



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2001 Volume II: Art as Evidence: The Interpretation of Objects

Reading the Landscape: Geology and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century American Landscape Paintings of Frederic E. Church

Guide for Curriculum Unit 01.02.01
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This curriculum unit uses nineteenth century American landscape paintings to teach high school students about topics in geography, geology, ecology, and environmental science. The unit blends subject matter from art and science, two strongly interconnected and fully complementary disciplines, to enhance learning about the natural world and the interaction of humans in natural systems. It is for use in The Dynamic Earth (An Introduction to Physical and Historical Geology), Environmental Science, and Advanced Placement Environmental Science, courses I teach currently at Wilbur Cross High School. Each of these courses is an upper level (Level 1 or Level 2) science elective, taken by high school juniors and seniors. Because of heavy emphasis on outdoor field and laboratory activities, each course is limited in enrollment to eighteen students.

The unit has been developed through my participation in the 2001 Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute seminar, "Art as Evidence: The Interpretation of Objects," seminar leader Jules D. Prown. The "objects" I use in developing unit activities include posters and slides of studio landscape paintings produced by Frederic Church (1826-1900), America's preeminent landscape painter of the nineteenth century, completed during his highly productive years of the 1840s through the 1860s.

Classroom activities include a close reading of selected Church landscape paintings using a methodology of description, deduction, and speculation; an extensive research program on the artistic and scientific content of the paintings, and laboratory and field activities using collected rock samples, fresh botanical material, and live animals temporarily brought in from the field.

(Recommended for Geology/Science, Environmental Science/Science, and AP Environmental Science, grades 11-12.)

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