



Yale-New Haven
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2005 Volume III: History in the American Landscape: Place, Memory, Poetry

Building Historical Understanding by Exploring American Landscapes

Guide for Curriculum Unit 05.03.02
by Judith S. Goodrich

The unit focuses on the study of historic landscapes to learn about the American past, paying attention to material culture, social history and 'sense of place' as revealed in primary sources. The unit will urge students to become careful observers of their own environment, to reflect on the meaning of the space they occupy, and to translate that understanding to their research on topics in American history.

Students will begin the unit by considering the meaning that a personal space and place holds and creates for each of them. Students will then examine some of the landscapes that have shaped the memory and the history of Americans in the past. Through research in primary documents and images, students will discover that 'sense of place' grows from memory as well as function. Students will explore the landscapes of Puritans and colonists, homesteaders or gold miners, factory workers or mill girls as they explore the growth of America through themes of exploration, conflict, governance and invention.

Paralleling the historical research, students will investigate the meaning of place through the lens of poetry. Students will explore the language used by poets to capture 'sense of place' and will create poems that express an understanding of 'sense of place' in their own lives.

(Recommended for American History, grade 8.)

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