

Making America in Landscape



Albert Bierstadt, *Wind River, Wyoming*, 1870.

Background Information

With the Louisiana Purchase, the United States greatly expanded its territory. Not long thereafter, with the completion of the Mexican-American War, the United States annexed half of Mexico's territory and gained a swath of land that stretched from coast to coast. The majority of US citizens, however, did not travel to the West, and had few ways to imagine what it was like. Artists played a key role in building a sense of wonder and amazement, often encouraging people to become pioneers and strike out for new experiences in the West. Eventually, many of the landscapes the artists captured—both fact-based and embellished—became iconic American scenes.

Look Closer



Albert Bierstadt, *Wind River, Wyoming*, 1870.

Observe all of the elements of this landscape. Notice the time of day(1), and pay attention to the vantage point of the viewer. Notice the scale of the animals in the foreground(2), and the way the sunlight reflects on the water in the middle ground(3). Finally, observe the way sunlight rakes the cliffs in the background(4), and take in the colors of the clouds and the sky(5).

Discussion Questions

- Does the landscape bring up any particular emotions as you look at it?
- What plants and animals does the artist include in this landscape painting? How does he depict them?
- What elements does the artist use in this painting to create a sense of awe in the viewers?
- Do you think any of the landscape elements in the paintings might have symbolic meaning? If so, what?

Activity

Many of the artists, like Albert Bierstadt, described at length the feelings evoked by the landscapes they witnessed in their journal entries and letters. Think of a place you have visited that gave you a sense of wonder and awe. What was that place? How would you describe the feelings you experienced to someone who has never visited there? Describe that in writing, either in the form of a letter or as a journal entry. Use that description to create a sketch of a place that expresses that. The sketch can be realistic or not, just as long as it evokes the feeling you wish to express. Take it further by using your description and sketch to create a more developed picture in color. You can use Bierstadt's journal entry and painting as inspiration.

Materials:

Albert Bierstadt's painting, *Wind River, Wyoming*

An excerpt from Albert Bierstadt's letter to *The Crayon* (a journal popular with artists at the time) in 1859:

"We came up here with Col. F. W. Lander, who commands a wagon-road expedition through the mountains. At present, however, our party numbers only three persons: Mr. F, myself, and a man to take charge of our animals. We have a spring-wagon and six mules, and we go where fancy leads us. I spend most of my time making journeys in the saddle or on the bare back of an Indian pony. We have plenty of game to eat, such as antelope, mountain grouse, rabbit, sage-hens, wild-ducks, and the like. We have also tea, coffee, dried fruits, beans, a few other luxuries, and a good appetite—we ask for nothing better. This living out of doors, night and day, I find of great benefit. I never felt better in my life. I do not know what some of your Eastern folks would say, who call night air injurious, if they could see us wake up in the morning with the dew on our faces!"

Pencil

Paper

Colored pencils/crayons/markers/watercolors

Resources

[https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/1558/A_Storm_in_the](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/1558/A_Storm_in_the_Rocky_Mountains_Mt._Rosalie)

[Rocky Mountains Mt. Rosalie](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/1558/A_Storm_in_the_Rocky_Mountains_Mt._Rosalie)

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/hurs/hd_hurs.htm

http://thewadsworth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Teacher-Resource-Bierstadt_08.02.12_HiRes.pdf

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF WESTERN ART

EDUCATION

Grade levels: P-12 CO Standards

Visual Arts (2009)

P 1.1; P 2.1; P 3.1; P 4.1

K 1.1-2; K 2.1-2; K 3.1; K 4.1

1 1.1-2; 1 2.1; 1 3.1; 1 4.1

2 1.1-2; 2 2.1; 2 3.1; 2 4.1

3 1.1-2; 3 2.2-3; 3 3.1-2; 3 4.1-2

4 1.1-3; 4 2.1-2; 4 3.1-2; 4 4.1-2

5 1.1-3; 5 2.1-2; 5 3.1, 3; 5 4.1-2

6 1.1-3; 6 2.1-2; 6 3.1-2; 6 4.1-2

7 1.1-3; 7 2.1-2; 7 3.1-3; 7 4.1-2

8 1.1-3; 8 2.1-2; 8 3.1-2; 8 4.1-2

HS 1.1-3; HS 2.1-3; HS 3.1-3; HS 4.1-3

Reading, Writing and Communications (2009)

P 3.1-3

K 3.1-2; K 4.1-3

1 2.2-4; 1 3.1-2; 1 4.1-2

2 1.1-2; 2 2.2-3; 2 3.1-3; 3 4.1-2

3 1.1-2; 3 2.2-3; 3 3.1-3; 3 4.1-2

4 1.1; 4 2.2-3; 4 3.1-3; 4 4.1-2

5 1.1-2; 5 2.2-3; 5 3.1-3; 5 4.1-3

6 1.1; 6 2.1-3; 6 3.2-3; 6 4.1-3

7 1.1-2; 7 2.1-3; 7 3.1-3; 7 4.1-3

8 1.1-2; 8 2.2-3; 8 3.1-3; 8 4.1-3

9 1.1-2; 9 2.2; 9 3.1-3; 9 4.1-2

10 1.1-2; 10 2.1-3; 10 3.1-3; 10 4.1-2

11 1.1-2; 11 2.1-3; 11 3.1-3; 11 4.1-3

12 1.1-2; 12 2.1-2; 12 3.1-3; 12 4.1-2