



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **American Genre Painting in the Nineteenth Century: Teaching Artistic Interpretation as a Tool for Critically Viewing History**

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### **Introduction**

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The challenge of teaching history stems from the fact that history is written by people. It is all too easy to ignore this fact, and present history as a series of facts in the absence of human intervention. Dispelling the myth that history is simply a pantheon of facts can be an enormous task. In many cases the key to breaking down the myth of purely factual history lies in an understanding of perspective. Teaching historical perspective can be problematic, however. To fully understand perspective, one often needs to digest a good deal of history. Though it can be easy to make high-level comparisons i.e. Spanish versus Native American views of Columbus, teaching the subtle nuances in language and perspective present serious barriers to understanding. Surmounting these barriers requires that we as teachers find tools that accentuate human perspective, while still requiring that the students discern that perspective for themselves.

In this case, art offers us this tool. While historians hide their perspective under layers of language, politics and feigned objectivity, artists have a tendency to broadcast their perspective for the critical eye to see. This is not always the case, but through the use of appropriate artistic sources in the classroom, the artist's point of view becomes tangible and approachable in a classroom setting. Therefore, teaching artistic analysis and interpretation, while valuable in their own right, becomes a valuable means of developing the skills of critical analysis and interpretive thought.

Too often artistic education is sacrificed in the desire to allot more time to "practical" subjects. I teach in a school that seeks to prepare students for college and careers in the field of Medicine and Business. Students take a variety of courses including Latin, anatomy, or accounting, that are specifically geared toward entrance into one of the focus fields. Students are faced with a rigorous course load that leaves them little time for electives, and therefore few are offered. While this course of study provides ample preparation for the fields in question, it does not adequately represent important elements like Art.

Even in schools where the curriculum includes art, the focus is generally on creation of art, as opposed to artistic interpretation and analysis. In most cases this leaves students ill prepared to understand and appreciate art. Thus many students miss out on a fundamental part of their education and are left with little interest in or understanding of the world of fine art.

In a world of standardized testing and rigorous new standards, time does not always exist in the current schedule to rectify this lack of artistic training. Therefore the mantle of that aspect of their education falls to their subject area teachers. In that vein I have created this unit as a means of not only exploring historical sources, but also as an introduction to art itself. This introduction to art will serve the dual purpose of helping my students explore art and building in them the skills to critically assess historical sources, artistic or otherwise.

This unit functions not only to expose students to art, but also to work on skills of critical thinking that translate to overall achievement across the curriculum. Such a unit is therefore functional on multiple levels of education beyond its artistic and historic subject matter.

The unit is based on American genre paintings of the 19th century and seeks to instill a greater understanding of the social history of the United States through these deep and insightful paintings. Genre paintings are simply paintings or portraits of individuals engaged in common activities. They are often stylized, and depict actual events. Nevertheless, to be understood and to make sense in their time, genre paintings needed to be strongly rooted in factual information. Much like modern political cartoons, if a genre painting depicted a subject that people could not relate to or understand, it would not be marketable.

The unit is designed to introduce art and history combined in a way that is exceedingly natural in the real world, but frequently absent from the classroom. It introduces art alongside history without separating the two into different spheres and different periods of the school day. Through their subject matter, the paintings offer a wealth of information on the daily lives of Americans spanning the Early Federalist, Antebellum, and post-Civil War periods, as well as the motives behind the paintings' creation and the forces that influenced their final form. The artist's motives and the forces in question draw history and art together in a way that makes both disciplines more real and more interesting.

The topical focus of this unit fits well into the nebulous space between the War of 1812 and the Reconstruction, which is fertile ground for historians, but can be problematic for history teachers. There are many separate themes, which must be addressed. A focus on artistic representations of the lives of individuals will provide an umbrella under which to approach these themes. Such a focus will also allow my students to develop a deeper understanding of social history, a field that is increasingly popular within academia due to its relevance to our modern lives and its focus on the vast majority of humanity, a group which was often ignored previously.

It can be difficult for a high school class to access social history since many of the factors and forces which made of the lives of Americans 200 years ago can be quite foreign to the modern high school student. It is also difficult for many students to set aside their temporal ethnocentrism in order to fully appreciate the complexities of daily life in a period of time other than their own. It is therefore quite a task for students to fully grasp the basic actions, events or pressures that made up the lives of our predecessors without extensive background and training. All the same, if students are given the opportunity to access the actual lives of individuals, they will have the chance to connect with history in a way they might not have otherwise.

Genre painting offers a unique opportunity to introduce the daily lives of 19th century Americans by allowing an examination of the motives behind many genre paintings. The Genre painters were creating images of life and individuals that were quite often severe exaggerations or idealizations of their subjects. They were, in effect, caricatures of daily life more than they were straight portraits of daily life. On the other side of the coin, these paintings also needed to be identifiable in order to sell. If a painting was completely unrecognizable, or presented an image that no one could relate to, the painter would most likely go hungry.

The fact that many aspects of real life show up as exaggerations in genre paintings lends to their classroom utility. Initially, the students will be relatively untrained in terms of their ability to analyze a painting. In the absence of the ability to critically analyze the painting from an artistic standpoint, the students will be asked to simply observe the paintings, listing and describing the specific details that stand out. These details represent the beginning of the historical information available in the paintings in question. These details will allow the students to pick up on larger themes in life in the 1800s, and serve as the beginning of their understanding of artistic and historic analysis.

The lessons in this unit move the students from basic definition and observation of genre works to analysis and evaluation of genre works as history and as art. They will take place over the course of 4 class periods (80 minutes in length). This is accomplished by the introduction of specifically chosen paintings, which are then analyzed by the students under the guidance of the teacher in order to teach the basics of analysis. Those basics are then reviewed and honed into the skill of critical analysis and close viewing. The goal will be, to move from viewing genre paintings as a source of information and a depiction of daily life to an understanding of them as complex works of art. In the end the benefits to the student are two-fold. Firstly, they will have learned the skills necessary to critically view and assess art, skills which tend to lead to a greater appreciation of fine art. Secondly they will have a deeper understanding of motive and perspective in the creation of art, a skill that translates directly into a greater understanding of perspectives and motives in history.

## Objectives

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As a result of this unit the students will be able to,

1. Extract basic facts of life and basic historical evidence from an artistic source.
  2. View genre paintings as a source of history to better understand the period in which they were created.
  3. Create their own hypotheses as to the motives and background, which led to the creation of the paintings.
  4. Assess specific genre paintings as sources of history and as art.
  5. View artworks as art themselves, critically assessing the message and meaning of specific genre paintings through a comparison of two paintings that they have not yet seen.
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6. Create their own genre work in a medium and on a topic of their own choosing.

## The Paintings

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### *Pat Lyon at the Forge 1.* (1829)

The first painting that will be presented in this unit is John Neagle's *Pat Lyon at the Forge*. The painting depicts Pat Lyon, a successful blacksmith. Lyon had made his fortune as a blacksmith, and was so proud of this fact that he wanted to be painted as a blacksmith, not a rich man. The painting presents enough factual information to allow for the beginnings of interpretation, and offers the opportunity for much greater analysis (a fact which lends itself to an initial assessment of the student's abilities in this area).

The painting depicts Lyon in his own forge looking up as if interrupted from work while a younger man, his apprentice, and works behind him. His tools are strewn about his work area, and the forge is lit. He is dressed as a workman, surrounded by the trappings of his work. This aspect of the painting will allow students to pick up on some very specific literal details about blacksmithing.

In addition to the factual details, there are some aspects of the painting (including its very composition), which hint at the overall goal of the unit. The tower in the upper right hand corner of the painting is actually a prison in which Lyon was briefly incarcerated. This detail expresses Neagle's rise to success from humble if not questionable beginnings. The young apprentice as well can be indicative of opportunity, or the entrepreneurial spirit.

Discussion of the painting's composition could center on the central question of "Why?" Why did Neagle paint the items he did? Why did Lyon want to be painted in this situation? Why is Neagle central in the painting? These questions and many more will help initiate the students to composition by teaching them that they must assume that everything in a painting has meaning, and is there for a reason.

### *War News from Mexico 2.* (1848)

The second painting in this unit is Richard Caton Woodville's *War News from Mexico*. The painting depicts a group of people gathered around a central figure who is reading a newspaper from the "penny press." The central thing in the painting is clearly the newspaper, and all of the action of the painting focuses around it. The painting is full of basic historical information, in addition to more abstract concepts, which make it an ideal painting for this section of the unit.

The newspaper at the center is part of the "penny press," a type of cheap newspaper, which was then common. By the 1840s technology, entrepreneurship and literacy led to the creation of cheap, mass-produced newspapers, which would become known as the penny press. These newspapers filled a niche in the economy and made fortunes for their investors. They were filled with sensationalized news from around the world, alongside newly available lithographs, which made it possible to show the reader what the article described. They were enormously popular, and served as entertainment throughout the nation.

The scene in the painting reiterates their popularity: a large group of people crowd around the paper and its reader hoping to hear part of the news. The painting's title tells the viewer quite clearly what the news in the paper was about, and plays into two other major themes in American History at the time of the painting, Manifest Destiny and the Mexican American War.

A New York newspaper editor named John O'Sullivan coined the term "Manifest Destiny." O'Sullivan wrote in

1845 “Our manifest destiny, is to over spread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”(Tindall, 534) The idea of manifest destiny spread throughout the national consciousness and gained great support among voters. Under the auspices of manifest destiny, the U.S. would annex Texas, go to war with Mexico, and settle a treaty with Britain over Oregon before the end of the decade.

In 1845, the United States annexed the recently independent nation of Texas arousing much consternation in Mexico (from whom Texas had recently won its independence). The Mexican government protested and in response the United States declared war on May 13th, 1846. For the next two years the Mexican War raged. In the end, under the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States gained California, New Mexico and all of Texas north of the Rio Grande. The Mexican Cession was one of the largest territorial gains in U.S. history and helped accomplish the dream of manifest destiny.

The painting depicts the popularity of news from this war, and the widespread interest that existed. In addition, it includes a number of specific details, which can not only hint at the social climate of the U.S. during this period, but can also spur discussion in a classroom setting. The placement of the woman (marginalized in the window) and the African Americans (sitting physically beneath the white men in the photo) hint not only at social realities of the 1840s, but can point to bias, an agenda, or a political statement being made by the artist. On the whole it is a painting, which is open to all levels of interpretation, and can allow for some serious discussion, which at this point in the unit, will be deeper and of a more insightful nature.

This painting offers the students an opportunity to recall what they learned about composition by discussing figure placement and dress. Simply by looking at the scene they will be able to see that the African American characters and the woman are both marginalized, the woman in the dark and the African Americans beneath the rest. Woodville makes a potent statement about the status of these characters through their placement, while offering a prime opportunity to discuss figure and item placement as a key component to composition.

Woodville also makes use of color in a way that lends itself to teaching artistic interpretation. His stark white paper in the center is clearly the focus, and this fact is accentuated by the fact that it is brighter than anything else in the painting. Woodville goes on to use a very similar white color in the African American child’s garment. Drawing upon the assumption that everything in a painting carries meaning, it might be useful to ask the students what this white garment means. The teacher might even ask whether or not we know what Woodville thinks of slavery or African Americans.

### *Bargaining for a Horse 3.* (1835)

The third painting in this unit is William Sidney Mount’s famous work, *Bargaining for a Horse* . It depicts two men whittling and ostensibly bargaining for a horse, which also appears in the scene. Mount’s original title (Farmers Bargaining) was changed by Edward L. Carey, who published an engraving of the painting in 1840. The changed name has stuck ever since.

It was painted by Mount for his patron Luman Reed, a successful New York merchant. Reed had come from a humble farming background in upstate New York, and in a way the painting exonerated him as a success. Reed was enormously pleased with the outcome of the work, declaring it “a new era of the fine arts in the country.”

Mount makes use of a visual pun in this painting, depicting the act of trading for a horse. The activity refers to “horse trading,” a 19th century colloquialism which referred to the promise of material benefit in return for

political support. Under its original title the joke of horse-trading is left to the observer, a point that Reed was quite fond of. After the title's change the meaning became much more obvious, leaving less to the devices of the 19th century viewer.

By depicting the men whittling mount ensures that they do not make eye contact, it also suggests that the bargain is not important enough to justify the full attention of either man. The whittling could also be seen as a means of delaying the bargaining, or even by distracting the each other from the bargain at hand. In either situation, it serves as an indictment of social, economic and political bargaining as something distasteful.

The painting also deals specifically with the notion of Yankeeism, a stereotype of Northeastern behavior, and a well-known concept in the late federalist and antebellum periods. Both north and south sought to increase their wealth and power at this point, but in very different ways. While the South continued to expand the institution of slavery, seeking to create more wealth by simply moving westward to plant more fields and create more plantations, the North was filled with entrepreneurs seeking commercial success. Thus the Yankee was born.

Yankees were most commonly depicted as New England farmers who were clumsy in manner, suspicious of progress and quite foreign to urbanites, especially New Yorkers. Yankee farmers epitomized the "other" to New Yorkers, and Yankee peddlers became a symbol of blatant commercial drive. These peddlers were viewed as trading their integrity for greed, and were therefore suspect characters of a deceitful nature. The Yankee was a creation that embodied all of the nations fears of progress, commercialism and the dominance of the North East over the rest of the nation.

Mount plays into this negative depiction with his farmers bargaining in that they are both participating in the almost universally Yankee activity of bargaining without any reference to the modes of production which led to the product in question. There are few farm implements, and little evidence that either man had anything to do with the raising or breeding of the horse, replacing old civic ideals about hard work and production. There is only the horse, the men, and the bargain.

Mount's work will allow the class to recap what has already been discussed through composition and color as well as offering fodder for discussion of the painter's motive. Once the painting is sufficiently analyzed, Mount's biases become quite clear. That being the case, it offers students the opportunity to hypothesize about the perspective of the artist in a way that has not yet been fully explored by the unit.

#### *Stump Speaking* 4. (1853)

The fourth painting in the unit is *Stump Speaking*, by George Caleb Bingham. The painting depicts a debate between a democrat and a Whig, both running for office. A crowd assembles, paying varying degrees of attention to the speaker.

It is important to note that the parties depicted in the painting bear some resemblance to our modern political parties and therefore could make a splendid comparison with modern parties. The Whigs, traditionally the party of the wealthy and the North East, believed in a stronger, more active federal government. While the democrats, traditionally the party of the South, believed in limited governmental power, and sought to weaken the federal government.

Bingham's work offers a wealth of accessible information on every level that has been discussed thus far. On the surface there is a great deal of historic information in the painting, which will be accessible to students at

this point. The crowd, and the barn and the fact that many have come to this speech only to pay no attention at all, all lend themselves to historical discussion. Beyond these factors, the painting makes very clear statements about the make up of the electorate, in that the work does not include any women or African Americans.

The subject of the painting also lends itself to historical discussion. A great deal of information about the character of American politics at that point. Stark differences might be drawn between the current state of politics and the conduct of politics in the 1850's. This painting offers a strong contrast to the sterile speeches and debates of our modern era. It might even be useful to compare this painting with a picture or video of a modern congressional election. This type of comparison would really enhance the differences in the participants, the structure, and the formality of events of this kind.

Bingham's politics are also clear through his depiction of the two speakers, and the crowd. Bingham was a confirmed Whig, having worked for the Whigs in the elections of 1840 and 1844 creating political banners. This information can be used to great effect in carrying home the point that each artist (indeed every person) had their own influences and reasons for creating art or history. For this reason this painting is extremely useful for the end of this unit.

In addition to hypothesizing on motive, and composition, Bingham's work lends itself to the final aspect of artistic interpretation to be taught through this unit, that of visual rhyming. Bingham makes clear use of this technique through his two white-clad characters. It would be difficult for Bingham to make the connection between these two men more clear. The teacher might ask the question, "Are there any two figures in this painting that are connected in some way?" or "Is there anything in this painting that strongly resembles something else?" The important part will be to elicit from the students the understanding that an artist might paint things very similarly in the interest of connecting the two.

#### *Forging the Shaft* 5 . (1877)

Weir's *Forging the Shaft* serves as an excellent comparison to Neagle's *Pat Lyon at the Forge* , on both an artistic and an historic level. *Forging the Shaft* depicts an ironworking factory in the 1870's. A group of men struggles with a very large iron shaft being pulled from a furnace. The fires of the furnace light the whole factory and there is a substantial group of men assembled to the task.

Weir's work makes an excellent historic counterpoint to the work of Neagle. While Neagle is portraying a lone artisan and his apprentice at work in a small forge, Weir shows a large group of factory workers all working together to forge something much larger. The comparison highlights the changes that occurred in America in just 50 years time, with Neagle romanticizing the individual, and Weir chronicling the masses.

On an artistic level, this comparison also helps to bring out a change in artistic focus, thus further solidifying the historic change in the means of production. The composition of Weir's work uses light, in this case the light of the forge to make the shaft the focal point of the whole painting. Neagle's work on the other hand uses color and light to highlight Lyon.

This comparison is a useful place to begin the unit as a function of the stark and obvious differences in composition combined with the historic relevance of the two works. Not only will this comparison allow for a strong introduction to genre works and art in general, but it also serves the purpose of introducing and solidifying an historic concept.



## The Paintings for Comparison

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The final assignment in the unit allows students to choose to either create a genre work themselves, or compare two paintings that have not yet been analyzed in class. Below are two available comparisons, though there are certainly many others that a teacher might draw from. In most cases, however, it will be necessary to limit the field of comparison choices for students as a function of the fact that too many choices could be mind-boggling, or lead to false comparisons, which would be counterproductive.

### Comparison 1

The first comparison focuses on 2 veterans of war and their lives after the war.

*Veteran in a New Field* 6. (1865)

With the end of the Civil War Homer, an illustrator for *Harpers Weekly* and painter of war imagery moved on to the topic of veterans after the war. He painted and drew several works, that dealt with this subject, including *Veteran in a New Field* .

The painting depicts a lone reaper in a sea of wheat. The reaper's back is turned to the viewer and he is busily at work cutting wheat. The wheat is so dominant in the field that the figure is almost overtaken, as he stands inundated up to his knees in the wheat he has already cut.

Though the painting initially appears quite simple, there is a great deal of depth if one looks further, and thus it offers an ideal candidate for one of the comparisons in the final unit. The strong horizontal lines, color, and composition used in the painting will allow the students to demonstrate all that they have learned throughout the unit.

*Willie Gillis in College* 7 . (1945)

Like Homer, Norman Rockwell worked as a magazine illustrator and painter. Norman Rockwell's was as the cover artist for *The Saturday Evening Post* , and many of his most famous paintings served as cover art for that publication. Also like Homer, Rockwell was deeply affected by war, in this case World War II, and his work often dealt with soldiers, and eventually the veterans of that war.

*Willie Gillis in College* is one such work. It depicts a veteran of World War II studying in a window seat. The figure barely fits in the window seat and is surrounded by the trappings of college. We are most likely meant to understand the character to be in college as a result of the G.I. Bill. The G.I. Bill guaranteed any veteran of the war the opportunity to go to college, and many did. The figure (Willie Gillis) was a character that Rockwell had painted throughout the war as a kind of "everyman."

The painting itself offers a great deal of room for interpretation, and comparison with the previous work, especially in the area of mood (Rockwell's work is comparatively more optimistic) and style. More astute comparisons might even note the difference in work for veterans on their return from war, and the universality of the character.



## Comparison 2

The second comparison deals with ideas of work and freedom.

The Fog Warning<sup>8</sup>. (1885)

Winslow Homer's *Fog Warning* depicts a lone fisherman rowing through high seas with his catch of the day. The horizon is a mix between ominous shades of fog and a lighter area above the fog. The sea is dark and dominates the scene.

The fish in the boat mirrors the sky in color and in shape, so as to create a clear echo for the students to draw from. The fisherman's boat also echoes a wisp of cloud that extends up from the fog into the pink sky of the sunset. All of the colors in the painting lend to the ominous feeling of the painting and lend themselves to interpretation. The composition also offers a great deal for the students to draw from even though it is not necessarily as cluttered as the Rockwell.

The subject of the painting leaves room for a good deal of speculation on the artist's views of work, and freedom. When coupled with the Rockwell, there is a great deal of leeway available to the students to draw their own conclusions about how the works relate to one another. Some of the more obvious comparisons or contrasts might deal with the relative freedom of the character in *Fog Warning* , or the nature of work during the periods in which the works were painted.

*Ticket Agent* 9. (1937)

The *Ticket Agent* depicts a lone ticket agent behind the barred ticket window of a railroad station. Bills advertising various vacation destinations offering escape from day to day life surround the window. The bills only highlight the fact that he is trapped behind the bars of his job.

The painting offers a great deal of room for artistic analysis through its use of color, its lines, and its composition. The ticket agent's face rests in his hands and the line of his arm draws the eye to the forlorn look on his face. The white color of his shirt further highlights this expression as it stands out against the dark background and the dark vest he is wearing. The whole scene makes some fairly clear statements about work and perceptions of work in 1937.

This is accurate from a historic perspective in that the country was still gripped by the Great Depression in 1937. America was hardly a land of opportunity at this point, and though many felt lucky if they had a job that does not mean that they enjoyed the work they were doing.

## Classroom Activities

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### Lesson #1- An introduction to Artistic interpretation.

Pat Lyon at the Forge

Goal

To introduce my students to the process of viewing and interpreting art.

### *Objectives*

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to,

1. Observe and Describe specific details of the painting, *Pat Lyon at the Forge*.
2. Define and explain what these specific details are (i.e. what is a forge) and how they contribute to the painting.
3. Imagine how these basic details and elements contributed/effected life in the early 1800s.

### *Materials*

*Pat Lyon at the Forge* (in a format which all students can see- a slide, poster, or overhead would do nicely), pen, paper, board, marker

### *Anticipatory Set*

Students will have 7 minutes to answer the question “What is Art?” in at least 5 lines.

### *Procedure*

1. The teacher will collect the answers, and explain that he will be putting a painting up, and asking them simply to describe what they see.
2. The teacher will then display the painting in a format which all students can see and the students will simply describe what they see. If the students need prodding, or discussion gets stale, the teacher can draw their attention to specific details in the painting, which have not already been noted. Asking open-ended questions designed to solicit insightful responses will do this.
3. While this is going on the teacher will clarify historical inaccuracies in what the students say, but will not betray any background to the painting, or lead them in any specific analytical direction.
4. Once the basic details and action are exhausted, the teacher will guide the class into the question of meaning, through questions like why does he use that tool? What would that item be used for? Or what is he making? At this point the teacher will expect predominantly literal answers, but any answers, which deal with deeper artistic meaning will be honored and praised as well.
5. The teacher will then pose the question, “what does this painting tell us about life in the 1800s?” and open the floor for discussion among the students.

## *Closure*

To wrap up the lesson the teacher will ask the students to brainstorm what they learned/saw today.

## *Assessment/Homework*

For homework the students will be asked to write one page to answer the question “Do you think this painting is completely accurate, like a photograph? Why or Why not?” This assignment will allow the teacher to gauge where each student is in terms of his or her ability to understand art as a source.

## **Lesson #2- Moving from observation to analysis.**

War News from Mexico

## *Goal*

To help the students view genre paintings as a source of history.

## *Objectives*

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to,

1. Observe and Describe specific details of the painting including the importance of figure placement, *War News from Mexico* .
2. Explain the history behind specific elements of the painting.
3. Evaluate the painting as a source of history.

## *Materials*

*War News from Mexico* (in a format which all students can see), pen, paper, board, marker, lecture notes on Manifest Destiny, the War with Mexico, and the Penny Press

## *Anticipatory Set*

Students will have 7 minutes to describe a newspaper in at least 5 lines.

## *Procedure*

1. The teacher will brainstorm the qualities of a modern newspaper with the students (adding if necessary the concept of accuracy, and objectivity in reporting).
2. As in the previous lesson, the teacher will then put the painting up and the students will simply describe what they see. If the students need prodding, or discussion gets stale, the teacher can draw their attention to specific details in the painting, which have not already been noted. Asking open-ended questions designed to solicit insightful responses will do this.

3. If the importance of figure placement is not mentioned naturally by the students in their observations, the teacher will bring it up before the end and ask, "What does the placement of the woman and the African Americans say?"
4. Once the basic details and action are exhausted, the teacher will lecture on the history of the Mexican War, Manifest Destiny and the Penny Press
5. When this is complete the teacher will put the painting back up and ask if there is anything else that they see now that they have that information.

### *Closure*

To wrap up the lesson the teacher will ask the students to discuss whether or not this painting is a good historical source.

### *Assessment/Homework*

For homework the students will be asked to write one page to answer the question "Do you think this painting is a good historical source? Why or Why not?"

### **Lesson #3- Hypothesizing Motives.**

Bargaining for a Horse.

### *Goal*

To allow the students to hypothesize as to the motives and influences of the artist

### *Objectives*

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to,

1. Observe specific details from the *painting Bargaining for a Horse* and explain how certain artistic factors (figure placement, visual echoing, and line) affect the meaning of the painting.
2. Compare their observations and their explanations with a historical source explaining Yankeeism, answering the question, "What is the artist trying to tell us about these people?"
3. Hypothesize as to the motive of the artist.

### *Materials*

*Bargaining for a Horse* (in a format which all students can see), pen, paper, board, marker, informational

packet about Yankeeism

### *Anticipatory Set*

Students will have 7 minutes to answer the question “Are Paintings completely accurate sources of history?” in at least 5 lines.

### *Procedure*

1. The teacher will discuss with the students their answers.
2. The teacher will then explain that this class will center on another painting, and that initially we are once again looking simply for observations.
3. The teacher will then put the painting up and the students will simply describe what they see. If the students need prodding, or discussion gets stale, the teacher can draw their attention to specific details in the painting, which have not already been noted. Asking open-ended questions designed to solicit insightful responses will do this. At this point the teacher will also start introducing questions geared toward the artistic elements of the painting by introducing the notion of line (diagonal vs. horizontal) and echo (of color and shape).
4. While this is going on the teacher will clarify historical inaccuracies in what the students say, but will not betray any background to the painting, or lead them in any specific analytical direction.
5. Once the basic details and action are exhausted, the teacher will pose the question “What do you think the painter is saying about the people in the painting?”
6. Teacher will then pass out packet on Yankeeism, and explain that the painting is centered on Yankeeism.
7. The class will read the packet together.

### *Closure*

To wrap up the lesson the teacher will ask the students to briefly discuss how this class was different from the last.

### *Assessment/Homework*

For homework the students will be asked to write one page to answer the question “What do you think the artist thinks about the people in the painting?” This assignment will introduce the notion of the painter’s motive in a situation where they have ample evidence to attempt an answer.

## Lesson #4- Artistic Analysis.

Stump Speaking.

### Goal

To allow the students to analyze a painting as a work of art and as a historical source

### Objectives

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to,

1. Observe specific details from the painting *Stump Speaking* and explain how certain artistic factors (figure placement, visual echoing, and line) affect the meaning of the painting.
2. Hypothesize as to the motives of the artist, and the message of the artist based on information from earlier in the unit
3. Evaluate a genre painting as a work of art and as a work of history.

### Materials

Stump Speaking (in a format which all students can see), *Pat Lyon at The Forge* , *Forging the Shaft*, pen, paper, board, marker,

### Anticipatory Set

Students will have 7 minutes to answer the question “What makes a ‘good’ painting?” in at least 5 lines.

### Procedure

1. The teacher will discuss with the students their answers.
2. The teacher will put up Stump Speaking and ask for observations and analysis, guiding students where necessary. The teacher will not give any of the historic background of this painting, but will ask questions based on his knowledge of that background.
3. Once the basic details and action are exhausted, the teacher will break the class into small groups (3 or 4) and ask them to discuss and answer the question “What is the Artist trying to show?”
4. The students will be given the chance to work on this and when it is complete, they will be asked to share their answers.
5. The teacher will discuss with the students their answers.
6. (This section could serve as an introduction to the final assignment as well) When the students have finished their work and discussion the teacher will then put up *Neagle* and briefly discuss what observations were made when last the class worked on it.
7. When the students have fully explored the Neagle work, the teacher will put up John Furguson

Weir's *Forging the Shaft* . Following a similar procedure as before, but this time adding questions that draw comparisons between the two i.e. how are these paintings different? How has life changed from 1827-1877?"

### *Closure*

To wrap up the lesson the teacher will ask the students to discuss briefly whether or not this is good art, and a good historical source.

### *Assessment/Homework*

For homework the students will be asked to write one page to answer the question "Is this painting good art? Is this good history? Why or why not?"

## **Final Assignment/Assessment.**

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For the final project of this unit the students will have a choice between two potential assignments. The first asks them to create their own genre work in the medium and topic of their choosing, and analyze it in the same way that we have done in class. The second asks them to compare and analyze two paintings, which they have not seen. Both assignments will expect the students to put in their best effort, and will require a good deal of work.

### **Assignment 1- Create your own Genre Work.**

#### *Introduction*

Over the last few classes we have discussed and analyzed genre paintings of the early 1800s. These paintings offer us a great insight into the past, as well as an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of art. You have been exposed to a number of works by a number of artists, and you have viewed them on multiple levels; as art, as history, as a document, etc. By now you should have a pretty solid understanding of what a genre work is, and what elements go into its creation.

#### *Assignment*

It will be your task to create a genre work of your own. It does not need to be a painting specifically; it can be in any medium you choose. If you wish you might compose a song, write a poem, draw a picture etc. I only have 2 requirements. It must be original and it must deal with a topic or concept that is present in your life



today.

I then want you to provide me with a 1-2 page analysis of the work you have done. Is it good history? Is it good art? You should answer these questions and more as you make use of the skills learned in class to evaluate your own work.

I expect nothing less than your best work, and you will be graded accordingly.

### *Rubric*

You will be graded on the following criteria

1. Quality- (25 points)- I want this to be nothing less than your best work.
2. History- (25 points)- Do you convey to your audience a sense (even if it is a dramatized or idealized sense) of what you are talking about?
3. Analysis- (25 points) As stated above, you need to make use of the skills you have learned in this class to analyze your work.
4. Originality/Creativity- (25 points) I expect you to be both original and creative in a way that both makes use of what we have learned and adapts it to modern use.

## **Assignment 2- Comparing Works of Art**

### *Introduction*

Over the last few classes we have discussed and analyzed genre paintings of the early 1800s. These paintings offer us a great insight into the past, as well as an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of art. You have been exposed to a number of works by a number of artists, and you have viewed them on multiple levels; as art, as history, as a document, etc. By now you should have a pretty solid understanding of what a genre work is, and what elements go into its creation.

### *Assignment*

If you choose to do this assignment you will be given a choice of two available comparisons and asked to compare and analyze them in the way we have used in class in 3-4 typed pages. I expect you to look deeply into the paintings and analyze them as history, as art, and in terms of the artistic devices they use.

After the analysis, you must compare the two paintings in order to show the uniqueness of each work as well as the similarities of the two.

### *Comparison Choices*

1. Winslow Homer's *Veteran in a New Field* Vs. Norman Rockwell's *Willie Gillis in College*
2. Winslow Homer's *Fog Warning* Vs. Norman Rockwell's *Ticket Agent*

## Rubric

You will be graded on the following criteria.

1. Quality- (25 points)- I want this to be nothing less than your best work.
2. History- (25 points)- What historic facts do the paintings convey? How do they rate/ compare to one another in terms of their quality as sources of history.
3. Artistic Analysis- (25 points)- What artistic elements are present? Are the paintings good art? How do they compare to one another?
4. Insight- (25 points) Have you looked deeply into each painting? I would like to see that you have taken the time to really delve into each painting as opposed to simply describing the very basics.

## Bibliography

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1. Ayres, William. Ed. *Picturing History: American Painting 1770-1930*. Rizzoli, New York. 1990.

- Gail E. Husch - "Freedom's Holy Cause": History, Religious, and Genre Painting in America, 1840-1860
- Ron Tyler- Historic reportage and artistic license: Prints and paintings of the Mexican War.

This book is a catalogue of the Frances Tavern Museum's exhibition *Picturing History: American Painting, 1770-1930*. William Ayres directed the exhibition and Barbara J. Mitnick served as curator. Before this, no comprehensive exhibition existed of American history painting, and thus this particular exhibition was quite important. The book itself covers the vast expanse of the period in question through the contributions of a wide array of art historians knowledgeable on the subject.

The articles drawn from in this unit provide valuable background information to the sections on Manifest Destiny, and the Mexican American War. Husch delves deeply into the intersection between history and genre painting in America during the antebellum period. While Tyler offers specific background to the painting and lithography that accompanied the Mexican American War, specifically dealing with representations of the war for the press.

2. Bingham, George Caleb. *Stump Speaking*. Oil on Canvas, 42 1/2 " by 58". Boatmen's Bancshares, Inc. St. Louis, MO. 1853-54.

3. Cikovsky, Nicolai Jr. and Kelly, Franklin. *Winslow Homer*, Yale University Press, New Haven. 1995.

This is the catalogue to an exhibition of the work of Winslow Homer during 1995 and 1996. The National Gallery of Art organized the exhibition. The catalogue strives to avoid being a book that simply deals with Homer's art. In stead it tries to be attentive dealing with particular objects of his art. Building on the works of Alvert Ten Eyck Gardner and Gordon Hendricks', the catalogue seeks to offer a new perspective, or a compilation of perspectives on Homer's specific works of art. The catalogue also seeks to shed light on Homer's elusive, sometimes fiercely guarded meanings behind many of his works by helping readers to understand why he was so

guarded.

4. Fahlman, Betsy. *John Ferguson Weir: The Labor of Art*. Associated University Presses, Inc. Newark, NJ. 1997

Betsy Fahlman presents here the first scholarly study to deal specifically with the work of John Ferguson Weir. Weir spent the last forty-four years of his life as director of the School of Fine Arts at Yale, and therefore had little time later in life for his artistic endeavors. She presents her monograph in an unconventional format as a result of Weir's imbalanced career. The volume is organized into seven chapters on a loosely chronological basis offering a contextualized view of his work.

5. Homer, Winslow. *The Fog Warning*. Oil on Canvas, 30" by 48". Museum of Fine Art, Boston, MA. 1885.

6. Homer, Winslow. *Veteran in a New Field*. Oil on Canvas, 24 1/8" by 38 1/8". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. 1865.

7. Finch, Christopher. *Norman Rockwell's America*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York. 1975.

Given that this book was written before Rockwell's death, Finch has the unique opportunity to deal directly with Rockwell himself on the facts and details in question. The book begins with a brief biography, but deals chiefly with Rockwell's prolific work, covering topically the span of his entire career. There is little that the book misses, and it offers insight into Rockwell's techniques and methods.

8. Johns, Elizabeth. *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life*, Yale University Press, and New Haven. 1991

Elizabeth Johns has presented a comprehensive look at American genre painting during the height of their popularity. During the period of 1830 to the outbreak of the Civil War, American genre painting had its heyday, and accordingly the book deals chiefly with this period. Johns focuses her look at genre painting around two chief notions: the individuals depicted, and the relationship of the actors in the paintings to its viewers. Johns deals chiefly with the contexts in which genre paintings were created drawing heavily from previous scholarship, which centered on biography, style, and the artists themselves.

9. Mount, William Sidney. *Bargaining for a Horse*. Oil on Canvas, 24" by 30". New York Historical Society, New York, NY. 1835.

10. Neagle, John. *Pat Lyon at the Forge*. Oil on Canvas, 93" by 68". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA. 1826-27.

11. Pohl, Frances K. *Framing America: A social History of American Art*, Thames & Hudson, New York. 2002

Frances Pohl's *Framing America* is a survey text on American Art. As a survey text, it is not a complete account of American Art but serves as a primer for further study. The book is chronologically and thematically arranged to develop an understanding of artists, their work, and the social history surrounding that work. In that vein, it is a successful introduction to American Art and social history at once.

12. Rockwell, Norman. *Ticket Agent*. Cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 24, 1937.

13. Rockwell, Norman. *Willie Gillis in College*. Cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 5 1946.

14. Shapiro, Michael Edward, Ed. Et al, *George Caleb*. The Saint Louis Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams Inc. New York City, 1990

This catalog of an exhibition of Bingham's work, which took place at the Saint Louis Art Museum and the National Gallery of Art in 1990, is made up of a number of articles contributed by various authors. The articles specifically deal with Bingham as an artist, historian, and 19th century American. The book spans the length and breadth of his career offering a wealth of information on the artist himself, while placing him in the context of his times. The editor, Michael Edward Shapiro, was the chief curator of the Saint

Louis Art Museum and was the driving force behind the exhibition.

15. Tindall, George Brown and Shi, David E. *America: A Narrative History*, Sixth Edition. W.W. Norton & Co. New York, 2004.

Tindall and Shi's narrative history is a comprehensive volume of American history. The history is presented in narrative form and traces the development of the American people throughout the 5 centuries since Columbus' voyage. The text is intended for use as a textbook in college and A.P. courses on U.S. History, and it does an excellent job presenting facts in a fair and balanced manner. Its focus is predominantly the people and social history of America, though it still does an adequate job providing political and military history.

16. Weir, John Furguson. *Forging the Shaft*. Oil on Canvas, 52 1/6" by 73 1/4". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. 1877.

17. Woodville, Richard Caton. *War News from Mexico*. Oil on Canvas, 27" by 24 3/4". The National Gallery, Washington D.C. 1848.

## Notes

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1. Neagle, John. *Pat Lyon at the Forge*. Oil on Canvas, 93" by 68". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA. 1826-27.

2. Woodville, Richard Caton. *War News from Mexico*. Oil on Canvas, 27" by 24 3/4". The National Gallery, Washington D.C. 1848.

3. Mount, William Sidney. *Bargaining for a Horse*. Oil on Canvas, 24" by 30". New York Historical Society, New York, NY. 1835.

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