

Sadorus Lesson Plan: The American Farm as Portrayed by Artists



Objective:

students will be able to describe how various artists painted American farms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by analyzing the content and form of selected paintings from the ISM collection and works from other Web sources. They will be able to identify idealized, nostalgic, and realistic views of farming through discussion, bringing into play their own knowledge of farms today.

Image: Irean Gordon, Rural Scene,

1940

Grade Level: Grade 8-12

Time Required: one class period; discussion of farming and settlement of America precedes it; time to see paintings online; time to write about what philosophy or attitudes an artist was expressing.

Motivation: The American Farm was a popular topic for artists to portray during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are many contemporary artists who paint rural and farm subjects. During pioneer days from the late 1700s to the late 1800s, Americans were settling the West and “conquering” nature. The philosophy of Manifest Destiny is evident in paintings of the era. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, different views of farming were expressed by artists. Some looked back to a happier time on the farm, to an idealized rural way of life, while other artists made social comments on the devastation caused by drought and bankruptcy. We can find out what the feelings of the time were by studying these works of art.

Procedure: Given a specific time limit, students will search the ISM Art Web modules for art works on the subject of farms.

They can be found at

[Depression Era Art](#), a small collection of paintings, prints, and sculptures from the ISM's WPA collection. an online collection of [Frank Sadorus' photographs](#) of his family farm in eastern Illinois circa 1910.

The [MuseumLink Prairie](#) Web module contains a group of artworks with rural themes.

Students can search other sites on rural art on Goggle.com with keywords such as <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA98/haven/wood/home.html> (Grant Wood),

http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/new_deal_for_the_arts/index.html (Great Depression) <http://home.sprynet.com/~bdsalern/amart1.htm>

(regionalist painters) http://kidsartworkshop.org/thomas_hart_benton.htm
(Thomas Hart Benton) http://whitemountainart.com/History/history_wmaa.htm

When students find a painting they like, they should print it out, bookmark it, and then begin to analyze it for content and style. You may use the guided Questions on the Martelly lithograph together as a class. Then give students a copy of the questions to use with their artwork choice.

Guided questions worksheet:

Title of artwork:

Painter's name:

Date of artwork:

Medium:

1. What things do you see in this painting? Make a list.
2. Does the title indicate to you any feelings or thoughts by the painter about his subject?
3. What information does this painting give you about farming?
4. Are there humans in this painting? What are they doing? What are their facial expressions? What mood does their presence create for you in the painting?
5. If there are no humans, what might their absence mean? Is the farm or land pure, pristine, or untouched — or is it ruined by former use and abandoned? Is it perhaps an imaginary place?
6. How does the medium help convey the feeling of the painting? (black/white, dark colors, delicate lines, harsh shadows, hazy washes, etc.)
7. After reading these questions and thinking about them, decide for yourself how the painting expresses farm life to you.
Write down your conclusion in a paragraph.

Sample Guided Analysis to do as a group:

John deMartelly (1903-1979)
Chore Boy,
Lithograph
Collection of the Illinois State
Museum



1. What things do you see in this painting? Make a list.

a boy, water pail, crows, wagon, hay, workers, fields, trees, sky...

2. Does the title indicate to you any feelings or thoughts by the painter about his subject?

3. Describe what you think the boy is doing, supposed to be doing, the mood created in the piece.

4. What does this painting tell you about farming? Did you know this before?

hand labor of 4-5 people cut, stack, and load hay onto wagons; the boy brings water to workers in a bucket; horses pull the wagon; no motors or engines in sight.

5. Are there humans in this painting? What are they doing? What are their facial expressions? What mood does their presence create for you in the painting?

personal responses to boy falling asleep in the sun during his chore

6. If there are no humans, do you think that has meaning? Is the farm or land pure, pristine, or touched — or is it ruined by former use and abandoned? Is it perhaps an imaginary place?

7. How does the medium help convey the feeling of the painting? (black/white, dark colors, delicate lines, harsh shadows, hazy washes, etc.)

elicit responses on mood; would it be a different mood if color (rather than black and white) produced the summer sunlight and shadow?

8. After reading these questions and thinking about them, decide for yourself how the painting expresses farm life to you, and write down your conclusion here.

individual responses based on discussion by group.

Sharing, Assessment, and Publication:

1) When students have finished their analyses and written down their comments, they can share their ideas with a larger group in discussion. Do any members of the class have a different reaction to a painting than the first viewer did? Why? What about the painting or the new viewer causes that different reaction? (Remember that each viewer brings his or her own life experience and experience with art to each artwork, so reactions differ in valid ways. There is more than one interpretation to a work of art, but there are also some cultural norms that apply).

2) Pin up the artworks on a board, then have students group them according to the content, mood, message, or other criteria that they feel some may have in common. Students should verbalize why they grouped works together. Do the grouped artworks share media, date of creation, style, or other characteristics?

Illinois State Board of Education Goals:

Visual Art:

Middle School: 25.B.3. Compare and contrast the elements and principles in two or more art works that share similar themes

Early H.S.: 27.B.3. Know and describe how artists and their works shape culture and increase understanding of societies, past and present.

Late H.S.: 27.B.5. Analyze how the arts shape and reflect ideas, issues or themes in a particular culture or historical period.