

Picturing America School Collaboration Conference  
**U.S. History Lesson Plan**, by Jennifer Nabozny

**U.S. Waterways “Now and Then”— From Exploration & Settlement to Recreation & Art**

**Objectives:**

- Students will examine the movement of the populace along U.S. waterways over the past four centuries.
- Students will expand their perception using American artwork and the artists who, through their perspective, voiced society’s values of waterways and the needs of the age.
- Students will be able to explain different uses of U.S. waterways; from utilitarian, to recreational, to being used as a form of art.

**Essential Question:** What influence has the needs of the people of each age had on their use and perception about water over time, as shown in the selected pieces of artwork?

**Background Information for the Teacher:** This lesson is intended to show how the needs of the peoples of an age influence water usage and their perspectives about what waterways mean to their lives. Students will examine how the perception of water and social attitudes towards water usage have changed over time by examining how water was used to explore, to transport goods and services, for recreation, ecological understanding, and for its innate beauty as a form of art. They will see the transformation from nature’s original form to human alterations through a “then and now” approach.

**Materials:** Selections from the Picturing America landscape collection; *View From Mount Holyoke, Northampton, MA, after a Thunderstorm* by Thomas Cole, *John Biglin In A Single Scull* by Thomas Eakins, *American Landscape* by Charles Sheeler, and Frank Lloyd Wright’s *Fallingwater*.

**Vocabulary:**

- Necessity
- Recreation
- Art (What IS art?)
- Exploration
- Ecology
- Perception
- Architecture
- Ingenuity
- Industrialization

**Lesson Outline:**

**Part 1** Introduction: Read 3 selections of poetry. Discuss.

Scan works (see questions for scanning). Students fill out questions on handout. Discuss.

Prep students for research presentation portion.

Allow 1+ weeks for research.

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In class or online, kids organize themselves.

**Part 2** Presentations that include 3 key discussion questions for their peers.

**Assessment:** *Will vary based upon the preferences of the instructor.*

- Collect the individual handouts from scanning the work.
- Rubric to assess the presentations
- Rubric to assess the papers
- Class participation

**Lesson: Part 1** Read the following poems about water and ask,  
“**Why is water so important?**” *Health, Electricity, Travel, Exploring, Shipping, Industry*

**New Water**

*All those years—almost a hundred—  
the farm had hard water.  
Hard orange. Buckets lined in orange.  
Sink and tub and toilet, too,  
once they got running water.  
And now, in less than a lifetime,  
just by changing the well’s location,  
in the same yard, mind you,  
the water’s soft, clear, delicious to drink.  
All those years to shake your head over.  
Look how sweet life has become;  
you can see it in the couple who live here,  
their calmness as they sit at their table,  
the beauty as they offer you new water to drink.*

*Sharon Chmielarz*

**Water Fun Then and Now**

Settlers Everywhere Built  
Their Towns  
Near Water  
Rivers And Lakes  
Fishing  
Canoeing  
And Water Falls

All In One Place  
People And Children  
In The City  
Rubbing All Around The Park  
Getting Wet  
Having Fun  
In The Sprinklers Before The  
Dark.

*Zoria, 5th Grade, PS 18 -  
Bro*

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**Water**

We send astronomers to the moon in search of water  
And our children run out of safe drinking water;  
Trekking miles on barefoot are our women to fetch water,  
Ecosystem is imbalanced and soft drink economy exploits water,  
Remember we are on the road to death with no tap of water

(Acrostic of Water)

Prem Nizar Hameed

**Scan and Discuss:**

Break the class into groups of 4, and have them scan the landscape poster and then answer the following questions. Repeat for each landscape.

- What do you see? What is happening in the picture?  
*Give details of objects/people you see, and feelings that come up about what you are seeing.*
- What time period do you think it is from? Why?
- How is the waterway in the picture being used?
- What do you think this says about the way the artist/society of the day see's this waterway?
- Why do you think the artist painted it? What is their message to you the viewer?
- What is the mood of the work?
- Does the water symbolize something in this work?

**Additional questions specific to the individual works:**

- *View From Mount Holyoke-* Describe the differences in the landscape of the work
- *John Biglin In A Single Scull-* Describe the person, his clothing, his expression.
- *American Landscape-* Where is the person?  
What does his size and placement tell you?
- *Fallingwater-* Why is this house unique?

**Research Paper and Presentation: Introduction**

Break students into 4 groups, each group will research one piece of art. Each group will sub-divide so that they each are researching a portion of a larger collaborated work.

Students will each write a [1 page?] paper on their research topic.

Topics:

- -The Artist, their background, style, intention and inspiration for this work of art.
- Overview of the culture and time period of the art work, discussing water use; wilderness, ecology, settlement, industry and trade

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- What was the artist trying to show about man's relationship with water in this specific piece of work?
- "Then and Now" How did the use of this waterway, this setting, change over time. For example: Earliest known usage, changes at significant periods in time, modern use. Show pictures.
- Historical background of this place; Changes in the landscape that took place over the past four centuries. Is there Historical significance of this place?
- What would you find and see if you stood and viewed this scene today?

Part 2-- Students will present a brief summary of the most interesting and relevant findings to the class. And the presenting group, with teacher assistance, will facilitate discussion by asking what they feel are key questions about their topic.

**Resources and Keywords**

Can be given to students to get them started.

***View From Mount Holyoke-*** Thomas Cole  
The Oxbow (Connecticut River)  
Historical Usage of the Connecticut River  
Mount Holyoke, Northampton, MA  
[www.chronos-historical.org/mtholyoke/history4.html](http://www.chronos-historical.org/mtholyoke/history4.html)

***John Biglin In A Single Scull-*** Thomas Eakins  
Schuylkill River, Philadelphia, PA  
Historical Uses of the Schuylkill River  
Rowing, History of  
[www.schuylkillbanks.org](http://www.schuylkillbanks.org)

***American Landscape-*** Charles Sheeler  
Old Detroit River Photos  
Ford Motor Co—Rouge Plant, Dearborn, MI  
Rouge River Photos  
Grosse Ile Waterfront  
North Maumee Bay Archeological District  
Historical usage of Rouge River  
[www.thehenryford.org/rouge/historyofrouge.aspx](http://www.thehenryford.org/rouge/historyofrouge.aspx)

***Fallingwater-*** Frank Lloyd Wright  
History of waterway usage  
Pennsylvania's Laurel Highlands  
[www.fallingwater.org](http://www.fallingwater.org)

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