

The Impact of Change: Local Land Use Planning & Values

Objectives:

- To analyze Romantic ideals and how they relate to the West.
- To compare and contrast Romantic ideals with local ideals about the landscape and natural resources.
- To analyze images for the causes and effects of change on the landscape, natural resources, and values of the local community.
- To write with purpose for an authentic audience.

Guiding Question:

To what extent do westerners believe in Romantic ideals? How are Romantic ideals being impacted by changes in the local community, particularly by changes in the landscape?

Background Information:

Even as the West continues to be romanticized, the changes it experienced in the end of the 20th century has had a marked impact on the region's landscape and resources, similar to the changes that occurred in the 19th century following westward expansion. In the future, the symbolism that is embodied by this region will likely shift from the Romantic ideals it has portrayed.

Because Bierstadt's painting "Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California, 1865" captures these ideals, it can help students understand the source of Romanticism in the West and the importance of believing in "the promise of a new beginning" (*Picturing America's Teachers' Resource Book*, 36). As students recognize how our values of the land are tied to personal beliefs, they can construct understandings of how changes in the land can alter those beliefs.

(Refer to *Picturing America's Teachers' Resource Book* for more contextual information about Bierstadt and his painting.)

Instructional Sequence:

- Develop an understanding of the following Romantic thoughts and ideals:
 - The natural goodness of humans is hindered by urban life and civilization.
 - The savage is noble.
 - Childhood is good.
 - Knowledge is gained through intuition rather than reason.
 - The sublime can be experienced through nature.
 - The individual imagination is the highest authority.
- Relate Romantic ideals to Albert Bierstadt's painting "Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California, 1865."
- Read the conclusion of Thomas Cole's "Essay on American Scenery" and relate his ideas to Romanticism and the portrayal of the American West in the 19th century.

- Connect these concepts to personal and local beliefs about the importance of landscape, wilderness, land use, natural resources, wildlife, etc.
- Visit the local historical society to select and digitize images that will illustrate change over time in local community.
- Re-shoot images from the same perspective to make a visual comparison.
- Discuss the impact of the current level of change on the local community. Predict how future changes will positively or negatively impact the locals' beliefs and values in relation to the natural resources and landscape. Involve local planners and county commissioners in the process to gain insight into future proposals.
- Write summaries in relation to each pair of images and post predictions on a collaborative summary page.
- Document and preserve the images on a public website and present findings at a local historical society or planning and zoning meeting.

Assessment:

- Self-assessment of participation in discussion and of group work for web site construction.
- Formal assessment of writing using a standardized rubric.