

COLE, THOMAS & THE HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL PAINTERS

Distant View of Niagara Falls



Primary Focus: Romanticism

Secondary Focus: The Hudson River School

The Hudson River School was America's first real art movement. The artwork produced explored the themes of discovery, exploration, and settlement that are distinctly American.

In the 19th Century Europe was still the main destination for art and many American artists left the U.S. to train, live, and work in European cities. But as America settled many artists also became inspired by the American experience and conveyed those experiences through their art. Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School, and his contemporaries were profoundly changed upon discovering the natural beauty of the Hudson River Valley in the Northeastern United States. Their art celebrates the magnificent and bountiful landscapes of this area.

Discuss the fact that The Hudson River School is not a real school per se but rather a common school of thought shared by the artists.

Students are studying various regions of the U.S. and the Northeast should be emphasized. For example, you can tie in the fact that the same year the Erie Canal opened (1825) was the same year Cole sailed up the Hudson River from New York City on a steamship and was forever changed by what he saw.

Romanticism. Imagination is used in this style of painting. The Hudson River painters took inspiration from real places but enhanced them to fit into their own vision.

Frederick Edwin Church is on the slide presentation and can be shown as another example of a Hudson River School painter.

Focus your discussion on: *Distant View of Niagara Falls*. (this work is in the AI)

Some questions to pose:

- How can you tell nature is so important to the Hudson River Painters?
- Why do you think the figures in all of these paintings are depicted so small?
- The themes of discovery, exploration, and settlement were very much a part of American thought during this era. How are these things reflected in these paintings?
- Is this painting Realistic or Romantic? (it is - a perfected landscape - a result of the artist's vision) Realism is the counter of Romanticism.
- Where is the Hudson River Valley located? Locate on classroom map if the students have not yet studied this region.
- If they have studied it ask: What are the mountain ranges in this region? (Catskills) What other geographic places did you encounter in this region when you researched your state? Did any seem inspiring to you?