



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2004 Volume III: Representations of American Culture, 1760-1960: Art and Literature

Art and National Identity: Analyzing Painting and Literature from the Era of Manifest Destiny

Guide for Curriculum Unit 04.03.04
by David DeNaples

There are two purposes to each lesson in this unit. Although the first is the development of a skill and the second is based on absorbing content, they are not mutually exclusive, nor should the unit be thought of or taught as two separate components. It will be my responsibility, as author of this curriculum (and the responsibility of any subsequent teachers who choose to apply this curriculum to their classrooms), to search for the richest content to further the growth of skills.

The content I expect my students to understand is American history, specifically examining art produced during the period of 19th century continental expansion and its relationship to the national identity of that time. The role of art as it relates to national identity could certainly be explored in other nations as well. Could the sentiments of politicians and orators be found in the paintings of the time? How did the artists represent such sentiment? These are examples of the types of questions I will apply to the selected pieces of art discussed below.

Through writing critically about their analyses and interpretations of both art and history the students will become better overall writers, benefiting them in all later classes. Writing skills are not a unique demand of the English teacher, but for some reason teaching writing has become a unique responsibility of that teacher. I am certain that many English teachers would agree with the idea that students need to learn writing in all the major disciplines and not just in their English or literature classes.

In *A Short Guide to Writing about Art*, Sylvan Barnet reminds us that when students are to write critically they "often think that they are writing for the teacher, but this is a misconception: when you write, you are the teacher." Hopefully, this unit will prove to be especially effective because of the method chosen. The analysis of works of art will enable the students to actually "do" history -- *they* will make interpretations based on *their* observations.

(Recommended for U.S and World History, grades 9-12.)

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>