

NEH Hudson River Workshop Lesson Plan 2011

Teacher: John Gornell

Subject: United States History I

Grade Level: 10th -11th Grade

Summary:

This lesson allows students to debate industry and preservation. They will use Washington Irving's home as an example of the fight between industry and preservation. This lesson is relevant to 21st century civics.

The Hudson River in the 19th Century and the Modernization of America Lesson Plan

Name: John Gornell, Northern Highlands Regional High School, Allendale, NJ.

Course: United States History 1

Grade level: 10th and 11th

Rationale: This lesson will challenge students to think about the costs and benefits of technological development. Through a debate format, students will see the complexities of the fight between industry and preservation and personal property rights. Students will use the Hudson River estate of Washington Irving as a microcosm of the 19th century clash between rapid industrialization and a growing appreciation for natural beauty in the Hudson River Valley. Students may also examine the government power of eminent domain. The story of Washington Irving's Sunnyside is easily relatable to current questions about progress in technology and industry. The eminent domain aspect of the lesson is also easily relevant to an appreciation of 21st century civics.

Essential Questions:

How did Americans balance the drive for progress with personal liberties and preservation of beauty?

What can the Hudson River School tell us about people in the mid 19th century and their relations with nature and progress?

Why were captains of industry, naturalists and industry itself all drawn to the Hudson River?

How would the construction of a railroad or similar project along 120 miles of river front property proceed differently today than in the mid 19th century.

Objectives:

The students will examine why the Hudson River Railroad was built and why it was successful.

The students will weigh Washington Irving's right to hold his property against the economic benefit of a railroad.

The students will juxtapose the economic value of a railroad along the Hudson to the other riches of the Hudson River (recreation, natural beauty, fish, etc.)

The students will compare the depictions of nature in the Hudson River Valley with the physical development of the region that was occurring at the same time.

Materials:

Washington Irving letter to Catherine Irving April 10, 1848 (settled with Rail Road Company)

Washington Irving letter to Gouverneur Kimble August 7, 1850 (rail road steam trumpet)

Wayne R. Kime. Pierre M. Irving and Washington Irving: a collaboration in life and letters, pages 36-39. (Garden of Eden)

Photos of Sunnyside with train passing, 2011

New York Tribune "Railroad to Albany: The Final Address of the Commissioners for Receiving Subscriptions to the Stock of the Hudson River Rail Company." January 8, 1847, p.1.

"Sunnyside from the Hudson" unknown artist, about 1860.

“Kindred Spirits” Asher Durand

“View of the Hudson” Frances Flora Bond Palmer

"View of the Round-Top in the Catskill Mountains" Thomas Cole

“Falls of the Kaaterskill” Thomas Cole

Procedure:

Plan to use at least two days to conduct this lesson.

DAY 1- Preparation

A. Instruct the students with a 15 minute lecture on the rapid economic development of New York along the Hudson after the completion of the Erie Canal. Explain the increasing importance of the river as a major transportation thoroughfare for goods from the Midwest and from the Hudson River Valley itself. Introduce the students to the Hudson River School painters and reference to James Fenimore Cooper.

B. Divide the students into 4 groups.

- 1- Art scholars (Hudson River School painters)
- 2- Friends of Washington Irving
- 3- Industrialists
- 4- jury

C. List the essential questions.

D. Distribute the documents to the different groups. Groups 1, 2 and 3 should learn the backgrounds of their characters and their relations to the Hudson River were. The first three groups will argue their side for or against construction of the West Shore Railroad. Group 4 will rule at the conclusion of debate at the end of DAY 2.

* In a more advanced class, the teacher may want to introduce the concept of eminent domain into the discussion. The debate could be fashioned as a hearing convened to determine whether the State of New York grants the power of eminent domain to the Saratoga and Hudson River Railroad, which was the company that wanted to build the railroad to compete with the Hudson River Railroad whose tracks were on the east side of the river.

DAY 2- Debate

A. Each of the first three groups will state their cases before the jury using the primary documents as evidence. They should build their arguments for or against construction. Direct the students to address the essential questions in their arguments. Each group should be able to state their positions in about five minutes.

B. After each group has spoken, allow them time to question each other.

C. The jury renders its decision.

Assessment

Ask each student to write a one page position paper from his/her position in the 21st century whether building this railroad was prudent. The students should write their own opinions but use the primary documents to support their positions. The students should consider the essential questions as they prepare their papers.

Materials collection

Photo of Sunnyside.

(image deleted to reduce file size)

http://farm5.static.flickr.com/4041/4647660938_17c18df96b.jpg

Painting of Sunnyside with railroad.

(image deleted to reduce file size)

http://library.explorethomascole.org/preview/it_262.jpg

Asher Durand 'Kindred Spirits'

(image deleted to reduce file size)

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9e/Asher_Durand_Kindred_Spirits.jpg

Samuel Colman 'Storm King on the Hudson'

(image deleted to reduce file size)

<http://nehudson.ramapo.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/storm-king-on-the-hudson.jpg>

Currier & Ives 'View of the Hudson'

(image deleted to reduce file size)

<http://nehudson.ramapo.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/view-of-the-hudson.jpg>

Thomas Cole 'View of the Round-Top in the Catskill Mountains'

(image deleted to reduce file size)

<http://www.explorethomascole.org/images/background.jpg>

Thomas Cole 'Falls of Kaaterskill'

(image deleted to reduce file size)

<http://www.paintinghere.com/UploadPic/Thomas%20Cole/big/Falls%20of%20Kaaterskill.jpg>

Photo of back porch of Sunnyside with passing commuter train.

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see attached jpeg 'WI house with passing commuter train'

Photo of back porch of Sunnyside with passing utility train.

(image deleted to reduce file size)

see attached jpeg 'WI house with passing utility train'

Washington Irving letter to Gouverneur Kimble August 7, 1850

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See attached file 'WI Train and Eden letter Kemble'

Washington Irving's comments about building railroad "though the Garden of Eden" are in an excerpt from the Kime book in a separate pdf file, 'PMI re Railroad Eden'

To Catherine Irving

New York, April 10th, 1848

My dear Kate

I have this moment received your very welcome letter and sit down in Pierre's law shop to scribble a reply to you. I am glad to find all things are going on so well and the cottage stands its grounds notwithstanding my long absence. I have been intending for sometime past to come up, but one thing or another prevents me. I have settled with the Rail Road Company who have paid me \$2500 in cash and \$1000 in stock at par -- which draws Seven per cent interest. So I think I have done as well as my neighbors who have been more litigious.

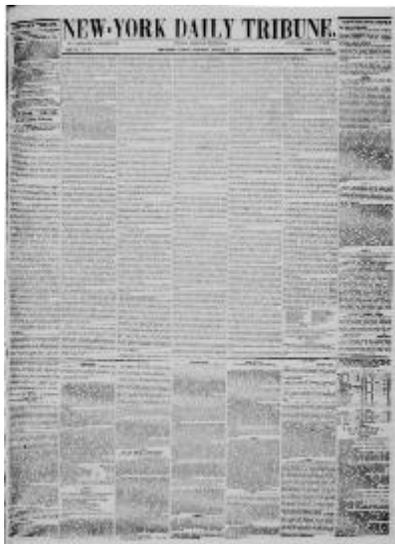
Washington Irving

New York Daily Tribune. (New York [N.Y.]) 1842-1866, January 8, 1847 Image 1
Image and text provided by Library of Congress, Washington, DC

Persistent link: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1847-01-08/ed-1/seq-1/>

PDF of New York Daily Tribune – January 8, 1847

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1847-01-08/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>



2107. *To Gouverneur Kemble*

Sunnyside, Aug. 7, 1850

My dear Kemble:

Excuse my not answering sooner your kind letter. It found me in a terrible state of shattered nerves; having been startled out of my first sleep at midnight, on Saturday night last, by the infernal alarm of your railroad steam trumpet. It left me in a deplorable state of nervous agitation for upward of an hour. I remained sleepless until daybreak, and miserable all the following day. It seemed to me almost as if done on purpose, for the trains had ceased for several days to make their diabolical blasts opposite my house. They have not molested me in this way since, and have clearly shown, by the cautious and tempered management of their whistle, that these unearthly yells and howls and screams, indulged in for a mile on a stretch, and destructive to the quiet of whole neighborhoods, are carried to an unnecessary and unwarrantable excess. They form one of the greatest nuisances attending railroads, and I am surprised that, in the present state of mechanical art, some signal less coarse and brutal could not be devised.

You will laugh at all this; but to have one's family disturbed all day, and startled from sleep at night by such horrific sounds, amounts to a constant calamity. I feel obliged to the company for the attention that has been paid to the complaints made in this instance, and I trust to their continuing to protect my homestead from the recurrence of such an evil.

It would give me great pleasure, my dear Kemble, to come at once to you; but I am advised, as soon as I have sufficient strength to leave home, to go where I may have the benefit of a complete change of air. I intend, therefore, to pay a visit to my niece, Mrs. Gabriel Irving,¹ at her place at Oyster Bay, where I shall have the benefit of salt air and sea breezes. My visit to you I shall defer until I feel in more companionable trim.

Ever, my dear Kemble, yours, affectionately,

Washington Irving

PUBLISHED: PMI, IV, 67-68; Scharf, *Westchester County*, II, 237.

1. The former Eliza Eckford (1813-1866), widow of Gabriel Irving (1807-1845).

Gouverneur Kemble was one of the directors of the Hudson River Railroad.