

Lesson Plan: Robert S. Duncanson

Landscapes

Overview

Students will learn about an important artist who was born in Fayette, NY and why he is important.

Objectives

After completing this activity students will:

- Know about the life and work of Robert S. Duncanson, an artist who was born in Fayette, NY.
- Know what a landscape artwork is.
- Use their observational skills to explore Robert S. Duncanson artwork.
- Create their own landscape artwork.

Time Required

One class period

Grade Range

9-12

Materials

- Smartboard or projector to project images of paintings.
- *Landscape with Rainbow* by Robert S. Duncanson. High-resolution digital images are found on the Smithsonian American Art Museum website: <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/landscape-rainbow-7601>
- Additional Duncanson images can be found on the websites of institutions which hold his work, including the Smithsonian and the Cincinnati Museum of art: (https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/robert-s-duncanson/NQJyYinFqXw_Lw)
- Pencils
- Paper
- Colored Pencils and/or paint

Subject

Art History and Art Studio

NYS Learning Standards

- VA:Cr2.1.HSI
- VA:Pr5.1.HSI
- VA:Re7.1.HSI
- VA:Cn11.1.HSI

Preparation

Review the background information and the images of Duncanson's work. Read through the procedures. Assemble your materials.

Procedure

Explain to the students that they will be learning about an artist who was born in Fayette, NY who became famous in his time and is being rediscovered today. We will look at one of his landscape paintings, discuss it, and create a landscape of our own.

Robert S. Duncanson was a famous Hudson River School artist who was born in Fayette, NY two-hundred years ago. Seneca County is celebrating him for a year (June 1, 2021-May 31, 2022). One of his works was chosen by First Lady Jill Biden to be featured in the inaugural ceremonies in 2021.

Background Information

Who was Robert S. Duncanson?

Robert S. Duncanson (1821 – December 21, 1872) was a 19th-century American landscape artist of European and African ancestry. Inspired by famous American landscape artists like Thomas Cole, Duncanson created renowned landscape paintings and is considered a second-generation Hudson River School artist. He is also considered the first African-American artist to be internationally known.

Duncanson was born in 1821 in Fayette, New York in the Finger Lakes. His father was a skilled carpenter and house painter. Duncanson learned these skills from his father as a young child, which helped him develop into an artist. When Duncanson was a boy, the family moved to Monroe, Michigan. He spent his teenage years there until he relocated to Cincinnati, Ohio and started his career as an artist.

What is the Hudson River School movement of art?

The Hudson River School was a group of American landscape painters who worked between about 1825 and 1870. Their aesthetic vision was influenced by Romanticism. The paintings typically depict the Hudson River Valley and the surrounding area, including the Catskill, Adirondack, and White Mountains. They formed the first school of painting in the U.S. Many tried to convey the uniqueness of the American landscape by creating idealized images of real places. They celebrated America and displayed their artistic independence from European tradition.

Discussion

We can learn a lot about an artist by looking at their artwork closely. Let's look at *Landscape with Rainbow* to better understand Duncanson's artwork.

1. Begin by discussing with students what a landscape painting is and why an artist might paint one.

Landscape painting is the portrayal of natural scenery such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers, and forests. Usually they include sky and a wide view of an area with elements arranged in a composition, which may include buildings, people, animals, and weather. An artist can use a landscape to tell a story, convey a feeling, explore color and light, or represent a particular place. The scene can be real or imaginary or contain elements of both.

2. Spend time carefully looking at the painting. Discuss what they notice.

Have students spend one minute silently looking at the painting. After the minute is up, ask what they think is going on in the painting. As they explain, ask them for details to support their opinions. Ask them what they see that makes them say that?

Directions

We are going to create a landscape inspired by the work of Robert S. Duncanson.

1. Use your imagination and draw a landscape that is familiar to you.
2. It could be the view of your house/apartment, a view from school or any outdoor space, real or imagined.

Wrap up discussion

How are the landscapes the same or different?

Can the viewer tell if the landscape is real or imaginary?

How was the process making a landscape?