

WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

KEY TERMS

- Cowboys
- Lakota
- Manifest Destiny
- Stereotypes
- Trade



CLOSE LOOKING

BALTIMORE-BORN ARTIST Alfred Jacob Miller painted this imagined hunting scene in 1865 using a combination of various sketches that he made twenty-eight years earlier on a trip through the Wyoming territory. Its oval format is a shape borrowed from Miller's art training in Europe. In the composition, horses carrying two Native Americans of the Plains culture group gallop over a log in pursuit of an elk swimming across the Platte River. Carrying lances, bows, and arrows in quivers, one hunter theatrically leans his head back while the horse beside him exhales steaming breath. These were probably intentional additions by Miller to increase the drama of the scene. Miller's inclusion of big,

INDIANS HUNTING ELK ON THE PLATTE 1865

Oil on canvas
Alfred Jacob Miller
Born: Baltimore, Maryland 1810
Died: Baltimore, Maryland 1874
Gift of Alfred J. Miller, BMA 1946.3

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

ALFRED MILLER WAS ONE of the first European-American artists to create images of life in the western United States. Born in Baltimore and trained in Paris and Rome, Miller moved to New Orleans and established an art studio, where he met Scottish adventurer Captain William Drummond Stewart. Upon seeing Miller's artwork, Stewart commissioned Miller to accompany him on an expedition to the Rocky Mountains for the annual fur trade rendezvous between mountain trappers and St. Louis traders. During the journey, Miller's sole job was to record the trip in field sketches. In April 1837, the party, consisting of forty-five men and twenty carts of equipment, began its seven-month journey on the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri, to Horse Creek, Wyoming, near the Colorado border. The party spent a week or so at the rendezvous, then headed further west into the Rockies to hunt moose and elk.

Miller returned from the trip and immediately began working on a set of watercolor sketches of fur traders, landscapes, Native Americans, and interactions between the Stewart party and indigenous peoples. These sketches were shipped to Captain Stewart's Murthly Castle in Scotland, and Alfred Miller followed. Living in the castle from 1840 to 1842, Miller completed the Stewart commission by producing paintings from some of Stewart's favorite sketches. Upon completing the project, Miller returned to Baltimore, where he spent the rest of his career painting portraits and scenes inspired by his journey west, including *Indians Hunting Elk on the Platte*.



dramatically lit clouds against a blue sky, the athleticism of the horse and rider acting as one in their pursuit, and the positioning of the Native American man's head suggesting the delivery of a war whoop all play into European American stereotypes at the time of native peoples as wild, without distinctive cultures and societies, and living in a state of blissful harmony with nature.

The splayed, hobby-horse like representation of the horses' legs was due to the inability of the unaided eye to accurately record the quick gait of a galloping horse. It wasn't until 1878 that Englishman Eadweard Muybridge finally captured the correct movement of a horse in motion in a pioneering series of sequential photographs. His photographs allowed artists to better understand and more accurately depict the animal's gait.

ART IN CONTEXT

WITH ITS SOURCE IN THE COLORADO MOUNTAINS, the Platte River rolls through Nebraska and feeds into the Missouri River. The Platte River Valley played an important role in the western migration of Americans, mostly of European descent, by providing routes for several trails including the Oregon Trail. While the Oregon Trail was used by native peoples for centuries, in the 1810s fur traders and trappers began altering it to accommodate wagon transportation. Along the route, fur trappers and traders directed mule trains carrying goods for barter and supplies west. On the return trip, traders carried out furs, usually beaver, destined for buyers in the East. In addition to traders, the Oregon Trail was used by Native Americans, settlers, farmers, miners, and ranchers migrating west in search of land. At its completion, the Oregon Trail spanned 2,130 miles from Independence, Missouri, across Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Idaho, and ending in Oregon City, Oregon.

Westward migration by European settlers east of the Mississippi River increased markedly during the first half of the nineteenth century. The United States government sought to lay claims to western territories, increase US boundaries, and shore up natural resources. The expansionist endeavor was in part justified by the idea of Manifest Destiny, a term coined in 1845 by journalist John L. O'Sullivan arguing the right of the United States to claim the whole of Oregon. Manifest Destiny held that the moral mission of US citizens was to move westward, bringing their ideas of civilization, democracy, and freedom from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. Rhetoric rather than specific policy, Manifest Destiny had devastating consequences because it inherently condoned the occupation and annexation of Native American lands and the murder or forced migration of indigenous people.

**A WILD SCENE** 1831–1832

Oil on canvas

Thomas Cole

Born: Lancashire, England 1801

Died: Catskill, New York 1848

Purchase with Exchange Funds from Leonce

Rabillon

Bequest Fund; and Purchase Fund, BMA 1958.15

RELATED ARTWORK

FOR A PUBLIC FASCINATED with the image of a quickly changing American West, Frederic Remington helped create a new American icon: the persona of the rugged, able-bodied, frontier cowboy. The bronco buster's job is to "break" a horse, that is, to tame its wild nature. In the artwork to the right, a newly saddled horse rears on its hind legs, while the cowboy, whose right boot has slipped from the stirrup, brandishes a quirt, a short-handled whip with a leather lash, in one hand and grasps the reins and a fistful of mane in the other. The cowboy, with his powerful arm outstretched, sits high in the saddle and, in doing so, appears to dominate the bronco. The iconic conquering cowboy represents a romanticized vision of western settlers—independent and heroic. The bronco stands as a metaphor for the myth of the American West as a vast wilderness in need of taming by the idealized American of Northern European descent. Despite this stereotype, many cowhands over the course of westward expansion were Spanish, Mexican, African American, or female.¹ Of the twenty-two sculpture subjects created by Remington, *Bronco Buster* was his first and remains his most popular.

THOUGH THE UNITED STATES had become a major power in its own right in the nineteenth century, many American artists continued to turn to Europe and its long artistic tradition for inspiration. In the fall and winter of 1831/1832, English-born American artist Thomas Cole traveled to Europe to paint and study famous artists of the past using a cash advance given to him by Baltimore art patron Richard Gilmore, Jr. In exchange, Gilmore accepted *A Wild Scene* (above), painted while the artist was in Florence, Italy. In it, Cole imagines a grand landscape, dramatically lit at dawn, in which idealized Native Americans hunt deer among colossal natural features. The diminutive scale of the American Indians gives them the appearance of being literally surrounded by the vast landscape. The depiction reflects a belief held by many settlers that Native Americans were somehow closer to nature and, thus, more

**BRONCO BUSTER** 1895; this cast 1906

Bronze

Frederic Sackrider Remington

Born: Canton, New York 1861

Died: Ridgefield, Connecticut 1909

Foundry: Roman Bronze Works, New York, New York 1897–1988

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey A. Legum, Baltimore

BMA 2012.585

innocent and “primitive” than their European American counterparts. The large scale of the canvas helps to create a sense of the awesome power of the untamed wilderness, as does the use of dramatic, highly contrasted light and shadow in areas such as the dawn sky, the large tree to the right in the composition, and the background cliffs. Although a stand-in for what was perceived as the “unspoiled” American landscape of the West, this work borrows heavily from traditions of large-scale European landscape paintings.

A Wild Scene was a precursor to a series of five paintings called “The Course of Empire”² in which the landscape served as a metaphor for the destiny of the United States. In the series, a grand landscape is shown in various stages, from untouched wilderness—as the West was perceived by many Americans east of the Mississippi—to powerful empire to utter decay. The cycle reflected concerns that the quickly fleeting pastoral nature of the nation would succumb to the forces of economic and political greed and industrial encroachment on the environment.

REPRESENTED ON THE FRONT of this highly decorated vest (above, right) are two mounted Lakota men holding feathered lances. Their horses’ tails are tied for battle.³ Horses were first brought to North America in 1519 by Spanish conquistadors and spread north and west with Spanish and Mexican expansion.⁴ For native North Americans and European settlers, horses were a symbol of wealth and were useful for herding, hunting, and going to battle.

The vest, finely appliquéd in colored glass beads, is an excellent example of the trade exchange that occurred between indigenous peoples and settlers from the East. Prior to the 1850s, vests were rarely worn by Native Americans of the Plains.⁵ As trade increased, the Lakota began bartering for vests or making their own using traded beads for decoration. Appliquéd vests were then either worn by Native American men or bartered to traders bound east. Women designed most of the geometric patterning found on garments, while men designed representational images. In the late 1800s, however, women began to create patterns of humans and animals. While we do not know who designed the images for this particular vest, it is certain that its intricate beadwork was sewn by an experienced seamstress using sinew on soft hide.



VEST late 19th century
Beads, buckskin
Culture: Lakota (Sioux)
Gift of Mrs. E. Ridgeley Simpson, BMA 1941.202g

¹ <http://www.nmhistorymuseum.org/calendar.php?id=1421>

² “The Course of Empire” series is housed at the New York Historical Society. The images can be viewed at explorethomascole.org.

³ Barbara Hall, *Hau, Kóla!* (Brown University: Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, 1980), 82.

⁴ <https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/magazine/ma05/indepth/>

⁵ <http://www.artsconnected.org/resource/96399/lakota-beaded-vest> ©Minneapolis Institute of Arts

⁶ John O’Sullivan, “Annexation” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no. 85 (July–August 1845): 5–10.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1:

Comparing and contrasting Manifest Destiny in image and text

Grades: 6–8, 9–12

Subjects: English Language Arts, History/ Social Studies, Visual Arts

Students will read the article “Annexation” by John L. O’Sullivan in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in which he coins the term Manifest Destiny⁶ and look closely at *Indians Hunting Elk on the Platte* and *A Wild Scene*. They will examine the two artworks using the questions below to guide their observations and ideas.

Teacher will record student responses on a white/black board using a Venn Diagram for the first three questions and a two-column chart for the last question.

- Compare and contrast the visual elements of the two paintings. What do they share? What is different?
- What are the different stories that each painting is telling? Where do they overlap or diverge in what they are communicating?
- How is O’Sullivan’s argument about Manifest Destiny supported or undermined by each of the paintings?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of using text or image to describe or promote an idea?

Individual students will then research at least one other additional image related to the idea of Manifest Destiny and compose a two- to- three page essay analyzing how visual images of the period affected the understanding of Manifest Destiny.

ACTIVITY 2:

Examining images from European American and Lakota perspectives

Grades: 6–8, 9–12

Subjects: English Language Arts, History/ Social Studies, Visual Arts

Students will look closely at the Lakota beaded vest, *Indians Hunting Elk on the Platte* and *A Wild Scene*. Teacher will divide students into teams of four and ask each group to use a three circle Venn Diagram to record their responses to the follow questions.

- Describe the art elements—color, line, shape, texture, space, and form—that you see in these works.
- How are the art elements used similarly? How are they used differently?
- How are the subjects similar? How are they different?

Students will then share their observations recorded in the Venn Diagrams. For further analysis of the similarities and differences, students will respond to the following questions in a group discussion.

Teacher will record student responses on a black/white board throughout the discussion.

- What does the difference in the way the horse is depicted suggest about the different artists, time periods, and social contexts?
- What underlying values may be represented in these works? What do you see that communicates these values to the viewer?
- How might the different circumstances in which these artworks were produced and sold have influenced their content and aesthetics?

Following the discussion, teacher will share information about the three objects from this resource. Student teams will then post their Venn Diagrams. They will research to find direct quotes and primary sources related to the importance of the horse for European and Native Americans in the American West that connect to the ideas from their Venn Diagrams and the group discussion. Each team will post the quotes and primary sources around their Venn Diagrams and connect with string, yarn, or colored tape the sources and the relevant ideas in the Venn Diagrams. They will then share with the class to explain their connections.

ACTIVITY 3:

Exploring the history of the cowboy image

Grades: 6–8, 9–12

Subjects: English Language Arts, History/ Social Studies, Visual Arts

Students will discuss *Bronco Buster*, looking closely at the sculpture, and using previous knowledge and the additional information (original or adapted) in this resource. In research teams of two or four, they will examine representations

of cowboys, compiling a grouping of various cowboy images from the 19th century through the present from print and/or online resources. They will research the following questions and present the results of their research to the class in oral presentations that feature visual images.

- How did early cowboy images, including *Bronco Buster*, relate to the idea of Manifest Destiny?
- How did images of cowboys change or stay the same over time?
- What did cowboys represent in different periods of American history?
- In which visual sources do you find cowboys and what do their images imply? How might their images be perceived by different audiences?

Each team of two or four students will then brainstorm four to five additional research questions, selecting the one question they feel would offer the greatest number of avenues for further exploration to share with the class.

STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

Grades 6–8

CCSS.ELA—Literacy. 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.

CCSS.ELA—Literacy. RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g. charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Grade 8

CCSS.ELA—Literacy. RI.8.7 Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

CCSS.ELA—Literacy. W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

Grades 9–10

CCSS.ELA—Literacy. RH.9-10.9 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

Grades 11–12

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.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.

MARYLAND STATE CURRICULUM

History/Social Studies

Grade 8

5.B.1.b. Evaluate Manifest Destiny and its impact on territorial expansion of the nation

Grades 9–12

Topic: Reconstruction and an Expanding America (Reconstruction–1897)

4.a Analyze the factors of westward expansion, including the rise of industrialization, concept of Manifest Destiny, perceptions of overcrowding, opportunities to acquire land, and the discovery of gold and silver.

Visual Arts

Grade 8

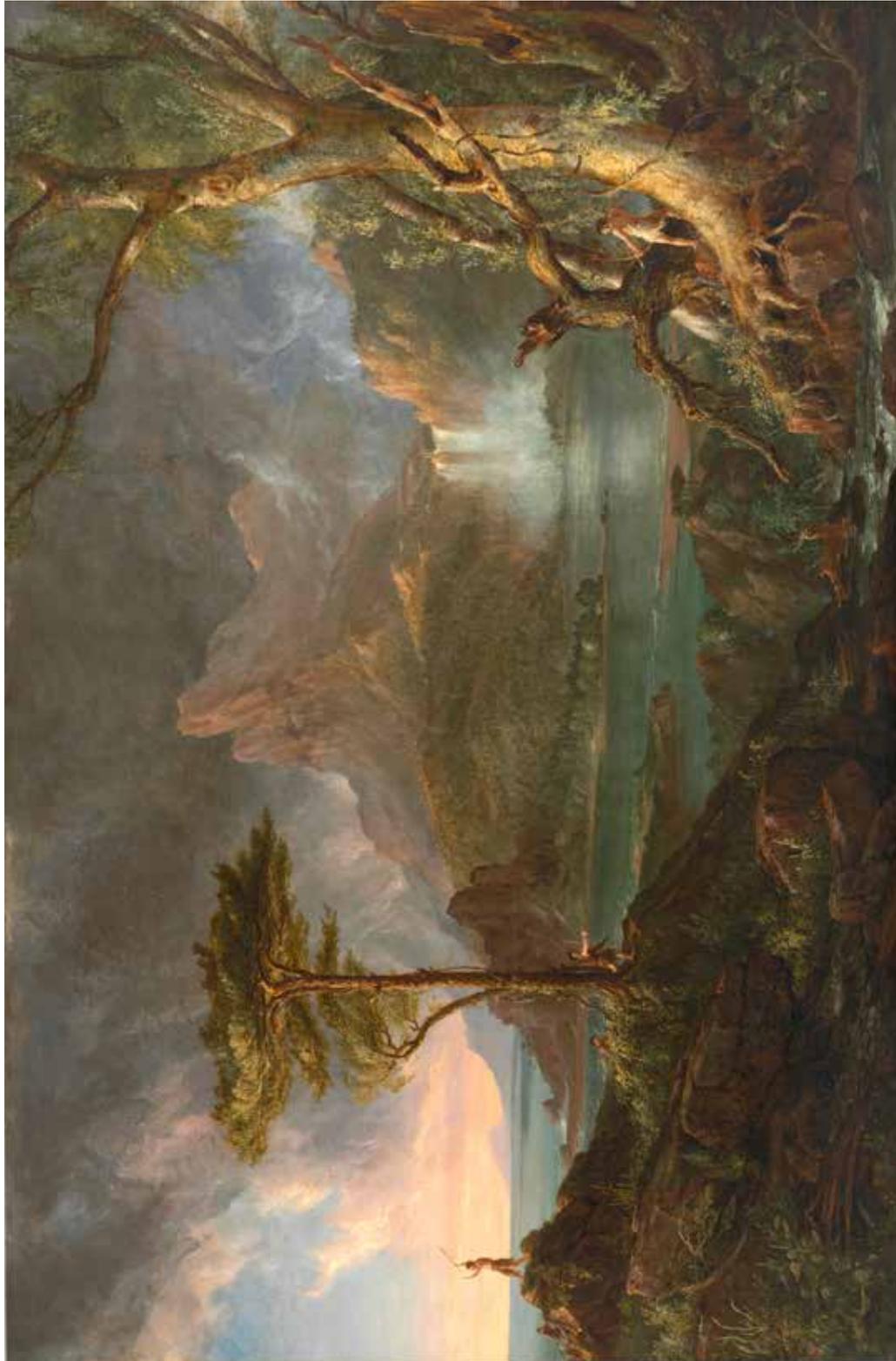
2.2.a. Compare historical, social, and cultural themes in selected artworks that communicate beliefs, customs, or values of a society

2.3.a. Compare similarities and differences in subject matter, styles, and techniques among various cultures and periods of history.

2.4.a. Compare ways in which themes, ideas, and issues in human experience are translated and expressed through the arts, humanities, and sciences.



Indians Hunting Elk on the Platte, 1865, Oil on canvas
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Died: Baltimore, Maryland 1874
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Born: Lancashire, England 1801, Died: Catskill, New York 1848
Purchase with Exchange Funds from Leonce Rabillon Bequest Fund; and
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Bronco Buster, 1895; this cast 1906, Bronze
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