

***American Westward Expansion***  
***Suggested Grades: Grades 5 and Grade 7***  
***Lesson by: Meagan McCormick***

**Disciplines: NYS Learning Standards**

◆ **Social Studies**

**Standard 1:** History of the United States and New York

**Performance Indicator (1):** The study of New York and the United States history requires an analysis of the development of American culture, its diversity and multicultural context, and the ways people are unified by many values, practices, and traditions.

**Performance Indicator (3):** Study about the major social, political, economic, cultural and religious developments in New York State and United States history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.

**Standard 3:** Geography

**Performance Indicator (1):** Geography can be divided into six essential elements which can be used to analyze important historic, geographic, economic, and environmental questions and issues. These six elements include: the world in spatial terms, places and regions, physical settings (including natural resources), human systems, environment and society, and the use of geography. (Adapted from *The National Geography Standards, 1994: Geography for Life*)

**Performance Indicator (2):** Geography requires the development and application of the skills of asking and answering geographic questions; analyzing theories of geography; and acquiring, organizing, and analyzing geographic information. (Adapted from: *The National Geography Standards, 1994: Geography for Life*)

**Standard 4:** Economics

**Performance Indicator (1):** The study of economics requires an understanding of major economic concepts and systems, the principles of economic decision making, and the interdependence of economies and economic systems throughout the world.

**Performance Indicator (2):** Economics requires the development and application of the skills needed to make informed and well-reasoned economic decisions in daily and national life.

◆ **English Language Arts (ELA)**

**Standard 1:** Language for Information and Understanding

**Performance Indicator (1):** Listening and reading to acquire information and understanding involves collecting data, facts, and ideas; discovering relationships, concepts, and generalizations; and using knowledge from oral, written, and electronic sources.

**Performance Indicator (2):** Speaking and writing to acquire and transmit information requires asking probing and clarifying questions, interpreting information in one's own words, applying information from one context to another, and presenting the information and interpretation clearly, concisely, and comprehensibly.

**Standard 3:** Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation

**Performance Indicator (1):** Listening and reading to analyze and evaluate experiences, ideas, information, and issues requires using evaluative criteria from a variety of perspectives and recognizing the difference in evaluations based on different sets of criteria.

**Performance Indicator (2):** Speaking and writing for critical analysis and evaluation requires presenting opinions and judgments on experiences, ideas, information, and issues clearly, logically, and persuasively with reference to specific criteria on which the opinion or judgment is based.

### ◆ The Arts- Visual Arts

**Standard 1:** Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts

**Performance Indicator (1):** Students will make works of art that explore different kinds of subject matter, topics, themes, and metaphors. Students will understand and use sensory elements, organizational principles, and expressive images to communicate their own ideas in works of art. Students will use a variety of art materials processes, mediums, and techniques, and use appropriate technologies for creating and exhibiting visual art works.

**Standard 2:** Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources

**Performance Indicator (2):** Students will know and use a variety of visual arts materials, techniques, and processes. Students will know about resources and opportunities for participation in visual arts in the community (exhibitions, libraries, museums, galleries) and use appropriate materials (art reproductions, slides, print materials, electronic media). Students will be aware of vocational options available in the visual arts.

**Standard 3:** Responding to and analyzing Works of Art

**Performance Indicator (3):** Students will reflect on, interpret, and evaluate works of art, using the language of art criticism. Students will analyze the visual art characteristics of the natural and built environment and explain the social, cultural, psychological, and environmental dimensions of the visual arts. Students will compare the way in which a variety of ideas, themes, and concepts are expressed in other disciplines.

**Descriptive Title:** American Westward Expansion

### **Context (Rationale):**

The lure of the West and its riches led Americans from earliest of times to leave the security of their homes and risk life and limb for the opportunity to begin a new life in the frontier. These earliest settlers called themselves pioneers. They were doctors, shopkeepers, blacksmiths, missionaries, lawyers, but mostly farmers. They traveled to the frontiers of North America. In the 1700's the frontiers were the Appalachian Mountains, but later, west across the Mississippi River all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Pioneer farmers sought inexpensive or even possibly free land available for homesteading. They often traveled in covered wagons as part of a wagon train led by captains and scouts who guided them through trails that led them to their final destinations. Travel was often tedious and extremely dangerous as they had to deal with a number of obstacles, in particular the rugged terrain and environment. As they study the paintings and engravings that depict scenes detailing American landscape, students should become more aware of the dangers and obstacles presented to America's early pioneers and the bravery and fortitude they exhibited to complete the journey leading to a new and better life.

**Performance Task:** The student will be able to –

- Identify artwork that represents westward expansion.
- Identify specific land and water forms depicted in the artwork.
- Describe how these features helped migration.
- Describe how these features hindered migration.
- Explain how the pioneers may have traveled through the particular landscapes.
- Describe what life may have been like on a trail leading to the frontier.
- Describe what supplies pioneers may have packed with them to survive on the trail taken.
- Describe other obstacles (weather conditions or individuals) that may have caused additional concerns for the pioneers.
- Create a journal depicting their experiences traveling on a frontier trail over the course of a week. The time period selected must be specific, either at the beginning, middle, or end of their journey. Accompanying each day's entry must be an illustration depicting what was described for that particular day.

### **Art Resources:**

- The Whirlpool, 1882-84, Thomas Sydney Moran, The Castellani Art Museum
- Ravine near Whirlpool 1882-84, Thomas Sydney Moran, The Castellani Art Museum
- Red Mountain Peaks, n.d., Albert Bierstadt, Castellani Art Museum
- Lake Louise, c.1920, Edward Henry Potthast, Castellani Art Museum
- Vernal Falls 1890, Thomas Hill, Castellani Art Museum
- The Sunburst, n.d., George Inness Jr., Castellani Art Museum
- Landscape with Sheep, 1889, Jasper Francis Cropsey, Castellani Art Museum

### **Art Materials:**

- Pencil
- Lined Paper
- White Drawing Paper
- Eraser
- Colored Pencils

### **Motivation:**

The teacher will motivate students by asking them if they have ever experienced a move from one home to another. Can they recall specific aspects of the move? Did they have to travel far? How long did the move take? Did certain problems present themselves during the time of the move? How did they feel personally about leaving familiar surroundings and close friends behind? The teacher will then ask students to consider how the pioneers must have felt traveling through territory that they had never seen before with other families who were virtual strangers to them. The teacher will also ask students to consider what fears the pioneers may have had knowing that everyday presented new challenges and obstacles. The teacher will use the landscapes depicted in the artwork to help students understand the physical conditions pioneers encountered in their journey to the American frontier, how they helped or hindered migration and how the pioneers were able to overcome hostile land, climate and other elements to reach their destination.

## **Presentation:**

1. Once the students arrive at the Castellani Art Museum they will be brought to the gallery housing the landscape artwork.
2. The teacher will question students about their knowledge of American western migration.
3. During discussion the teacher will supply additional information describing America's earliest pioneers; who they were, their motives for moving west, and how they traveled.
4. The teacher will then ask students to study the artwork in the gallery, examining each piece of art carefully.
5. The teacher will ask students to describe what they see in each landscape.
6. The teacher will ask students to identify what physical features would have made travel possible.
7. The teacher will then ask students what physical features would have presented an obstacle to travel.
8. The teacher will ask students to describe how the pioneers might have attempted to overcome a particular obstacle.
9. The teacher will at this point name and describe some of the trails used by the pioneers, where they started and ended and how long the journey often took.
10. Besides noting the obvious land and water features depicted in the landscape artwork the teacher will ask students to describe what other things the pioneers had to consider as they traveled through various regions of the country. Students should be able to identify the change in land elevation, types of waterways, and changes season and climatic conditions from one part of the country to the other.
11. Next the students should be able to describe how these changes impacted the pioneers as they traveled westward and how they attempted to cope with these problems presented.
12. At this point the teacher will give students their assignment. They must create a journal depicting their experiences traveling on a frontier trail over the course of a week. The time period selected must be specific, either at the beginning, middle, or end of their journey. Accompanying each day's entry must be an illustration depicting what was described for that particular day.

## **Assessment Tools and Evidence:**

**Tools:** At the end of the session the teacher will ask students to share journal entries with the rest of the students. The teacher will ask the students question about their stories and ask if they would like to show their illustrations with the rest of the class.

**Evidence:** The evidence of whether or not the students understood the influence of the landscape as it influenced westward migration will be determined by their journal entries and their illustrations.

**Teacher Reflection/Follow Up:** Do the students understand the strength, fortitude, and bravery exhibited by America's pioneers? Do they understand the obstacles that had to be overcome in order to settle the west? Do they understand how the landscape played a major role affecting western migration? The teacher will make decisions based on the work created by the students and feedback from subject area teacher.