

Objective:

Students will examine how differently native culture and European culture viewed their relationship to the land and how this led to and exacerbated conflict between the two groups.

Guiding Question:

How does Albert Bierstadt's "Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California, 1865," reflect the ideals and conceptual ideas behind Manifest Destiny?

Background Information:

As part of a required Washington State history course, students examine how Washington state came into existence – geographically, politically and culturally. Students study the original cultural groups, and those that came later. As part of the units on Native Americans and the Lewis and Clark Expedition in particular, students examine the concept of Manifest Destiny and how that affected settlement of the Pacific Northwest and interaction with various groups of people.

Context with larger periods of history is critical to consider. What effect did the Civil War have on the settlement of the Oregon Territory? What effect did the Indian Wars have on that settlement? How did the idea of Manifest Destiny play into the settlement of the West? How did all of this impact and shape our interactions with the Native population already present?

The area my students live in is the Columbia River Gorge, not dissimilar to the painting I have chosen to launch this lesson.

Activities:

Open lesson with general survey of student ideas/knowledge/understanding of Manifest Destiny. Provide students with a generally accepted definition.

Students will read an essay by John L. O'Sullivan on Manifest Destiny (www.civics-online.org). (O'Sullivan is the person who originally coined the term.)

Discuss and analyze key words and phrases in the essay – what ironies do students notice, particularly in terms of the ideals put forth by O'Sullivan and how we chose to interact with the native populations?

After a thorough discussion of the concept, show students the painting by Bierstadt. What key words and phrases from the essay do they see manifested in the painting?

Discuss the differences between how early settlers viewed the "wilderness" and how it was seen by Native culture. How do we view "wilderness" today?

Assessment of Understanding:

1. Students, working in pairs, will research and bring to class another painting by an American artist that reflects the ideals/concepts of Manifest Destiny and present it to the class.
2. Students will write an essay discussing how manifest destiny still affects/shapes our culture today.