

SUSQUEHANNA ART MUSEUM

AT THE MARTY AND TOM PHILIPS FAMILY ART CENTER

Teacher Resource | *American Identity: Restoring the Susquehanna River's Artistic Legacy*

Grade Level: Grades 9-12

Background

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, artists increasingly turned their attention to the dramatic transformations of the American landscape wrought by industry and technology.

In the Susquehanna Valley, the latter half of the 19th century saw rapid industrial growth driven by expanding railroads, mining, and timber operations along the river's shores. As demand for electricity surged, major hydroelectric projects reshaped the valley: the Holtwood Dam was the first large-scale structure on the Susquehanna, followed in the 1930s by the Safe Harbor Dam upstream and the Conowingo Dam downstream. These monumental engineering feats dramatically altered the river's visual and geographic character, yet their vast scale and bold forms also drew artists fascinated by symbols of American industrial power.



After Jasper F. Cropsey, *American Autumn, Starucca Valley, Erie R. Road*, c. 1867, 19 color chromolithograph, Courtesy of the Friends of the Susquehanna River Art Collection

Activities

Part One

Observe, Question & Research (STEAM)

Print or project the artworks on Pages 2-4 for students to view. Ask students to identify what manmade structures they can see in the prints. Follow up by asking students to research and answer the following questions.

What is a viaduct? What is a dam? What purposes do they serve?

Why do you think artists were depicting these structures?

Are these technologies still in use today? How have they changed over time?

What other questions do you have about these pieces of engineering?

Part Two

Art Mediums & Processes

Introduce students to the processes of lithography and engraving.

Lithography: 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.¹

Engraving: an intaglio printmaking process in which lines are cut into a metal plate in order to hold the ink.²

Show students examples of lithography stones and engraved copper plates. Compare and contrast the processes and materials used.

What might be the advantage to making a print instead of a painting?

¹ *Lithograph*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (2018, December 21). <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/materials-and-techniques-printmaking-lithograph>

² *Engraving*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (2018, December 21). <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/materials-and-techniques-printmaking-engraving>



COLUMBIA BRIDGE.

(On the Susquehanna.)

After William H. Bartlett, *Columbia Bridge (on the Susquehanna)*, 1838, from Bartlett's "American Scenery", steel plate engraving, Courtesy of the Friends of the Susquehanna River Art Collection



After Jasper F. Cropsey, *American Autumn, Starucca Valley, Erie R. Road*, c. 1867, 19 color chromolithograph, Courtesy of the Friends of the Susquehanna River Art Collection



After Daniel Garber, *The Conowingo Dam*, 1939, offset lithograph reproduction, published by the Philadelphia Electric Company