

A FILM BY KEN BURNS
THE NATIONAL PARKS
America's Best Idea

THE NATIONAL PARKS: AMERICA'S BEST IDEA
LESSON PLANS

IMAGES OF THE PARKS

For more information, visit

www.pbs.org/nationalparks/for-educators/

IMAGES OF THE PARKS

Overview

It was paintings and photography that first brought the grandeur of the regions yet to become national parks to the public's attention in the latter half of the 19th century. Both played a crucial role in the creation of parks and in the nation's perception of them and their value. Images of jaw dropping beauty accompanied by vivid and expressive articles in popular publications brought the secrets of the West to the American people.

This lesson explores several of the themes in *The National Parks: America's Best Idea* by comparing the works of artists and photographers who documented and interpreted the spectacular scenery of the parks during the 19th and 20th centuries. At the end of their viewing and research, students will analyze how artists and photographers contributed to chronicling the imagery of the national parks, then will construct a public art exhibit and invite fellow classmates, school faculty and the public to view.

Objectives

The student will:

- describe the art of painters capturing images of western scenic regions
- discuss their reaction to the paintings with partners
- compare and contrast the different styles of painters who express
- research the life and work of artists of the national parks
- summarize the impact of the artist's in bringing awareness to Americans of the importance of the region or the park

Estimated Time

- Three class periods

Materials Needed

- Student handout: Museum Exhibits
- Internet access
- Poster paper, display board, pens, pencils, markers
- Digital slide presentation software
- Computers, printers

Activity/Procedure

Part 1: The Artists

1. Arrange the class into pairs for a think-pair-share activity.
2. Tell students that they will watch a series of video segments on early exploration of the scenic wonders of Yosemite and Yellowstone. As they watch the segments, ask them to write their reactions to what they see. These can be just a list of adjectives or reactive statements.
3. Show the film clips "Images of the Parks, Clip 1" featuring the scenic beauty of Yosemite along with "Images of the Parks, Clip 2" and "Images of the Parks, Clip 3" about the

mystery of Yellowstone (.pbs.org/nationalparks/for-educators/lesson-plans/#images). Tell students to pay close attention to the artwork of Alfred Bierstadt.

4. Now show the segment “Images of the Parks, Clip 4” (.pbs.org/nationalparks/for-educators/lesson-plans/#images) which explores how railroad companies, industrious entrepreneurs, and politicians used the work of artists to convey the scenic beauty of Yosemite and Yellowstone to lure tourists from the eastern United States to visit the West. Tell students to pay close attention to the art work of Thomas Moran and William Henry Jackson and write their reactions.
5. Have the pair exchange their notes and read their partner’s thoughts. Next have students write a one- or two-sentence comment to what they read on their partner’s paper and return the papers. Ask several students to share their notes and their partner’s response.
6. Now show the clip “Images of the Parks, Clip 5” (.pbs.org/nationalparks/for-educators/lesson-plans/#images) featuring Chiura Obata, a Japanese-born artist who painted scenes of Yosemite National Park in the 1930s. As they watch the segment, have them pay close attention to Obata’s artwork and words and write their reactions.
7. Have students individually set up a Venn diagram or a T-chart and compare and contrast the differences they saw in the art of Bierstadt and Moran with that of Obata. Then have students share their charts with their partners and discuss their findings.
8. Randomly, ask several students for their impressions of the artists’ styles and statements.

Part 2: Museum Exhibits

In this activity, students become curators of a museum exhibit of a selected artist. They create a gallery presentation on the artist’s work and experience for public viewing.

1. Reorganize students into groups of three or four and have them select one of the artists or photographers listed below.
 - George Catlin (painter)
 - Albert Bierstadt (painter)
 - Thomas Moran (painter)
 - George Masa (photographer)
 - Ansel Adams (photographer)
 - Iwao Matsushita (photographer)
 - Chiura Obata (painter)
 - William Henry Jackson (photographer)
 - Frank J. Haynes (photographer)
2. Distribute the handout **Museum Exhibit** to all students. Review the directions and answer any questions. Consider advising students to assign specific tasks for each member of the group, playing to their strengths.

3. As students become involved in their research and have gained a good understanding of their artist, ask them to suggest several ideas for an overall theme for the exhibit. Write these up on the front board for later review.
4. After all groups have finished constructing their exhibits, have students revisit their list of possible themes for the exhibit and decide on a name. Arrange for students to set up and present their exhibits to their classmates, the school and, if possible, the community. All members of each group should participate in setting up and presenting the exhibit, providing commentary and pointing out special areas of interest in their exhibit. Send a notice to parents and school personnel about the date and time of the exhibit.

Assessment

Student can be assessed on the following:

- Cooperative group work
- Coverage of the required content in their exhibit
- Use and incorporation of technology in their exhibit
- Understanding of the artist's work and contribution to the national parks

Related Academic Standards

This lesson meets the following curriculum standards set by McREL – Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning:

Visual Arts

1. Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts
4. Understands the visual arts in relation to history and culture

Language

Writing

1. Uses the general skill and strategies of the writing process
3. Uses grammar and mechanical conventions in writing compositions
4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Viewing

9. Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

Additionally this lesson meets the following standards set by National Center for History in the Schools:

Historical Understanding

Historical Thinking

- Standard 2, I: Draw upon visual, literary and musical sources including a) photographs, paintings, cartoons, etc., to clarify, illustrate, or elaborate upon information presented in the historical narrative.

Geography

- Use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information;

- Identify and explain how culture and experience influence people's perception of places and regions;

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Museum Exhibits Student Handout

Overview: In this activity your groups will develop a museum exhibit on your artist or photographer. Your gallery exhibit will feature the artist's work, a map of the area where they did their work. When your exhibit is finished, your group will join with the other groups to construct and present a gallery exhibit to the public. Your presentation can be constructed as a traditional museum exhibit on poster board, or you can create a digital presentation of slides, online maps and video clips from the **NATIONAL PARKS** series or a combination of both.

Directions:

1. Assign specific tasks for each member of the group, playing to their strengths. But also remember, all members are responsible for completing and presenting the exhibit and provide help where ever they can.
2. Research your artist on the following areas:
 - a. A brief biography of the artist covering how he got started in their craft and an overview of their work in general.
 - b. Several (five-six) examples of the artist's work in a national park(s) or the region that became a national park that can be enlarged for easy viewing. Write a caption for each that states the name of the artist, the title of the work, and the date it was created. Also, any reference to who holds the copyright.
 - c. An analysis of how the artist's work reflects the uniqueness of a park or a region that became a national park.
 - d. The impact of the artist in bringing awareness to Americans of the importance of the region or the park.
 - e. Quotes from the artist you feel are appropriate and enhance your exhibit
 - f. A map of the area that is the subject of their art. Identify specific areas where some of the work was created.
3. In addition to pbs.org/nationalparks, use some of the suggested sites below to assist you in you in your research

Resources:

- National Gallery of Art www.nga.gov (search by artist)
- National Parks Service www.nps.gov (search by park, then artist)
- Library of Congress lcweb2.loc.gov/pp/mdbquery.html
- National Parks Museum Management Program www.nps.gov/history/museum/ (click Park Profiles)
- Masters of Photography www.masters-of-photography.com/index.html
- Also conduct general searches and research on your artist from the Internet, library and other sources