

THOMAS COLE AND INDUSTRIALIZATION:

How has our landscape changed over time?



Duration: 45 minutes

Grade Level: 3-5

Learning Objectives:

- Compare and contrast paintings to identify key differences or similarities in environments.
- Develop an understanding of the Industrial Revolution by reading and analyzing primary sources and making connections to the present time.
- Develop an understanding of how a landscape changes over time through a hands-on activity.

Materials:

Smartboard or computer to project paintings

Description of Lesson Plan:

Educator will lead students in a discussion about the Industrial Revolution, Thomas Cole, the changing environment during his lifetime and how he expressed these changes in his art and writing. Students will compare and contrast two Thomas Cole paintings made before and after the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. In pairs or in groups, students will discuss and interpret two primary sources. Finally, students will engage in an art, writing, or environmental activities to synthesize their learning.

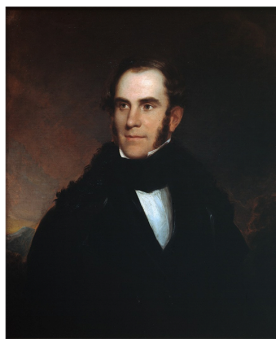
BACKGROUND

Use the provided background information to familiarize students with Cole and the Industrial Revolution.

Who was Thomas Cole?

Artist, Writer, and Early Environmentalist

Thomas Cole was a British-born American artist, writer, and early environmentalist who lived from 1801 to 1848. When America was still a new nation just forming its own identity and traditions, Thomas Cole became well-known for painting landscapes around the Hudson River and Catskills, a style which would later be known as the Hudson River School. He painted and wrote extensively about the American landscape,

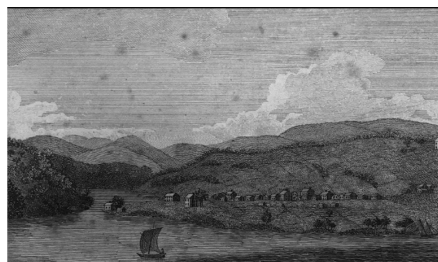


Portrait of Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand. 1837.

arguing that it was among the most beautiful in the world and that it should be protected and preserved, not developed for profit. Cole is important to us today because as an artist, he urged for the preservation of the natural environment in the United States.

Bolton, England to Catskill, New York

Thomas Cole became regarded as the "founder of American art," but he was, in fact, an immigrant to the United States. Cole was born in Bolton, England in 1801, during a time of heavy industrialization. In 1818, at age



The Village of Catskill around 1797. Woodcut after a drawing by A. P. Fecit, Frontispiece of the New York Magazine, September 1797.

17, Cole came to the United States with his family, and spent a period of time moving around the country before coming to Catskill, New

York in 1825. While living in Catskill from 1836 to 1848, Cole began to express strong views concerning the impact of industrial development and its negative consequences for the wild beauty of the Catskills landscapes that were such a source of inspiration to his work.

Discussion questions for the classroom:

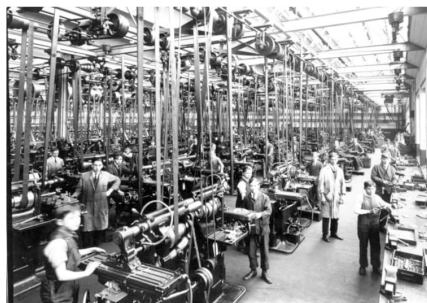
- Why is it important that we study the Industrial Revolution today?
- What do you think life was like before the Industrial Revolution?

What was the Industrial Revolution?

The Industrial Revolution in the United States lasted from around 1820-1870. This was a period of time in which goods were no longer being made by hand, but by machinery and in factories. Industrialization changed communication, production of materials and goods, and transportation. This period of rapid growth shaped the ways we live.

Most of us have travelled in a car or train before, talked on a cell phone, bought a canned good from the grocery store. Many of the conveniences we enjoy today, like rapid communication and transportation, packaged and canned food, clothing that we can buy in stores rather than make by hand, exist because the Industrial Revolution laid the groundwork for future innovations.

The Industrial Revolution brought about economic prosperity, many positive social changes, and modern conveniences, but also took its toll on the American landscape. The introduction of factories, trains, and steamships, to name a few, brought with it new public health concerns, deforestation, and pollution. Today, the issue of preservation versus development, or how to balance environmental conservation with economic progress is a problem we are still solving.



Machine shop in the early 20th century. (Image courtesy of John Abbott.)

VIEW ON THE CATSKILL, EARLY AUTUMN

1837. Oil on canvas.

Lead students in a discussion of the painting using guiding questions. Go to exploretomascole.org to find paintings and zoom in.

In *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn* Cole painted Catskill, New York before the Industrial Revolution.

Humans have made some alterations to the landscape but it is still overwhelmingly a scene of nature. In a pasture, a horse runs away from a person, perhaps indicating that humans have yet to fully gain control of the natural world.

The ridgeline of the Catskill Mountains is framed by lush vegetation.



A family is seen picnicking beside the Catskill Creek, enjoying the offerings of the natural world.

A small house just visible behind the creek is the only permanent settlement in the scene.

The Catskill Creek is wild and pristine.

QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING:

- What do you see?
- If you were inside this painting, what would you hear, smell, or feel?
- What is the relationship between humans and their environment in this painting?

RIVER IN THE CATSKILLS

1843. Oil on canvas.

Lead students in a compare/contrast discussion of the two paintings.

Just six years later, Cole painted the same scene utterly transformed by industry. As industrialization took hold in Catskill, Thomas Cole noted the changes in his diary: “The copper-hearted barbarians are cutting all the trees down in the beautiful valley on which I have looked so often with a loving eye.”

The railroad now cuts through the landscape.

Forests have been cut down to make way for farmland, houses dot the horizon.

The Catskill Mountains are hazier and less imposing.



A favorite element of Cole's paintings, the cut-down tree, exemplifies human disregard for the environment.

A lone figure observes the transformed landscape with an axe in hand.

The once quiet Catskill Creek is now exposed and crossed by a bridge.

QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING:

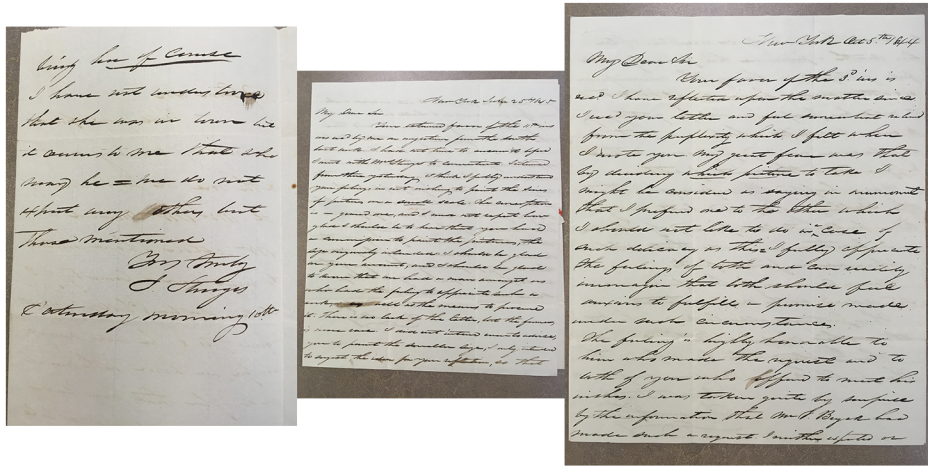
- What do you see?
- If you were inside this painting, what would you hear, smell, or feel?
- What has changed in this landscape? How do you feel about it?

READING AND INTERPRETING PRIMARY SOURCES

If students are not familiar with what a primary source is, use included questions to guide a discussion.

What is a primary source?

A primary source provides direct or firsthand evidence about an event, object, or person. Primary sources can be letters, journals, diaries, artwork, legal documents, video or audio recordings.



Letters exchanged between Cole and Jonathan Sturges, 1844 and 1845

Discussion Questions for the Classroom:

- Why are primary sources important?
- How can a primary source help us understand the past?

As a class or in pairs using printed out quotes, discuss the following excerpts from Cole's letters and diaries

Thomas Cole's Diary and Letters

For students: What emotions are Cole and Sturges trying to convey? What words are familiar? What words are not?

“Last evening I took a walk up the Catskill above Austin’s Mill where the railroad is. This was once a favorite walk but the charm of quietness and solitude is gone. They cut down the forests with a wantonness for which there is no excuse.”

—Thomas Cole, in his diary from August 1st, 1836

“I shall be happy to possess a picture showing what the valley of Catskill was before the art of modern improvement found footing here. I think of it often and can imagine what your feelings are when you see the beauties of nature swept away to make room for avarice—we are truly a destructive people.”

—Jonathan Sturges to Thomas Cole, March 23rd, 1837



ART:

Using the attached PDF, lead students in the “The Industrialization Game.” After game is complete, ask students to reflect on and share as a group what it felt like to watch a town industrialize. Ask students: “What did our town look like at the beginning of the game?” and “What did our town look like at the end of the game?”



WRITING:

Thomas Cole wrote about the changing landscape during the Industrial Revolution in an 1836 essay called “Essay on American Scenery.” In their own version of “Essay on American Scenery” ask students to reflect on the question, “How is the landscape changing? Is there something you do or experience today that you hope will be around for future generations?”



ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION:

Lead students in a discussion about environmental preservation and ask them specifically, “Is there something you do or experience today that you hope will be around for future generations?” After students have generated answers, discuss ways to create positive environmental change (reducing consumption of plastic or water, walking rather than driving, picking up trash, writing to congresspeople, etc.) and invite students to enact one of these changes.

THE INDUSTRIALIZATION GAME: DIRECTIONS AND SCRIPT

Duration: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Pencils for each student, 5-6 big pieces of white paper (around 3.5' x 3.5') with map of Catskill, New York (or whatever town your school is in) drawn on it to provide structure for activity.

Directions: Break students into groups of four to five. Make sure everyone has a pencil. Groups share one big map and fill it in together. Key directions for the group are in red italics.

Script:

In this game, we're going to industrialize the town Catskill. In this activity, you're going to get a chance to draw and be creative, but from time to time, you'll also have to listen for directions. Ready?

We'll start long before Thomas Cole arrives in Catskill, and even about ten years before he is born. It's 1790 and you are in the village of Catskill. America is a new country. Industrialization has not yet started in this part of the world. Catskill is a tiny village, is quiet and wild, and the people who live in the village are farming and, for the most part, making things by hand. *I'd like each person in the group to add a block of farmland to your map. (Allow three or four minutes for students to add farmland).*

Let's speed up a few years. Something big is about to happen in Catskill. Steamships arrive. These boats carry people and goods up and down the Hudson River. Locate the Hudson River and each person should add a steamship to your map. (Allow two minutes)

Now, with all of this industry going on in the Hudson River, people start to arrive in Catskill and more people want to live here. Suddenly our town with just a few farms now has over three hundred people. *We can't possibly draw 300 houses so what I'll do is count down from 10 and in those ten seconds I want you to draw as many houses onto your map as you can. (Count down a slow ten seconds.)*

Now that we have so many people living in Catskill, these people have some needs that will need to be met. *I would like someone in the group to add a store, one person to add a doctor's office, one to add a jail, one to add a courthouse, and one to add a school. (Allow for two to three minutes for these additions. If you have more or less than five people in your group you can create more businesses or fewer—the idea is that everyone in the group has a task.)*

Something else is about to change Catskill. Factories arrive. In towns in the Hudson Valley and much of the United States, these factories and mills pop up along rivers and creeks. This happens very quickly. By now it's the 1830s, and in just a few years in Catskill, seventy-five factories and mills pop up along the Catskill Creek. *Find the Catskill Creek on your map and I'm going to count down from ten and in those ten seconds you should add as many factories along the Catskill Creek as you can.*

With all of these factories, there are now more jobs in Catskill. Now we have even more people living in our town. *I'm going to count down from ten again and we should add as many houses as we can. (Count down a slow ten seconds.)*

Industrialization is not over yet. Another change is arriving—the railroad. *I'd like everyone in the group to add railroad tracks criss-crossing across your town. Perhaps you need to build a bridge that crosses the Catskill Creek. Maybe you need a train station. (Allow two to three minutes.)*

THE INDUSTRIALIZATION GAME: DIRECTIONS AND SCRIPT

Our towns have steamships, houses, factories, railroads. Let's do our last phase of development. *I'm going to count down from 15 and add any last factories, houses, ships, trains, businesses that you can. When the fifteen seconds are up, please put down your pencils and walk away from your maps and meet me at the front of the room to discuss what we just did. (Count down a slow fifteen seconds.)*

Group Wrap-Up Discussion:

We saw our towns change quite a bit over the course of this activity. Let's start by going back to when we first began this activity and our maps had just a few farms. What were some good things about the way people were living? Students may respond with some of the following:

- Quietness, solitude, and peace of farm life.
- People were self-reliant.
- The natural world was present and accessible

What were some difficulties to this way of life? Students may respond with the following:

- People had to make everything by hand—this way of life was very hard work.
- It was difficult to get from place to place—there were no trains or major roads.
- People were very isolated from each other. There were no schools, businesses, or places of community.

Now let's talk about what our maps looked like when we ended the activity. What were some benefits of developing our towns the way we did? Students may respond with the following:

- Life was much more convenient; instead of having to make everything by hand, things could be bought from stores.
- Kids could go to school, doctors are available, there are jobs at factories.
- Living more closely together perhaps meant a greater sense of community.

What was lost as we developed our towns?

- We lost farmland, trees, open space.
- Catskill lost its quietness and wildness as it industrialized.

These were the advantages and challenges of the Industrial Revolution in Catskill, and all over the United States, and some of the changes that Thomas Cole observed and documented in his lifetime.

VILLAGE OF CATSKILL

HUDSON
RIVER

CATSKILL CREEK

