

EXPLORING AMERICA THROUGH ART

“The West”

“They made us many promises, more than I can remember, but they never kept but one; they promised to take our land, and they took it.”
(Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*)

Essential Questions:

- Why did Americans feel the need to expand westward?
- How did the westward expansion affect Native People?
- What was “the West” and how did artists portray “The West” during the early twentieth century?
- How did the Federal Art Project provide sustenance for artists?

Objectives:

- I can give details regarding the consequences of westward expansion.
- I can compare and contrast how artists portrayed this time period.
- I can explain how the Federal Art Project gave artists hope and respect for their skills during the Great Depression.
- I can describe how art from this era portrayed the ‘highs and lows’ of everyday life.

Materials:

- Mabel Dwight, *New Mexico Interior*.
- John Gast, *American Progress*.
- Lyman Byxbe, *Let'er Buck*.
- Unknown artist, *U.S. Cavalry pursuing American Indians*
<https://buamomeka.binghamton.edu/s/ExploringAmerica/page/the-west>
- ‘Wild West’ video 1930’s, amateur home video.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7q0s1F1_2w
- Westward Expansion Unit.
[Westward Expansion](#)
- Loss of Native People’s Lives.
[The Loss of American Indian Life and Impact of Expansion on Immigrants | US History II: 1877 to Present | Course Hero](#).
- Mabel Dwight.
<https://americanart.si.edu/artist/mabel-dwight-1373>
- Federal Arts Project.
<https://mymodernmet.com/wpa-federal-art-project/>

Vocabulary:

- Federal Arts Project - the first major attempt at government [patronage](#) of the [visual arts](#) in the [United States](#) and the most extensive and influential of the visual arts projects conceived during the Depression of the 1930s by the administration of President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#). (*Britannica.com*)
- Romanticize - to make something appear better, more appealing than it really is; to describe in an idealized fashion.
- Lithograph - a planographic printmaking process in which a design is drawn onto a flat stone (or prepared metal plate, usually zinc or aluminum) and affixed by means of a chemical reaction ([metmuseum.org](#)).
- Engraving - a printmaking process in which lines are cut into a metal plate in order to hold the ink ([metmuseum.org](#)).

Engage:

- When you hear the phrase, “The West,” what images come to mind?
- View the ‘home movie’ video from the 1930’s. Discuss.
-https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7q0s1F1_2w



John Gast, American Progress, 1872.
Chromolithograph published by George A. Croft.
Source: Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

[Art Analysis: American Progress by John Gast, 1872 - Bill of Rights Institute](#)

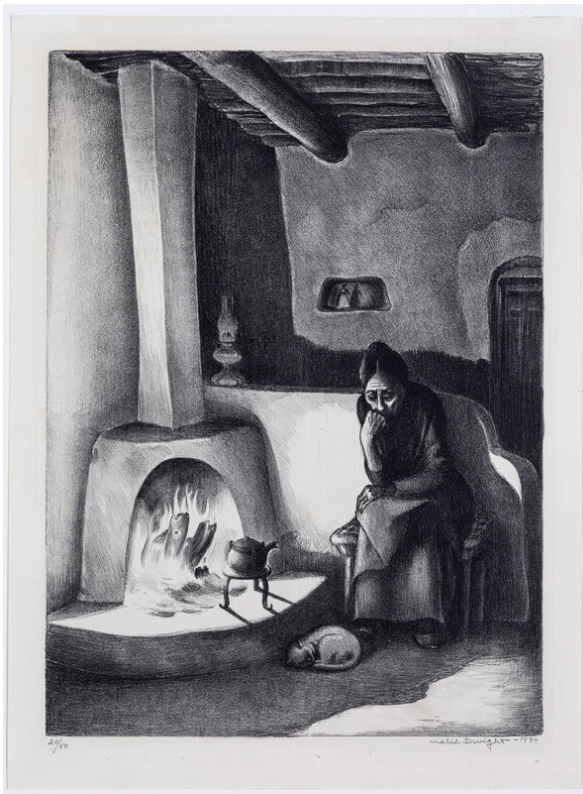
***Some questions taken from this site.**

- Take a moment to look at this picture.
- What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What objects, landscape, and people do you see?
- What might be the symbolism of the central figure in the painting?
- How do the figures, light, and technology change moving from East (right side) to West (left side) in this picture?
- What types of 19th-century technology do you see?
- How do you think Gast (the artist) viewed Westward expansion?
- Explain how the provided image shows competition for natural resources affecting relationships between settlers and with Native Americans?
- Why do you think the artist titled this piece "American Progress?"
- Who is making "Progress"?
- Review themes from the Manifest Destiny.

[-Manifest Destiny - Definition, Facts & Significance - HISTORY.](#)

Explore:

- Take a moment to look at these pictures:



Mabel Dwight (American, 1876 – 1955)
New Mexico Interior, 1934



Lyman Byxbe (American, 1886 – 1980)
Let'er Buck, 1937



Unknown artist, *U.S. Cavalry pursuing American Indians* (1899), Chromolithograph

- Compare and contrast the images above.
- Describe what objects you see, as well as the action in each.
- How would you describe the mood in each image?
- How might the artists imagined Native Americans?
- How is 'the West' portrayed in each image?
- How might gender affect the artists' work? How is each gender portrayed? How might the artist have been influenced by their upbringing?
- Discuss each image's perspective.
- How might the Byxbe engraving 'romanticize' the West during this time period?

Elaborate/Project:



Adolf Dehn (American, 1895 – 1968)
Western Sunflowers (or Colorado Sunflowers), 1941



Federico Castellón (American, born Spain, 1914 – 1971)
Road in Arizona, ca. 1941

- Carefully view each image and choose one.
- List the elements in the image (objects, landscape/skyscape).
- How might you “colorize” your picture using a western palette or color scheme (you don’t need to colorize every element)?

- For each object, identify a color that might 'fit' the theme of the piece. See (<https://colorhunt.co/>), photoshop ([How to colorize black and white photos in Photoshop - Adobe](#)), iPhoto, or print the image and use colored pencils or pastels.
- Explain why you chose each particular color.
- Present to your class, and explain your color choices/symbolism.

Evaluation:

- Participation in discussions.
- Class presentation on colorizing.

Background Information for Teachers:

John Gast

-[John Gast, American Progress, 1872](#)

Mabel Dwight

-[Mabel Dwight](#)

Lyman Byxbe

<https://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/john-gast-american-progress-1872/>

Federal Art Project

<https://mymodernmet.com/wpa-federal-art-project/>

Loss of Native People's Lives

[The Loss of American Indian Life and Impact of Expansion on Immigrants | US History II: 1877 to Present | Course Hero](#)

*Excellent Resource: Myth of the West

[Myth of the West: Lonely But Free I'll Be Found | History Detectives | PBS](#)