

Landscapes, National Identity and Emotions

GRADE LEVEL: High School

SUBJECT: Visual Arts, Social Studies, Language Arts

MEDIA: Painting

FEATURED ARTWORK:



Gustave Doré, (French, 1832-1883), *Castle on the Rhône*, 1878, Oil on canvas, Bequest of Gilbert M. Denman, Jr., 2005.1.16

OBJECTIVE:

Students will examine a painting by Gustave Doré and explore the landscape's relationship to politics and identity. They will then create two landscapes of their own that express distinct emotions.

DISCUSSION:

Gustave Doré was a French artist who primarily created prints. He is well-known for his prints in *Paradise Lost* by John Milton and in *The Inferno* by Dante. In addition to prints, Doré was also a successful Romantic painter.

Castle on the Rhône by Gustave Doré is a painting that was completed circa 1878 in France. This painting depicts a mountainous landscape with steep slopes that are divided by a river. The ruins of a castle are located in the upper third of the composition, upon a cliff that is found in the middle ground. The painting is composed of loose brush strokes that leave the painting devoid of extreme detail but are still able to delineate smaller objects such as rocks and birds. There is a light source coming from behind the cliffs, which leaves the mountainous cliffs in the foreground dark while illuminating the horizon in the background.

The color palette primarily consists of varied neutrals such as tans, browns and grays, highlighted with pastel hues of purple, yellow and blue.

This landscape depicts the homeland of Gustave Doré, the area known as Alsace, located in Northern France. Doré had a lifelong interest in landscapes that stemmed from his extensive traveling. The history of Alsace has been a difficult one, as the region shifted national identity numerous times throughout its past, including the time in which Doré was living and working. Doré was affected by the difficult history of the region of Alsace. As the boundaries between France and Germany shifted, Alsace's national identity changed.

Nations to which Alsace has belonged:

- 962-1648: Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation
- 1648-1871: France
- 1871-1918: Germany*
- 1918-1940: France
- 1940-1945: Germany
- 1945-Present: France

*Occurred during Doré's lifetime.

At the time of this painting, Alsace was annexed by the Germans following the Franco-Prussian War. The Treaty of Westphalia designated Alsace as belonging to the German Empire (1871). From a German nationalistic perspective, the annexation of Alsace seemed justified, since a large percentage of the population spoke Germanic dialects. Doré painted *Castle on the Rhône* seven years later, when sentiments concerning the national identity of the area's population were still heightened. In this painting, Doré was able to communicate his feelings concerning the subject matter through the language of color and light. The use of both light and dark represent the conflict of the identity of Alsace; the painting is primarily cast in a dark light, as Alsace now belonged to the Germans, but there is a sliver of light on the horizon that represents the hope that it would one day return to France. The river depicted in the painting, dividing a land into two halves, represents the split identity of the land, while the castle in the far off distance, standing at a great height away from the viewer, represents Doré's disconnection with his homeland. In fact, after Alsace became German territory once again, Doré left Alsace and refused to go back until it was returned to the French. Consequently, this painting was not painted *in situ* but rather from the use of his earlier sketches, his imagination and his memory.

The controversy surrounding this land, a land caught in a struggle between Germany and France, fed Doré's appetite for an impressive but also turbulent nature; a recurring theme of Romantic paintings. Instead of emphasizing reason and intellect, Doré emphasized intuition, imagination and emotion. Romanticism is characterized by the depiction of nature, its uncontrollable and unpredictable power and the use of color to display emotion and sentiment.

MATERIALS:

- Black paper (2 sheets per student)
- Chalk Pastels

PROCESS:

1. Briefly discuss the life and history of Gustave Doré as well as the history of his homeland, Alsace. Below are some questions that you can use to help guide the discussion:

- Identity involves the traditions, heritage, language and environment of a society. Controversies arose over Alsace due to a lack of a strong and consistent language. When Alsace was finally re-appropriated to France in 1945, lengths were taken to establish French as the one and only language. What do you think this accomplished?
 - Have you traveled to a different area of the United States or an entirely different country? What did you notice about the landscape? Did you miss the landscape of your home? What was similar or different in this new landscape as compared to your home?
 - How can components of landscapes shape your mental image of the whole? For example, what do you think of when you see a palm tree? An evergreen tree? Corn? A cactus? What nations could these belong to? Can you think of any examples where plants play a role in creating a unified identity? What about state flowers/trees?
2. Discuss the formal techniques that Doré used in his landscape to create a sense of mood. How do the composition, colors and light influence the mood?
 3. Discuss color theory, such as warm colors, cool colors and color culture, or how colors can correspond to emotions. For example, the expression, “I’m feeling blue” is equated with sadness; whereas the expression, “I’m seeing red” is equated with anger.
 4. Before getting started on their landscape, have students imagine a happy memory, event or historical event. Then have them convey that feeling through their use of color and attention to light.
 5. Have students imagine a sad or scary memory, life event or historical event. Then have them convey that feeling through their use of color and attention to light.
 6. Have students compare their two drawings. Do they show a clear difference in mood and emotion? Wrap up the lesson with a brief discussion about how art is a form of expression.

Extensions:

- Have students create drawings using chalk pastels that express the emotions felt by the people of our nation during a specific time in history, such as the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War I, World War II, etc.
- Have students create propaganda posters that persuade viewers to feel a particular way due to their composition, color and attention to light.
- Since our names are a major part of our identity, have students take the first letter of their name and incorporate it into a landscape drawing. For example, the letter “S” can become a stream, the letter “M” can become a mountain, the letter “T” can become telephone lines, etc.

TEKS:

Visual Art:

117.32.1 Perception. The student develops and organizes ideas from the environment.

117.32.2 Creative expression/performance. The student expresses ideas through original artworks, using a variety of media with appropriate skill.

117.32.3 Historical/cultural heritage. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture as records of human achievement.

Language Arts:

110.18.2 Reading/Vocabulary Development. Students understand new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing.

110.18.4 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Poetry. Students understand, make inferences and draw

conclusions about the structure and elements of poetry and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

110.18.14 Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text.

110.18.15 Writing/Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas.

Social Studies:

113.18.15 Culture. The student understands the similarities and differences within and among cultures in various world societies.

Lessons are written by area educators and the San Antonio Museum of Art Education department. If you are interested in sharing your lesson ideas featuring works of art from the museum's collections with the San Antonio Museum of Art Education department, please email education@samuseum.org.