

## SLOW LOOKING ACTIVITY

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Studies have found that museum visitors spend an average of 8 seconds looking at a piece of art. Slow looking encourages viewers to spend more time with an artwork – whether that is 15 minutes or an entire afternoon. This allows us to better know an artwork’s intricacies and can help us form personal connections with art.

You don’t have to visit a museum to practice slow looking! Explore these ideas in the activity below.

### THOMAS COLE’S *CATSKILL SCENERY*



“If, then, it is indeed true that the contemplation of scenery can be so abundant a source of delight and improvement, a taste for it is certainly worthy of particular cultivation; for the capacity for enjoyment will assuredly increase with study and knowledge.” –Thomas Cole, *Lecture on American Scenery*, 1841

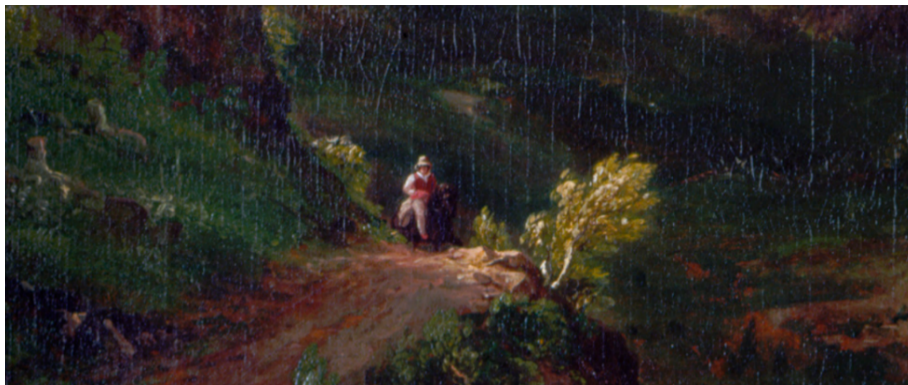
Thomas Cole believed meditating upon landscapes could increase one’s happiness. We encourage you to spend time with Cole’s *Catskill Scenery*. This painting is bucolic and peaceful – the sky is bright blue and clear of storm clouds, and the wooded hills are lush and green. If one looks closely, however, much activity occurs in this seemingly static scene.

What are your immediate feelings or emotions as you come to this painting? Are you feeling stressed, calm, happy, sad? Make a note of this emotion.

**As you contemplate this scene, what elements do you notice?**



In the sunniest, brightest spot in the scene, cows and sheep sprinkle a grassy hill. A couple of log houses, with smoke rising from their chimneys, peek out from the rolling hills.



On the left side of the painting, we see a man in a red vest and straw hat on horseback. He emerges from a valley along a dirt trail and is illuminated by a ray of sunshine.



In the center of the painting, two small figures find themselves on a bridge over water. A male figure dressed in red sits on the edge of the bridge to fish. A female figure begins to cross the bridge on foot.





In the lower right corner, cows of various colors find refreshment in the shores of the Catskill Creek. A rower has just disembarked and travels with supplies in his canoe.



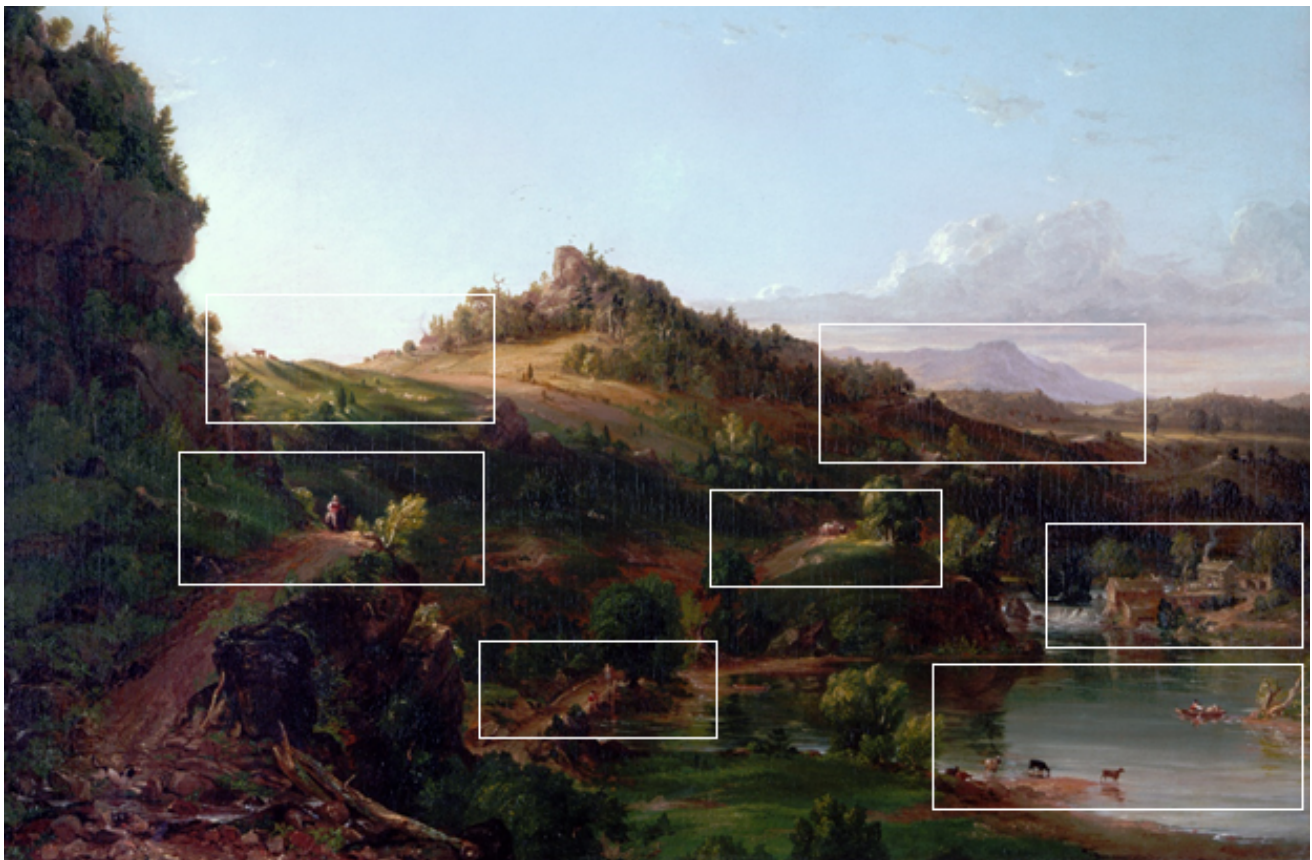
Directly above, a couple log buildings stand on the edge of the Catskill Creek. Small figures move about outside, and smoke emerges from one of the buildings.



Above and to the left, a horse-drawn cart moves away from us, soon to disappear into the wooded hills of Catskill.



In the background, the Catskill Mountains emerge in purple and gray tones. Miniscule figures, identifiable by blobs of red paint signifying clothing, travel on the paths.



### WHAT ELSE DO YOU NOTICE?

After spending time with this work of art, how do you feel? How have your emotions changed from how you felt at the beginning of the activity?

Practice slow looking with other pieces of art in museums or in your social media feeds. Pay attention to the details that emerge and your feelings as you commune with the work. You may just discover a deep connection to a new favorite work of art!

This activity was created by Amanda Malmstrom, the assistant curator at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.

Thomas Cole, *Catskill Scenery*, 1833, oil on canvas, 24 1/2 x 32 3/8 in., Eliza McMillan Trust, Friends Fund, and funds given by Mr. and Mrs. John S. Ames and Miss Elizabeth Green, by exchange, Saint Louis Art Museum.