements of painting (composition, light);
- ★ Describe key themes in the artworks and select visual examples to support the themes;
- ★ Compare the visual images in the artworks to the events taking place in the United States (i.e., Civil War);
- ★ Summarize and restate, in writing, the theme(s) of the artists.

## MATERIALS

- ✓ Reproductions and About the Art sheets from this Teacher's Guide relating to the following paintings:
  - Martin Johnson Heade, *Approaching Thunder Storm*, 1859
  - Albert Bierstadt, *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865
  - Frederic Edwin Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862
  - Frederic Edwin Church, *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866
- ✓ Texts by Thomas More, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson, including:
  - *Utopia*: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2130/2130-h/2130-h.htm>
  - *Common Sense*: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/147/147-h/147-h.htm>
  - *The Declaration of Independence*: [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html)

## LESSON

(NOTE: Ideally, the lesson should come at the end of a Civil War unit.)

### 1. Warm-up

Have students brainstorm (with a partner or in writing journals) on the question: How did the New World represent a New Eden? Consider how the three Thomases—Thomas Moore in *Utopia*, Thomas Paine in his various writings, and Thomas Jefferson in his writings and actions—saw America as a paradise to be inhabited by the new man.

## 2. Observation

Have students view each of the four artworks included in the lesson. The works should be viewed in the order listed in the Materials section.

## 3. Context

As each artwork is viewed, provide brief background on the work from the About the Art sheets in the Teacher's Guide. Include, at minimum, information on Lincoln's signing legislation to preserve Yosemite and Church's work in South America with scientist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt.

## 4. Discussion

Pause with each artwork and ask students to respond verbally to these questions:

- a. What do you see? (Objective: these are landscapes)
- b. What might be going on in the artwork?
- c. How did the artist represent nature? Possible responses include peaceful, turbulent, hopeful, mythical/unrealistic.
- d. Is anything missing? Why? (Important to note the limited presence or lack of humans in the paintings, especially the Bierstadt view of Yosemite.)
- e. Consider the date of the painting and the events of the American Civil War. Did the artist have a subtext about the war in his painting?

## 5. Writing Assignment

Students select one of the four artworks and respond, in writing, to the following:

- a. What was the artist's thesis? (Yes, artists make thesis statements in their work!)
- b. Did the artist believe that the New World was the New Eden? Support your answer with clues in the artwork.
- c. Did the artist believe that the New Eden was destroyed or could it be saved? Support your answer with clues in the artwork.
- d. If you were viewing this artwork when it first went on exhibit, how would it make you feel? Why?
- e. Would you hang the painting in your house today? Why?







*“Our painters have worked in the  
midst of great events, and therefore  
subjected to the most tumultuous,  
shattering, and ennobling experiences.”*

*— Eugene Benson, May 1866*



Smithsonian American Art Museum

**THE CIVIL WAR**  
AND *American Art*

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# STUDY PRINTS



Eastman Johnson

*Negro Life at the South*, 1859

oil on linen, 37 × 46 in.

The New-York Historical Society, The Robert L. Stuart Collection



E. Johnson

Eastman Johnson

*A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*, 1862

oil on board, 21 ½ × 26 in.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, The Paul Mellon Collection



Winslow Homer

*Prisoners from the Front*, 1866

oil on canvas, 24 × 38 in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Frank B. Porter, 1922



Winslow Homer

*The Veteran in a New Field*, 1865

oil on canvas, 24  $\frac{1}{8}$  × 38  $\frac{1}{8}$  in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Miss Adelaide  
Milton de Groot (1876–1967), 1967



Winslow Homer

*A Visit from the Old Mistress*, 1876

oil on canvas, 18 × 24 in.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of William T. Evans



Winslow Homer

*The Cotton Pickers*, 1876

oil on canvas, 24  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 38  $\frac{1}{8}$  in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Acquisition made possible through Museum Trustees:

Robert O. Anderson, R. Stanton Avery, B. Gerald Cantor, Edward W. Carter, Justin Dart,  
Charles E. Ducommun, Camilla Chandler Frost, Julian Ganz, Jr., Dr. Armand Hammer,  
Harry Lenart, Dr. Franklin D. Murphy, Mrs. Joan Palevsky, Richard E. Sherwood, Maynard J.  
Toll, and Hal B. Wallis



Martin Johnson Heade

*Approaching Thunder Storm*, 1859

oil on canvas, 28 × 44 in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Erving Wolf Foundation and  
Mr. and Mrs. Erving Wolf, in memory of Diane R. Wolf, 1975



Frederic Edwin Church

*Cotopaxi*, 1862

oil on canvas, 48 × 85 in.

Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Robert H. Tannahill Foundation Fund,  
Gibbs-Williams Fund, Dexter M. Ferry Jr. Fund, Merrill Fund, Beatrice W. Rogers Fund,  
and Richard A. Manoogian Fund



Sanford Robinson Gifford

*A Coming Storm*, 1863, retouched and redated in 1880

oil on canvas, 28 × 42 in.

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the McNeil Americana Collection



Frederic Edwin Church

*Aurora Borealis*, 1865

oil on canvas, 56 × 83 1/2 in.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Eleanor Blodgett



Frederic Edwin Church

*Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866

oil on canvas, 56 ¼ × 84 ¼ in.

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Museum purchase, Mildred Anna Williams Collection



Albert Bierstadt

*Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865

oil on canvas, 64 ½ × 96 ½ in.

Birmingham Museum of Art; Gift of the Birmingham Public Library