

The Puritan Tradition and American Identity

LESSON PLANNING

C-3 STANDARDS

Perspectives

D.2.His.5.3-5 Explain connections among historical context and peoples' perspectives at the time.

Historical Sources and Evidence

D2.His.10.3-5 Compare information provided by different historical sources about the past.

D2.His.13.3-5 Use information about a historical source, including the maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose to judge the extent to which the source is useful for studying a particular topic.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- 1 What does it mean “to take a perspective?”
- 2 How does understanding others' perspectives bring deeper meaning to the study of people, places, and issues?
- 3 How can artwork serve as primary source evidence to help us understand others' perspectives in the course of history?
- 4 How do our own experiences influence our perspectives?

Materials

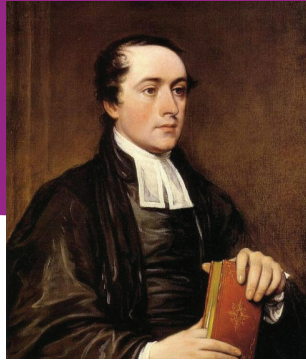
* Click the link below each image for information from the NBMAA e-museum on the artist and the painting.



[Joseph Badger](#)
[Samuel Moody](#)
[ca.1758](#)



[Joseph Badger](#)
[Hannah Minot Moody](#)
[ca.1758](#)



[John Trumbull](#)
[The Rev. Jonathan](#)
[Mayhew Wainwright](#)
[1820](#)



[Frederic Church](#)
[West Rock, New Haven](#)
[1849](#)

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- 1 Interpret Frederic Church's painting, including its reflection of Puritan's influence.
- 2 Connect to social studies content identified by the teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Pose an interesting question or scenario to hook students' interest. For example, show students the portraits of Samuel and Hannah Minot Moody and of the Rev. Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright. Each of these people had a strong Puritan background which was so influential in shaping American identity. (Invite students to remember the Puritan who fled persecution in search of religious freedom. They brought to the colonies a sense that they would be blessed if they honored God. In settling in New England, they honored God through their beliefs in hard work, honesty, responsibility, education, separation of church and state, purpose in community and the right of all free adult men to vote. The Puritan settlers also believed it was their God-ordained destiny to create an earthly paradise, governed by the Old Testament. Do we still connect to these ideals today?)

Tell students that the painting they will explore was created by Frederic Church whose father was a Puritan pioneer from England. He came with Thomas Hooker to the area that would become Hartford, Frederic Church's birthplace.

Art Vocabulary

Portrait—an artistic representation of a person/people.

Landscape—a section or expanse of rural scenery, usually extensive, that can be seen from a single viewpoint.

ENGAGING LEARNING

Provide the image of “West Rock, New Haven” on paper or digitally. Work as a whole class or with students in pairs or groups of three.

Observe: look closely

Use VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) to help students explore the works.

- Ask students to look at the works for a minute. Ask students to discuss three things they notice.
- Ask students to share their observations about West Rock, New Haven. Follow up with the question, “What makes you say that?” or “Tell me more about that.”
- Ask further open-ended questions, such as
 - “How did the artist capture your attention?”
 - “What story is told by this work? From whose perspective is it being told?”
 - “What are some questions this painting brings up for you?”

Use Inquiry

- “What are the many and varied ways that Church told us about nature?”
 - “How does the size of the hay wagon and the size of the people compare to West Rock’s size? What might Church be attempting to show with this contrast?”
 - “What do you notice about the weather? What is Church trying to show?”
 - “How many different shades of green does Church use? Why?”
 - “How are the clouds important in this work?”
 - “Is the sky or the land more important to the artist?” “What makes you say so?”
- “What are the values that Frederic Church conveys in this painting that it became so admired? What did he want to communicate in this landscape?” Summarize students’ comments and ask questions to help students make connections to the way in which depicting the beauty of the American landscape contributed to establishing a national identity—Europe had castles, America had the beautiful landscape!
- Provide relevant background information about the Hudson River School and Frederic Church. “How does the artist’s background, personal history or intention influence the work?”
- “What would the Moody’s and Rev. Wainwright think about this work?” (If a prompt is needed, ask “Would they say it reflects the greatness of God’s creation? Why or why not?”)

Interpret to personalize and connect

Help students connect with the beauty of nature that Church wished to convey.

- “Is the water calm or rough? Where does the water lead? What feeling or mood do you get by following the water?”
- “Who are the people in this painting? What are they doing? Where would you want to be in this painting? What would you be doing?”
- “The artist Frederic Church painted a field in honor of his friend Cyrus Field. He also painted a symbol to represent himself. Can you find it? If you were to put a symbol of yourself in this painting, what would it be? Where would you put it so that it fit within the painting?”

Think Critically

West Rock represents the beauty of the American landscape. However, it also has a deep connection to Connecticut’s Puritan roots of freedom from persecution and tyranny. Relate the story of the Judges' Cave as described briefly in the “Historical Background.” Share the statement on the plaque at the site of the cave.

"Here May Fifteenth 1661 and for some weeks thereafter Edward Whalley and his son-in-law William Goffe, members of the Parliament-General, officers in the army of the Commonwealth and signers of the death warrant of King Charles First, found shelter and concealment from the officers of the Crown after the Restoration. ‘Opposition to tyrants is obedience to God,’ 1896."

Ask students to support or refute the idea that “freedom from tyranny” embedded in this story still has significance today.

Think Critically

Connect this work to contemporary perspectives.

- “In your mind, are Puritan values expressed in Church’s work or is this just a beautiful painting?”
- “Is this a primary source for understanding history or not?” Explain your reasoning.

CLOSURE

Students meet in a group of three to answer the question, “What did you learn by discussing the artist’s perspective in West Rock, New Haven?” Do a round-robin in the class, taking one idea from each group. Summarize the connections between the artwork and social studies content objectives related to this lesson.

EXTENSION: *Expanding our Perspectives*

Frederic Church was known as a Hudson River School painter, named for artists originally from the New York area, who captured the grandeur of the American landscape. This work was painted in 1849 from Church’s perspective, an early environmentalist. Imagine the world in 2049, two hundred years after Church painted this work. Describe how nature in this painting might look different from a contemporary perspective and explain your reasoning. After students explain their reasoning, show a photo of West Rock today and discuss how and why West Rock remains similar yet different.