**Pittsford on the Erie Canal, 1837**  
George Harvey, American (born England), 1800-1878  
Oil on wood panel

**About the Painting:**  
This painting is a landscape but one that celebrates man’s taming of nature. The Erie Canal and its towpath, with canal boat pulled by three horses (no mules here!), dominates the painting; the grandeur of man’s technological achievement shares equal billing with the drama of the clouds and sky. The stillness of the water reflects the sky, the boat and the trees. This painting and another like it, *Sultry Calm*, were painted from sketches done during the artist’s visit to the Rochester area. The scene has been located at King’s Landing just outside Pittsford village; the distant skyline includes the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and the step-gabled building at the Four Corners (today known as the Phoenix Building).

**About the Artist:**  
Painter George Harvey visited the Pittsford area and recorded his impressions of the weather and the village in a series of sketches and paintings. He had hoped to produce and sell a portfolio of prints depicting America’s unique scenery, a popular theme in both America and his homeland, England, in the mid 19th century. Entitled *Atmospheric Landscapes*, the series was to convey “to the nations on the other side of the Atlantic ideas of scenery which could never have entered into their imaginations, and convictions of American enterprises and improvements which description could hardly bring home to general belief.” Although the series project failed, he continued to paint the landscapes that celebrate the beauties of the American landscape.

**Additional Information:**

Harvey observed:

*The cumulus cloud, from which the sketch was taken, rose with great suddenness. At noon the weather was very oppressive and sultry, and not a cloud to be seen; at two o’clock the sky was in commotion, and at three a most terrific thunder storm burst upon the country. The little village in the distance is near to Rochester, a great place for flour mills. The principal trade of Pittsford is the purchase of grain for other markets; it is situated in one of the most productive agricultural districts in the Union. The Erie Canal has been the means of giving to the city of New York that immense commercial importance which she at present possesses.*

The Erie Canal, completed in 1825, resulted in the explosive growth of Rochester and communities in the Genesee valley. Agricultural products and raw materials were shipped north on the Genesee River or along the state roads to Rochester; industries there turned Rochester into America’s first “boontown” whose products were shipped by canal to New York City and markets throughout eastern America and Europe. However, in 1835 the construction of the Erie Railroad (in Pittsford along the south bank of the Erie Canal although not seen in Harvey’s painting) would challenge the economic significance of the Erie Canal as well as its place in America’s imagination.

Support for the Memorial Art Gallery’s 2005-06 school programs is provided by Bank of America, Dominion, the Mary W. Clark Trust, and Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation. Additional support is provided by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas F. Judson Jr., the estate of Estelle B. Goldman and an anonymous donor for the McPherson Director of Education.
**Pittsford on the Erie Canal, A Sultry Calm**, 1837
George Harvey
American, 1800 - 1878

**LET'S LOOK:**
- What do you see?
- What in the painting makes you say that?
- How does the artist help us to see that?
- What questions do you have?

**STUDENT ACTIVITIES:**

**Five Senses**
Ask students to imagine and describe textures, smells, sounds, and tastes they "see" in the artwork. What specific details are they “reading?”

Using the line drawing of the painting, students can fill in the missing details that they think are important.

**Then What Happened?**
Introduce the artwork as if it were a scene from a storyboard. Ask the students to imagine how the story might continue (group activity).

Using the storyboard worksheet, the students can draw additional or alternate scenes using details gleaned from the brainstorm session.

**How's the Weather?**
Ask the students to identify and describe the weather conditions in the scene. What details does the artist use to tell us the weather?

Use the worksheet to depict this scene in different seasons or weather conditions. Students can draw and color in new details or cut them from magazines to create a collage.

Create by projecting the image on the wall and sketching in the outlines; students can then add the details.

**Musical Moods**
Ask students what sounds they hear in the painting. What colors or lines or characters are they “hearing?”

Try to recreate various sounds from the scene.

Ask students what music they would use if this was a scene in a movie.

Listen to examples of music from the time and place of the painting.
Wish You Were Here!
Using the painting as a “vacation destination,” compose postcards to family or friends telling about your experience. Choose 1-2 specific details and describe them in words so that your friends can picture the location too.

Yesterday & Today
Ask students to imagine the painting as a scene from the past. What clues or details indicate that it is an historical scene? How might the scene have changed since it was painted?

Use the line drawing worksheet to create a 21st century version of the scene. Students can draw in the details or use pictures from magazines.

Art Alive!
Translate the painting into theater: students can take turns in the role of the characters, creating a few moments of dialogue or action.

Experiment with still poses and action scenes.

Photograph the students in their poses and compare with the painting.

New York State Standards: Social Studies I, History of the United States and New York
Skills of historical analysis:
View historic events through the eyes of those who were there, as shown in their art, writings, music and artifacts.
Acquire, organize and analyze information so as to extrapolate and draw conclusions.

New York State Standards: The Arts 4
Develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shaper diverse cultures of past and present society.
LOOKING TO LEARN

Story Starter

- What is the story this painting has to tell? __________________________________________________________
  ______________________________________________________________________________________________
  ______________________________________________________________________________________________

What is the setting? __________________________________________________________

Who are the characters? __________________________________________________________

Are you in the story? How could you be a part of it? __________________________________________________________

Does the painting show the beginning, the middle or the end of the story? __________________________________________________________

- Cut out and paste the painting in the one of the boxes below. Where you place it will determine whether it is the beginning, the middle or the end of the story.
  Draw two other pictures in the other boxes that tell the rest of your story.
  What other details can be used to show that time has passed in your story? __________________________________________________________

Extension: Students write the story and use pictures to illustrate it.

Story Title: ____________________________

Name: ____________________________

Painting: Pittsford on the Erie Canal by George Harvey

Memorial Art Gallery
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Support for the Gallery’s school programs is provided by Bank of America, Dominion and the Mary W. Clark Trust. Additional support is provided by the Fred and Floy Willmott Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas F. Judson Jr., the estate of Estelle B. Goldman and an anonymous donor for the McPherson Director of Education.
### Teaching American History through American Art
#### Rochester and the Genesee Valley
#### March 29, 2006

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| *Genesee Scenery*, c.1846-47  
Thomas Cole (1801-1848) |  |  |
| *Genesee Oaks*, c. 1860  
Asher Brown Durand (1796-1886) |  |  |
| *Main Street Bridge*, 1908  
Colin Campbell Cooper (1856-1937) |  |  |
Teaching American History through American Art
The Erie Canal
Classroom Resources Available in the Teacher Resource Center of the Memorial Art Gallery
http://mag.rochester.edu or (585) 473 7720 x 3022

Books:
The Course of Empire: The Erie Canal and the New York Landscape, 1825-1875.
Images and text from an exhibition at the Memorial Art Gallery, June-August, 1984.


Erie Canal Legacy: Architectural Treasures of the Empire State
Andy Olenick. The Landmark Society of Western New York in conjunction with the Mohawk Valley Corridor Commission, 2000.

Up & Down the River: Art & Geography of the Genesee River
Photographs and paintings of western New York

Young People’s History of Rochester.
144 illustrated pages

Kits and videocassettes:
American Visions.
8 videocassettes, 60 minutes each, a chronological survey of art and American history. Volume 3: “Wilderness and the West”

Art & Origin Myths: Heroes & Heroines; Ecology; 19th-Century America
20 art prints and teacher’s guide to lessons and activities

The Inquiring Eye: American Paintings.
Washington: The National Gallery of Art, 1992
20 slides, 14 reproductions, text and classroom activities

Land & Landscape: Views of America’s History and Culture.
1 videocassette, 15 reproductions, a study guide and student workbook

Natural Palette: Hudson River Artists and the Land.
1 videocassette, a teacher's guide and 10 art reproductions

The Orator, the Pigeon, and the 21 Foot Naked Green Man: Public Art in Rochester from 1840 to 1940.
30 minute videotape telling the story of public sculptures in Rochester, New York.
Scenes of American life: Treasures from the Smithsonian American Art
1 videocassette (10 min.), 10 slides, 10 art reproductions, and 1 study guide

Posters:
Distant View of Niagara Falls (Thomas Cole)
Chicago, IL: Art Institute of Chicago, Division of Museum Education, 1999.

Interdisciplinary Connections: Art and Science, Natural Environments.
Take 5 Series of 5 posters and teacher guides

Interdisciplinary Connections: Art and Social Studies.
Take 5 Series of 5 posters and teacher guides

Websites:
The Albany Institute of History and Art
Museum educators use objects, images and inquiry-based teaching methods to engage students in lessons that focus on American history and art. Students are active participants in the lesson; they observe, analyze and express their ideas about objects and images presented.
http://www.albanyinstitute.org/resources/index.htm

“A Guide to Building Visual Arts Lessons”
The J. Paul Getty Museum Education department has created this guide to help teachers and curriculum developers create successful arts-focused lessons. Included are ideas for preparing lessons, a step-by-step guide for teaching visual arts for each grade level, and ideas for evaluation and assessment approaches.
http://www.getty.edu/education/for_teachers/building_lessons/

National Gallery of Art
National Gallery classroom for teachers and students includes extensive interactive lessons on a wide variety of curriculum topics.
http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/

“Teachers’ Guide to American Art”
Developed by the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, this site includes works of art from colonial times to the Civil War that enhance the American history curriculum. The descriptive information about the artworks is accompanied by lesson plans that serve to enhance the 5th-grade American history curriculum.

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George Harvey
*Pittsford on the Erie Canal, A Sultry Calm, 1837*

Gift of the Margaret M. McDonald Memorial Fund, 2005:33
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester
Thomas Cole
*Genesee Scenery, 1846-1847*

Gift of Howard and Florence Merritt, 94.40
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester
Asher Brown Durand
*Genesee Oaks*, 1860

Gift of the Women's Council in honor of Harris K. Prior, 74.5
Colin Campbell Cooper
*Main Street Bridge, Rochester, 1908*

Gift of Mr. Hiram W. Sibley, 26.20
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester