

APUSH Picturing America Lesson Plan – Kris Wampler

Image: *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California, 1865* – Albert Bierstadt

Concept: Immigration to the American West in the mid to late 1800's.

Objective: Students will be able to compare and contrast the artwork of Albert Bierstadt and the literary work of Willa Cather and how both related to producing images of the American West in the mid to late 1800's.

Students will begin this lesson by researching a short biography of Willa Cather and Albert Bierstadt. Both Cather and Bierstadt experienced moving and traveling to a new place in the Western area of the United States. Both found that the West was a place of beauty, haunting expansion, and full of trials and hardships.

Students will then read Chapter two from Part One of O Pioneers! They will also observe the painting *Looking Down Yosemite Valley*. After studying both works they will begin to question how both works project the images of the American West and how immigrants felt about their new found land.

Guiding Question: How does the painting of *Yosemite Valley* and Willa Cather's O Pioneers! project images of the American West to all those who dreamed of moving West in the mid to late 1800's.

Background information:

Willa Cather (1873-1947) was raised in Nebraska, but spent most of her adult life in the Midwest and New York. As a young child she observed many of the Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, French, German and Czech immigrants who lived in her area of Nebraska. The immigrants were to leave a lasting impression on Cather throughout her life. She used many of their experiences in her short stories and novels.

Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) was a German born artist who was raised in the United States. Just before the Civil War he traveled with U.S. Army engineers to the American West. On his trip he made many sketches and when he returned to the East he painted many very large paintings of his images of the American West and its immense beauty.

Vocabulary:

Mortgages: payment on a home loan.

Corpulent: overweight

Westward Expansion: Immigrants traveling to the western part of the United States.

Analysis Activity:

Students will be asked to compare and contrast how the short reading from O Pioneers! and the painting *Looking Down Yosemite Valley* would have projected images of the American West for the immigrants and Americans on the Eastern coast of the United States in the mid to late 1800's.

(over)

Assessment:

Each student will be given a multiple choice test over the history and lives of both Cather and Bierstadt. Each student will write an essay on how the Cather reading and the Bierstadt painting evoked images of the American West on the immigrants and Americans who lived on the East coast of the United States.