



## The Oxbow by Thomas Cole

This is a view from the top of Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts in 1836. A thunderstorm is just ending and sunlight streams down on the peaceful cultivated valley below. On the left of the painting dark clouds still hover over the untamed wilderness where a rough and craggy tree juts from the top of the hill. The artists intention was to show the contrast between civilization and nature.

Cole was British born and so unused to the degree of wilderness he found in America. This painting shows how man never really lives with nature, but instead tames and changes it. At the very bottom of the painting you can see the artist painting the scene, a tiny insignificant intrusion into the wilderness.



## The Arcadian or Pastoral State by Thomas Cole

This is part of a series of five paintings depicting the course of empire. The series begins with The Savage State, then Pastoral, Consummation of Empire, Destruction, and Desolation. It was a common belief in America at the time that the pastoral state, the state of early America, was the most virtuous and ideal because empire leads to pride and moral decay which leads to destruction.

This painting depicts a Greek countryside before cities have sprung up. The people live in harmony with a nature just tamed enough to be safe. They are content and happy. This is the state that many saw America in in the early 1800's.





## Manhood by Thomas Cole

Third in a series of four paintings depicting an allegory of life, this shows how in adulthood life is rough and the course is not always smooth. The traveler relies on prayer and religious conviction to keep his spirits up through the rough ride. Though the traveler cannot see them, God and angels watch from above and guide and guard him.

The paintings in the series include childhood where the traveler is guarded and protected by an angel on a calm springtime river, youth where the angel bids the young man farewell as he sails off through a summertime landscape toward a castle in the sky, manhood, a rough autumn voyage, and old age where the traveler is once again guided by the angel across a winter sea to the heavenly realms.



## Kindred Spirits by Asher Durand

This was painted in 1849 and shows Thomas Cole, the painter and a personal friend of Durand's, and Cole's friend, the poet William Cullen Bryant, in an idealized American wilderness setting. The painting was commissioned as a gift for Bryant who was mourning the recent death of Cole. Both the men in the painting had used this scenery as inspiration for their works, art and poetry, respectively. The painting represents a union of the early American school of thought in both art and literature. The untamed beauty of the American wilderness was (and is) its true cultural heritage and the inspiration for works of the soul.





## The Catskills by Asher Durand

The use of a vertical canvas to depict a landscape was almost unique to Durand. He wanted to show the grandeur of the height of the trees framing the view beyond and to make the viewer feel in awe of the natural scenery. The views in the American wilderness were likewise constrained vertically as one was surrounded by trees and rocky outcrops. In Europe broad vistas may open up, but this was less so in America.

This was painted in 1858 at the height of Durand's skill and fame as an artist. The painting is in accordance with Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendental philosophy that said man may find God in nature.



## Heart of the Andes by Frederic Edwin Church

This was painted in 1859 after the artist took a trip to South America. It is painted on an enormous 5 foot by 10 foot canvas and its showing established Church as one of America's foremost landscape painters. People lined up for hours to view it upon release.

In the center of the painting we can see a little church in the distance, a signature detail of Church's paintings, and in the lower left some natives worshipping at a cross. Church subscribed to the common philosophy of the Romantic movement that God and nature are unified and God can be found in nature. You have this grand untamed wilderness scene and right smack dab in the middle we see evidence of God.





## Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone by Thomas Moran

Moran was invited to go on an expedition of exploration in the Yellowstone region in 1871 as an artist who might record for the American public the beauties of the west. Moran's paintings of Yellowstone helped ensure it was preserved as the first National Park. This painting was completed in 1901 and can currently be viewed in the Smithsonian.



## The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak by Albert Bierstadt

Bierstadt worked with the older generation of Hudson River School artists then brought his expertise west as the east was by this time quite civilized. This was painted in 1862 and depicts a peak in modern day Wyoming where Bierstadt traveled with a survey team.

The scene is idealized, picturesque, and grand, having been painted on a ten foot wide canvas, much like Church's Heart of the Andes to which it has been compared. It was exactly the scene of the untamed west that Americans wanted to see.



## Last of the Buffalo by Albert Bierstadt

This was painted in about 1888 on a huge ten foot canvas and shows wildlife disappearing from the wilderness as well as the Plains Indians and their way of life. By the time Bierstadt painted this, the buffalo herds had declined from 30 million to an estimated 1000 individuals. While this painting addresses a real current issue of the day the larger message is that man has the power to alter and even destroy nature.

The silhouettes of the main figures in the foreground are echoed by the shapes of the mountains in the background, a reminder that we are connected to nature. Bierstadt was a conservationist.



## Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California by Albert Bierstadt

This was painted in 1868 in oil on canvas. It depicts an idealized scene of nature in the untamed American west. It was painted in Rome and shown in Europe before it was brought to America. Paintings like this fueled the European imagination of what American wilderness was like, even though Bierstadt did not faithfully portray the actual scenery. In this piece the light streaming down from the top center of the clouds lends a heavenly view, as though this is paradise itself. The background mountains grow hazy as they recede into the distance and the whole scene is of overwhelming grandeur.



# Hudson River School Art Cards

The Hudson River School was begun in about 1825 by Thomas Cole and his friend Asher Durand in the Hudson River Valley and lasted until around 1900. It was part of the larger Romantic movement that was taking place in Europe, but instead of ruined abbeys being overtaken by trees the Americans portrayed their cultural heritage, untamed wilderness. The themes of the Hudson River School include the ability to find and commune with the Divine in nature, the value of wild spaces and human interconnectedness with them, and how civilization encroaches on nature.

The first generation of Hudson River School artists was succeeded by those who had to go west to the untamed Rockies to find new natural vistas, the east being completely tamed by the mid 1800's. This second generation included Frederic Edwin Church, Thomas Moran, and Albert Bierstadt.

Print these art cards and descriptions onto white card stock. Cut the cards out on the solid lines.

Help your kids become familiar with these paintings and artists by playing matching games, sorting the cards, and quizzing over them.

1. Place the cards face down, with images in one group and description cards in another group. Choose one card from each group. Determine if they match. You can read the description of the painting to see if they do.
2. Arrange the paintings in order of date. Which were painted first? Can you see a progression of techniques or style in the cards?
3. Hold up an image card and see if your child can remember the title of the painting. After these are mastered, use the image cards to memorize the titles and artists together. Finally master the titles, artists, and a little information about the painting.
4. Go online and find more art by the same artists. Can you tell which artist painted the piece just by looking at the style?