

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

POST-APOCALYPTIC VISIONS

ESSENTIAL QUESTION	How can landscape painting address social and environmental changes, and the possible future human outcomes of these changes?
GRADES	6-12
TIME	One class period
ART CONCEPTS	Landscape painting, composition, realism, shading, light, narrative-based art
CULTURAL CONCEPTS	Social issues, war, cycles of time, environmental change
MATERIALS	Color markers, pencils, color pencils, collage materials (i.e. photos of buildings, streets, trees, mountains, and deserts), bristol paper or watercolor paper, glue sticks, scissors
TALKING ABOUT ART	<p>Thomas Cole created <i>The Course of Empire</i> series of paintings as a warning to the growing American nation of the cost of human greed, war and violence.</p> <p>What human-made elements can be seen in <i>The Course of Empire: Desolation</i>?</p> <p>What feelings does the painting evoke?</p> <p>How does the painting serve as a warning?</p>
MAKING ART	<p>Begin by writing a short story (at least one paragraph) describing a landscape after a human-caused apocalyptic event has wiped out all human inhabitants of Earth; examples could be: world war (full scale nuclear destruction) or an environmental disaster like the melting of the polar ice caps due to global warming and/or greenhouse gases or a massive chemical spill that destroys all food crops worldwide. What do cities look like? What sounds can be heard? Is anything still alive? If so, what? How did this happen, and how could it have been prevented?</p> <p>Then, using books, magazines, or images from the internet, choose photographs of famous landmarks, government buildings, and important bridges as well as natural elements like trees, mountains, deserts, and oceans and human-made elements like waste, plastic, machinery, and smog to illustrate what remains. Use scissors to cut out the photographs and scratch onto the images to make them appear aged and partially destroyed. Using pencils, color pencils and/or markers, further the aged and destroyed look by coloring on top of the images. Show evidence of what caused these changes – either war or environmental disaster.</p>

MAKING ART

Lay out your images on a piece of paper to create a landscape composition, filling the paper as much as possible. Fill in the rest of the landscape with colored pencils. Then glue your images onto the paper. Now look back at your story – does it need a revision to include elements from your artwork that were not in your initial story? Add more descriptions to your story if necessary, then title your artwork using words selected from the story you wrote.

REFLECTION

Arrange a display of all the artworks and stories around the room. Ask students to walk around looking at the artworks and reading the accompanying stories. In the stories, what are the different reasons for the destruction of human civilization? In any of the artworks, are there indications that humans or some form of life could return sometime in the future? How does this exercise make you think about humanity's impact on nature? Do you think a work of art is more or less effective than an essay cautioning people against the behavior that might lead to such an apocalyptic event? Why?

**CURRICULUM
CONNECTION**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SPEAKING AND LISTENING.6-12

6-8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners. 6.2. Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WRITING STANDARDS.6-12

6-12.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.LITERACY IN HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES.6

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