

Bound Down the River

Flatboats, used to carry freight down the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers during the first half of the 19th century, were a thing of the past when Currier & Ives issued this print in 1870. Possibly designed after George Caleb Bingham's famous painting, *Jollyflatboatmen* of 1846, *Bound Down the River* celebrates the traditional methods of shipping crops and objects through waterways for sale to markets on the East Coast. Currier & Ives show the sailors enjoying themselves, reflecting the many historic accounts that the men who traveled the rivers by flatboat were boisterous and enjoyed dancing and music. Five steamships, which could travel the same distance in a few days that took a flatboat several months, can be seen in the background.

Currier & Ives often combined images of past technology, such as the flatboat, with examples of industrialization, such as the steamboat, to illustrate how traditional methods and modern advancements could co-exist.

TEACHER(S) NAME(S): Jenny S. Speck-Sherson

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will describe the evolution of printing.
2. Students will analyze how art reflects historical changes in America.
3. Students will develop and utilize visual literacy skills.

National Curriculum Standards:

Social Studies Thematic Strands: III People, Place and Environments; VIII Science, Technology and Society

Visual Arts Content Standard 4 - Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

MATERIALS:

Currier & Ives print: *Bound Down the River*

Other:

LCD projector with laptop

Internet access to Springfield Museums Currier & Ives database

Visual Literacy Worksheet

Local primary and secondary sources gathered from the town library (ex. a letter from a Mount Holyoke Seminary student documenting her travels from Indiana to South Hadley by way of the Niagara Falls.)

PROCEDURE:

1. Discuss lithography and history of printmaking; class working in pairs will try the interactive demo of printmaking at www.moma.org/exhibitions/2001/whatisaprint
2. Review technology at the time and discuss why lithographs would be such a successful medium.

3. Teacher projects *Bound Down the River*; students complete Visual Literacy Worksheet, analyzing the print.
4. Class discusses their findings.
5. Teacher supplements with historical background and contrasts view with a painting by George Caleb Bingham at www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/WWbingham3.jpg
Bingham romanticized life on the Missouri River.
6. Compare to Thomas Cole's work – Cole, like Bingham, presented modernity, transportation and technology as in conflict with nature; *Bound Down the River* shows the old and the new in harmony – although the people on the flatboat look happier than those in the modern river boats.
7. Working in pairs, students choose another image depicting “American progress” to analyze using the Visual Literacy Worksheet. Images to choose from include *Through to the Pacific*, *American Express Train*, *Champions of the Mississippi*, and *Across the Continent*.
8. Students present their findings to the class.
9. Class revisits goals and discuss how they were met.