

TEACHING HISTORY THROUGH ART

Western Images

Visions of California from the Reagan Library and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Common Core CA – (Intro. Page 3):

“To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and summarize information and ideas, to conduct original research to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive print and non-print texts in media forms old and new. The need to conduct research and to produce and consume media is embedded into every aspect of today’s curriculum. In like fashion, research and media skills and understandings are embedded in the Standards rather than treated in a separate section.”

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

7 (grades 6-8)

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

(Grade 9-10)

Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

(Grade 11-12)

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

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The American West

1. List as many words as you can that come to mind when you hear the term “American West.” Take 30 seconds to do this. You can list these words on your own paper or on the board.
2. Why did you choose those words? Explain your reasoning.
3. Take two minutes to draw a picture of the American West.
4. Circle details in your picture that you think symbolize the American West. Do any of the pictures you drew match the words in question number 1? (Examples include covered wagon, cowboy boots, horse, farm land)

American Art:

In the 1800s, the west was idealized as an open space of exploration and viewed as a growing area of opportunity to create the ideal vision of American farming culture. Coinciding with these ideals are the following historical experiences from the era:

- The Lewis and Clark Expedition
- The Louisiana Purchase
- The development of Railroads
- Statehood for California

Impressionism in America:

The Impressionist style of painting which focused on using broad strokes of color to capture light was developed in France in the 1800s. Many American artists such as Walter Elmer Schofield, Louis Ritman and others began to work in this style as well in the late 1800s and very early 1900s. Impressionist painters created much of their work “en plein air”, a French expression meaning outside or outdoors.

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The Great Depression:

Beginning in the 1930s, America, like the rest of the world was plagued by the economic depression. Government programs, like the Works Progress Administration; helped create a growth of American art through commissions of public artworks. Much of this artwork was created to mirror or show what was going on in American cities at the time. Photography, which was developed in the late 1800s, was more widely used and more paintings were created to reveal aspects of everyday life.

Ronald Reagan:

Ronald Reagan was born in 1911 and spent his early life was spent in Illinois. His father was a salesman and the family lived very modestly. Much of his early life was spent outdoors. In high school, he played football and worked as a lifeguard during the summer. Like many Americans, he was coming of age during the Great Depression and initially struggled to find work. Ultimately, he captured the hearts and minds of the American people through the newly developing medium of radio and later television and movies. Capturing the value of these new technologies moved the future President and his family to California and helped him develop his skills working with and communicating with Americans.

Quotes from the Time Period:

In his autobiography, *An American Life*, **Ronald Reagan** referred to himself as a child as “the Great Naturalist” (page 31) discussing how much he read about and enjoyed the outdoors.

In his well known biography of President Reagan, **Lou Cannon** stated, “On screen and in person Reagan came across as virile and Midwestern, expressing patriotic certitudes and old-fashioned values that were somehow softened by his smile.” (p.31)

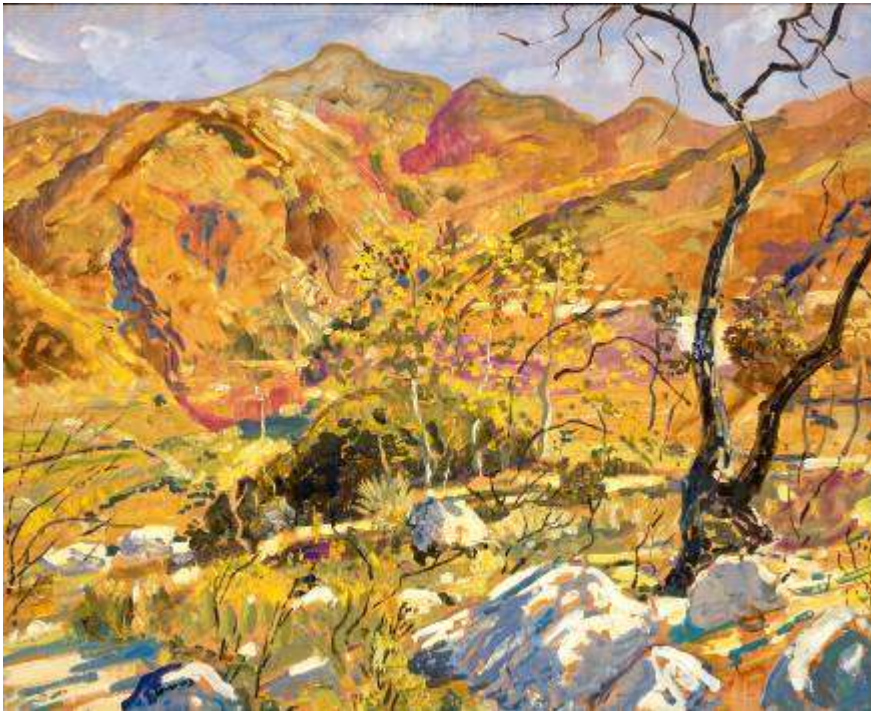
Walter Elmer Schofield painted Tujunga Canyon 1934-1935 during the Great Depression. Walter Elmer Schofield was part of the Pennsylvania Impressionist movement. The goals of this movement of painters included capturing light, color and moments in the outdoors.

One of Schofield's famous quotes is:

“The landscape painter is of necessity, an outdoors man...For vitality and convincing quality only come to the man who serves, not in the studio but out in the open where even the things he fights against strengthen him, because you see, nature is always vital, even in her implicit moods and never denies a vision to the real lover.”

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1. Circle or highlight what you think are the two most important words in each of these quotes.
2. Explain why you chose each of these words.
3. List any pairs of words you circled that belong together. Explain why and how you think these pairs belong together.



Walter Elmer Schofield (United States, 1867–1944)
Tujunga Canyon, circa 1934–1935
Oil on wood panel
Framed: 33 x 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
Gift of Nancy M. Berman (M.2002.180)
© The Heirs of W. Elmer Schofield 2014
Photo © 2014 Museum Associates/LACMA

1. What details tell you that this is a painting of the American West?
2. Describe how Schofield captured these details, including artistic choices about line, shape, value, and color.
3. What details make this landscape look more or less realistic?
4. If you could experience the landscape depicted in this painting, what might you see, hear, and smell?

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President Reagan at Rancho del Cielo

1. Do you see anything in the picture of President Reagan at Rancho del Cielo above that is symbolic of the west?
2. Are there any similarities between this picture and the one you drew earlier?
3. Compare the painting by Schofield and the picture of President Ronald Reagan on his ranch. How would you describe the way the western landscape is portrayed in each? Describe three similarities. Describe three differences.

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View of Santa Clara Valley, circa 1910
Photograph Courtesy of Santa Clara City Library

1. Take a look at the landscape above. List three adjectives to describe the photograph.
2. List three natural objects in the photograph.
3. Explain how you feel when you look at this photograph.
4. Based on this photograph, would you want to live in the Santa Clara Valley in 1910?

Explain your reasoning.

5. Additional Research: Research what the Santa Clara Valley looks like today. Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting the image you chose of the Santa Clara Valley today and the Santa Clara Valley in 1910. Explain how modern technology has impacted the land.

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This painting of the Santa Clara Valley below was created by Harold G. Peelor around 1900.



Harold G. Peelor (United States, 1856-1940)

Santa Clara Valley, circa 1900

Oil on canvas

28 ¾ x 36 in.

Purchased with funds provided by Robert and Kelly Day (M.2002.12)

Photo copyright 2014 Museum Associates/LACMA

1. Based on what you have just read about painting in 19th century America, does this artwork create the kind of mood you would expect an American landscape painting in 1900 to create?
2. Look at the painting of Santa Clara Valley. List three words that describe this picture to you.
3. How do you feel looking at the painting? Explain your reasoning.
4. List two differences and two similarities between the painting by Harold Peelor above and the photograph of the Santa Clara Valley.
5. If you were to put yourself in the painting, where would you belong? Why?

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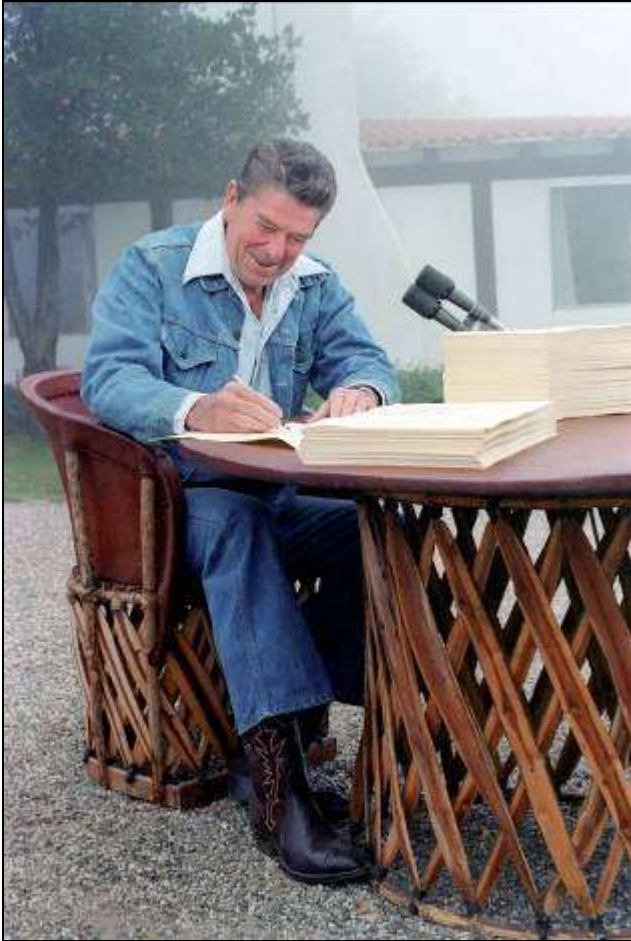
Look at the photograph of the Reagan Ranch below:



1. In what ways does this photograph seem like the painting of Santa Clara?
2. In what ways does it seem different?

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Look at the picture below of President Reagan signing the Economic Recovery Tax Act, August 13, 1981.



Explain why you think President Reagan would choose to sign a bill at his ranch in California rather than at the White House in Washington, D.C. Think about what the west and the ranch may have symbolized to Americans in 1981.

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Extension Activity:

Create an illustrated timeline from 1880-1930 using the photos and paintings from this packet. Include at least five events and five visual images.

Think about creating a visual timeline either online or one that involves the entire class and the whole classroom. If you use the whole classroom, ask each student to bring in one additional event with a matching image. Ask the student to write one paragraph explaining why they chose the specific image they used to illustrate the event.