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Picturing America
School Collaboration

URBS IN HORTO -- CITY IN A GARDEN
THE INFLUENCE OF THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE ON THE PARKS MOVEMENT IN CHICAGO

Grade and Subject: 8th grade Humanities elective

Guiding Question: How does Thomas Cole's representation of the American landscape in "The Oxbow" 1836 and Charles Sheeler's "American Landscape" 1930 inform our understanding of the creation of public parks in Chicago in the 19th and 20th Centuries?

Day 1: The Sacred American Landscape (50 minutes)

Display "The Oxbow" at the front of the class. Explain that the painting will be the focal point of our understanding of the ideal American landscape. But before we examine the painting closely, we will spend 25 minutes reading, discussing and reporting on three pertinent primary source documents that will give context to the work of art.

A. Divide class into three groups. Each group designates a scribe to record discussion and a speaker to present salient points of discussion to the whole class. Each group will discuss/analyze selections from one of these primary source documents:

"Nature" (1836) by Ralph Waldo Emerson

Genesis, "Noah and the Rainbow"

"Essay on American Scenery" (1836) by Thomas Cole

Essential question to guide group discussion: How does each selection understand man's relationship to the land, to G-d?

Speaker from each group will give a brief summary of group's primary source document and the group's understanding of it.

B. As a class, closely examine "The Oxbow." How does it reflect an understanding of nature and landscape expressed in the documents we just read? Create a Venn diagram like the one in the Teacher's Manual to better understand the different elements in the painting.

C. Based upon what we have read in the primary source documents and seen in Cole's "The Oxbow," what do you think park design in the 19th Century would look like?

Day 2: The Chicago Vernacular Landscape (50 minutes)

Display Sheeler's "American Landscape" along with "The Oxbow" in front of the class.

A. Again students will divide into three groups to examine the following primary source documents:

"Chicago" (1916) by Carl Sandburg

"The New Colossus" (1883) by Emma Lazarus

First view of Chicago, *The Jungle* (1906) by Upton Sinclair

Essential question to guide group discussion: How did immigration and industrialization shape the American landscape?

Speaker from each group will give a brief summary of group's primary source document and the group's understanding of it.

B. As a class, closely examine "American Landscape." How does it reflect an understanding of the American landscape in light of industrialization? Compare and contrast to "The Oxbow."

C. Based upon what we have read in the primary source documents and the paintings we have examined, what do you think public parks should look like at the beginning of the 20th Century?

Day 3: Field Trip (½ day)

Class will travel to Jackson Park and Millennium Park for guided tour.

Note: water features, use of native plants, wildlife habitats, accessibility, varied use.

Guiding question: What makes a park "work?"

Assignment: Design a park. Same size display boards will be distributed to each student.

Include a designer's statement (6-10 sentences) explaining your rationale.

All designs and designer statements will be displayed in the Media Center.

Assessment: Rubric

Background/Contextual Info for Teachers

City Beautiful Movement: Grew out of a desire to control the diversity and chaos of rapidly growing industrial cities by applying Beaux Arts principles of classical order and monumentality to the design of urban spaces.

Thomas Cole (1801-1848): Leader of group of American landscape artists that became known as the Hudson River School. Helped develop a distinctly American style of landscape painting that included dramatic, panoramic scenes of the American wilderness.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882): Leading American essayist, poet, critic, orator and popular philosopher. His first book, *Nature* (1836) was well-received and sparked the philosophical movement called *transcendentalism*.

Jens Jensen (1860-1951): Landscape architect who was a leading force in promoting a style of design that celebrated the native Midwestern landscape. Born in Denmark; emigrated to the U.S. in 1884.

Emma Lazarus (1849-1887): American poet.

Frederick Law Olmstead, Sr. (1822-1903): American landscape architect, city planner and writer on social issues. One of the planners of New York's Central Park; designed the layout for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893).

Parks Movement: Based on the belief in the positive effect of nature on the human spirit.

Carl Sandburg (1878-1967): American poet, biographer and historian best known for his celebration of the common man.

Charles Sheeler (1883-1965): American painter and photographer best known for paintings that blend realism with the geometric forms associated with cubism.

Upton Sinclair (1878-1968): American writer and reformer who became famous as a *muckraker*.

Primary Source Documents

for lesson plan:

URBS IN HORTO -- CITY IN A GARDEN

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THE PARKS MOVEMENT IN CHICAGO**

Selections from "Nature" (1836) by Ralph Waldo Emerson

The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence. Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man extort her secret, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection. Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. The flowers, the animals, the mountains, reflected the wisdom of his best hour, as much as they had delighted the simplicity of his childhood.

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood.

Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me. I am part or parcel of God.

[27. *The Rainbow*]

⁸ God said to Noah and his sons with him, ⁹ "I Myself am making a covenant with you and with your offspring after you. ¹⁰ [It will also include] every living creature that is with you among the birds, the livestock, and all the beasts of the earth with you—all who left the ark, including every animal on earth. ¹¹ I will make My covenant with you, and all life will never be cut short by the waters of a flood. There will never again be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹² God said, "This is the sign that I am providing for the covenant between Me, you, and every living creature that is with you, for everlasting generations: ¹³ I have placed My rainbow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth, the rainbow will be seen among the clouds. ¹⁵ I will then recall the covenant that exists between Me, you and every living soul in all flesh. ¹⁶ The rainbow will be in the clouds, and I will see it to recall the eternal covenant between God and every living soul in all flesh that is on the earth."

¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have made between Me and all flesh on the earth."

Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery"

From: *The American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836).

[I. Introduction]

The essay, which is here offered, is a mere sketch of an almost illimitable subject--American Scenery; and in selecting the theme the writer placed more confidence in its overflowing richness, than in his own capacity for treating it in a manner worthy of its vastness and importance.

It is a subject that to every American ought to be of surpassing interest; for, whether he beholds the Hudson mingling waters with the Atlantic--explores the central wilds of this vast continent, or stands on the margin of the distant Oregon, he is still in the midst of American scenery--it is his own land; its beauty, its magnificence, its sublimity--all are his; and how undeserving of such a birthright, if he can turn towards it an unobserving eye, an unaffected heart!

Before entering into the proposed subject, in which I shall treat more particularly of the scenery of the Northern and Eastern States, I shall be excused for saying a few words on the advantages of cultivating a taste for scenery, and for exclaiming against the apathy with which the beauties of external nature are regarded by the great mass, even of our refined community.

He who looks on nature with a "loving eye," cannot move from his dwelling without the salutation of beauty; even in the city the deep blue sky and the drifting clouds appeal to him. And if to escape its turmoil--if only to obtain a free horizon, land and water in the play of light and shadow yields delight--let him be transported to those favored regions, where the features of the earth are more varied, or yet add the sunset, that wreath of glory daily bound around the world, and he, indeed, drinks from pleasure's purest cup. The delight such a man experiences is not merely sensual, or selfish, that passes with the occasion leaving no trace behind; but in gazing on the pure creations of the Almighty, he feels a calm religious tone steal through his mind, and when he has turned to mingle with his fellow men, the chords which have been struck in that sweet communion cease not to vibrate.

In what has been said I have alluded to wild and uncultivated scenery; but the cultivated must not be forgotten, for it is still more important to man in his social capacity--necessarily bringing him in contact with the cultured; it encompasses our homes, and, though devoid of the stern sublimity of the wild, its quieter spirit steals tenderly into our bosoms mingled with a thousand domestic affections and heart-touching associations--human hands have wrought, and human deeds hallowed all around.

"Chicago" (1916) by Carl Sandburg

HOG Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I
have seen your painted women under the gas lamps
luring the farm boys.
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it
is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to
kill again.
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the
faces of women and children I have seen the marks
of wanton hunger.
And having answered so I turn once more to those who
sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer
and say to them:
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing
so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on
job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the
little soft cities;

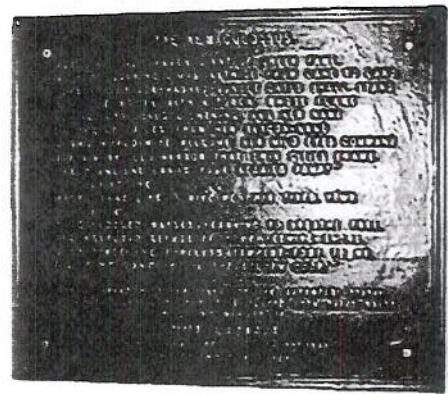
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning
as a savage pitted against the wilderness,
Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding,
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with
white teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young
man laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has
never lost a battle,
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse,
and under his ribs the heart of the people,
Laughing!
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of
Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog
Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with
Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

"The New Colossus" (1883) by Emma Lazarus

"The New Colossus" is a sonnet by Emma Lazarus (1849-1887), written in 1883 and, in 1903, engraved on a bronze plaque and mounted inside the Statue of Liberty.

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"



The plaque at the Statue of Liberty

Selection from *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair

They sat and stared out of the window. They were on a street which seemed to run on forever, mile after mile--thirty-four of them, if they had known it--and each side of it one uninterrupted row of wretched little two-story frame buildings. Down every side street they could see, it was the same--never a hill and never a hollow, but always the same endless vista of ugly and dirty little wooden buildings. Here and there would be a bridge crossing a filthy creek, with hard-baked mud shores and dingy sheds and docks along it; here and there would be a railroad crossing, with a tangle of switches, and locomotives puffing, and rattling freight cars filing by; here and there would be a great factory, a dingy building with innumerable windows in it, and immense volumes of smoke pouring from the chimneys, darkening the air above and making filthy the earth beneath. But after each of these interruptions, the desolate procession would begin again--the procession of dreary little buildings.

A full hour before the party reached the city they had begun to note the perplexing changes in the atmosphere. It grew darker all the time, and upon the earth the grass seemed to grow less green. Every minute, as the train sped on, the colors of things became dingier; the fields were grown parched and yellow, the landscape hideous and bare. And along with the thickening smoke they began to notice another circumstance, a strange, pungent odor. They were not sure that it was unpleasant, this odor; some might have called it sickening, but their taste in odors was not developed, and they were only sure that it was curious. Now, sitting in the trolley car, they realized that they were on their way to the home of it--that they had traveled all the way from Lithuania to it. It was now no longer something far off and faint, that you caught in whiffs; you could literally taste it, as well as smell it--you could take hold of it, almost, and examine it at your leisure. They were divided in their opinions about it. It was an elemental odor, raw and crude; it was rich, almost rancid, sensual, and strong. There were some who drank it in as if it were an intoxicant; there were others who put their handkerchiefs to their faces. The new emigrants were still tasting it, lost in wonder, when suddenly the car came to a halt, and the door was flung open, and a voice shouted--"Stockyards!"

They were left standing upon the corner, staring; down a side street there were two rows of brick houses, and between them a vista: half a dozen chimneys, tall as the tallest of buildings, touching the very sky--and leaping from them half a dozen columns of smoke, thick, oily, and black as night. It might have come from the center of the world, this smoke, where the fires of the ages still smolder. It came as if self-impelled, driving all before it, a perpetual explosion. It was inexhaustible; one stared, waiting to see it stop, but still the great streams rolled out. They spread in vast clouds overhead, writhing, curling; then, uniting in one giant river, they streamed away down the sky, stretching a black pall as far as the eye could reach.