

Teaching with *Indian Immigration – 1820-1885* by Charles Banks Wilson



This document is designed to help teachers present, discuss, and teach about Oklahoma history and art literacy through the use of this work of art. The information and exercises here will aid in understanding and learning from this artwork.

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First Analysis and Criticism

The steps below may be used for group discussion or individual written work.

Before beginning the steps, take two minutes to study the artwork. Look at all the details and subject matter. After studying the artwork in silence, follow these steps:

Describe:

Be specific and descriptive. List only the facts about the objects in the painting or sculpture.

- What things are in the artwork?
- What is happening?
- List what you see (people, animals, clothing, environment, objects, etc.).

Analyze:

- How are the elements of art – line, shape, form, texture, space, and value used?
- How are the principles of design – unity, pattern, rhythm, variety, balance, emphasis, and proportion used?

Interpretation:

Make initial, reasonable inferences.

- What do you think is happening in the artwork?
- Who is doing what?
- What do you think the artist is trying to say to the viewer?

Evaluate:

Express your opinion.

- What do you think about the artwork?
- Is it important?
- How does it help you understand the past?
- Do you like it? Why or why not?

Overview of the Artwork

The abounding interest in the portraits of Robert S. Kerr, Sequoyah, Jim Thorpe, and Will Rogers painted by Charles Banks Wilson sparked the 1970 legislature to commission Wilson to create four murals depicting the history of Oklahoma from 1541 to 1906. Wilson spent four years researching his subject matter. Each person depicted was illustrated from life and Wilson utilized clay models before painting each scene. The 13 by 27 foot linen canvases were woven in Belgium. The murals were mounted on Fiberglas with hot wax resin adhesive and then placed thirty-six feet above the floor. On Statehood Day in 1976, Carl Clark and Betty Price co-chaired the dedication committee. During the ceremony, historian Dr. A.M. Gibson spoke about the historic murals.

Indian Immigration captures the atmospheric tension and civil unrest as sixty-seven different Native American tribes were forced into the region. Already a home for nomadic hunters, the Native American settlers would become implemental in the development of the state. Wilson depicts numerous armed federal troops surrounding a Native American village. The troops were sent as a preventative measure against tribal warfare.

About the Artist

Charles Banks Wilson was born in 1918 in Arkansas and grew up in Miami, Oklahoma. Educated at the Art Institute of Chicago from 1936-1940, he was given an award from the Chicago Society of Lithographers and Etchers, and his work was added to the Art Institute collection. While at the Art Institute, he also began a project whereupon he sketched portraits of numerous members of Oklahoma's American Indian tribes – a project that would soon become a lifelong artistic journey.

Wilson completed his education in Chicago and later returned to Oklahoma in 1943, where he established a permanent studio in Miami. Two years later, he began teaching night classes in drawing at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College. Eventually he became head of the art department, a position he held until 1960. During this period he continued to illustrate books and produce lithographs from his own press.

In 1957, he completed his first portrait commission for Tulsa oilman and collector Thomas Gilcrease. Perhaps one of Wilson's greatest achievements came when the U.S. Senate selected four of his paintings to be shown in 20 world capitals. In 2001, he was named an Oklahoma Cultural Treasure and is a member of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

The Series

In 1970, Charles Banks Wilson was commissioned by the Oklahoma Legislature to complete four major murals in the three-dimensional triangles of the Rotunda piers. Wilson was given the challenge of depicting Oklahoma's history from the earliest recorded expedition in 1541 to the iconic scenes of settlement in 1906, the year before statehood.

Wilson spent years gathering research about Oklahoma before beginning the process of producing the murals. The research created the foundation for his preliminary sketches, of which he completed 75 for each mural. Each individual in the murals was illustrated from life. From the sketches, he created a 15-inch working drawing, which he used for reference. Wilson then built small three-dimensional clay models of each detail in the drawing, which he used for a reference of how the light would fall on each object. From there, he created several black-and-white paintings of the entire scene before finally making color choices and completing a 37-inch color painting. Then, he began work on the final product, a panel stretching 14-feet wide at the base, 25-feet wide at the top, and 13-feet high.

Upon completion in 1976, the murals were mounted on Fiberglas with hot wax resin adhesive and then placed approximately 36 feet above the 4th floor.

History Details



Indian immigration brought 67 different tribes into the region. Oklahoma first became the home of nomadic hunters who followed the wandering buffalo across the Great Plains. These “Knights of the Grassland” jealously guarded their hunting grounds. The relocation of the Five Civilized Tribes to Oklahoma by the Federal Government opened the way for the settlement of other tribes in present-day Oklahoma. Only the United States Government, with peace emissaries and troops, prevented constant tribal warfare.

1. Comanche opposing settlement by eastern and southeastern tribes.
2. The Osage warred against the newcomers.
3. Indian hunters resented the immigrants
4. The Kiowa considered war justified.
5. The Wichita and Plains-Apache felt they were defending their hunting right against the “intruders.”
6. The United States had promised to protect the removed tribes from the western tribes.
7. United States Army soldier, 1836.
8. The immigrants collectively known as the Five Civilized Tribes included the Choctaw;
9. the Cherokee;
10. the Creek;
11. the Chickasaw; and
12. the Seminole.
13. The Five Civilized Tribes endured great hardships on their Trail of Tears.
14. Thirteen other tribes also came to the territory traveling at least partway by boat.
15. Until the acquisition of Texas, the most southwestern post in the United States was Fort Washita.
16. Buffalo hide tipi, the Plains Indians portable dwelling.
17. An important food for the Indians was the nut of the hickory tree.

Visual Art Details



Indian immigration was an emotional time for Oklahoma. Many tribes lost their homeland or relocated to new land. Tension was high for everyone during this time. Charles Banks Wilson used artistic techniques to convey this time of unrest. For instance, many of the people within the painting have their arms raised. This is how the artist conveyed unrest and opposition.

1. Wilson used color and clothing to identify the various tribes.
2. During his research, Wilson found the headdress worn by the Osage medicine man at the Field Museum in Chicago. He was able to sketch it for accuracy in the mural.
3. White is often added to the paint to create the illusion of distance. Objects that are far away are not as vivid in color as closer objects.
4. R.L. Fitzgerald, the former superintendant of Seneca Schools, was the model for this figure.
5. Perspective is used to make this group of people appear like they are emerging from the background and moving towards the viewer.
6. Wilson used the posture of this person to show that he is ready to defend his family and tribe.

History Highlights



- Many tribes of the Great Plains already occupied the land that the federal government designated as Indian Territory.
- The federal government began pushing the southeastern Indians to move to Indian Territory, land already occupied by the Plains tribes.
- Hostilities developed between the Osage and Western Cherokee tribes when the latter settled on land in Arkansas.
- New military posts were built to protect and control the Indians.
- In 1828, the Western Cherokee tribes agreed to exchange their land in Arkansas for land in the newly designated Indian Territory, formerly occupied by the Osage.
- President Andrew Jackson became the leader in the efforts to relocate the southeastern Indian tribes to the west.
- The Indian Removal Act of 1830 brought about drastic changes to the Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Seminole tribes of the southeast.
- All the southeastern tribes suffered during what was called the “Trail of Tears.” Bad weather, disease, and spoiled rations devastated the tribal populations as they were forced to move to Indian Territory.
- Other tribes were forced to surrender their homelands to the federal government as a result of the Indian Removal Act.

Suggested Reading

Oklahoma Adventure, Centennial Edition 2006 by Oklahoma History Press

Unit 2: Chapter 5: Cultural and Religious Conflicts, **pages 40-50**

Unit 2: Chapter 6: Choctaw and Creek Removals, **pages 51-59**

Unit 2: Chapter 7: Trail of Tears, **pages 60-69**

Unit 2: Chapter 8: Seminoles and Other Settlers, **pages 70-77**

Oklahoma: Land of Contrasts by Clairmont Press

Chapter 6: A Clash of Cultures, **pages 136-161**

The Story of Oklahoma, Second Edition by Baird and Goble

Unit 2: The Discovery of Oklahoma; Chapter 8: Indian Removals, **pages 109-125**

Further Reading

Hunt, David C. *The Lithographs of Charles Banks Wilson* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).

Wilson, Charles Banks. *Search for the Purebloods* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982).

Cagle, Charles. *An Oklahoma Portrait: Conversations with the artist Charles Banks Wilson* (Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association, 1989).

Oklahoma History Vocabulary

Acculturation- the process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group

Allotment- assignment of land to an individual or group

Annuity- money paid in small yearly amounts over a certain period of time

Assimilation- the process by which people of one culture are absorbed into another, as when they adopt the practices and beliefs of the other culture and abandon or alter some or all of the customs of their former culture

Cede- to turn over or surrender; often by treaty

Civilized- having an advanced or humane culture or society

Emigrant- one who moves out of his or her home region or country; one who migrates into a region or country

Lighthorse- mounted police used by the Choctaws

Migrate- to move from one place to another

Provision- a clause in a legal instrument or law providing for a particular matter; stipulation

Removal- change of residence; resettlement

Reservation- land set aside for an Indian tribe to live on

Subsistence- basic food and clothing needs

Visual Art Vocabulary

Balance- a principle of design; the arrangement of the elements of art in a composition; basic types of balance are symmetrical (mirror image), asymmetrical, and radial (from a center point)

Composition- the arrangement of objects, shapes, and colors in a work of art

Perspective- system for giving the illusion of three-dimensional space and depth on a two-dimensional surface

Texture- an element of art; the surface quality or feel of an object; texture may be actual (rough or smooth) or implied visually

Two-Dimensional- flat; having only two qualities of height and breadth, as in a drawing or painting

Review Questions

These questions may provide for verbal class discussion or for individual writing assignments.

**Note: Some topics may not be addressed in the text book for your class.*

1. How did the government officials justify confiscating Indian lands?
2. How did whites and Indians view one another?
3. What president is associated with the Indian Removal Act of 1830?
4. In what ways did governmental policies encourage acculturation and assimilation of Indians?
5. What was the major provision of the Indian Removal Act of 1830?
6. What two tribes fought for control of land in northeastern Oklahoma?
7. Name the two earliest forts built to control and protect Indians relocated to Indian Territory.
8. What actions did the Chickasaws take to avoid removal?
9. What actions did the Cherokees take to avoid removal?
10. Why did the Chickasaws cede their lands north of the Tennessee River?
11. What poor conditions contributed to the deaths both during and after the tribes' removal to Indian Territory?
12. What problems did the Chickasaws encounter in Indian Territory?
13. Many various tribes are depicted in this mural. Name all the tribes you can find and how you identified them.
14. What do you think is the center of focus in this mural? How is focus brought to this point?
15. Which object or person is closest to the viewer in the painting? How does the artist make it appear close to the viewer?
16. Which object or person is farthest away from the viewer in the painting? How does the artist make it appear far away from the viewer?
17. How would you describe the balance of the composition? Is it symmetrical, asymmetrical, or radial?
18. Can you identify any areas of the painting where the artist created the illusion of texture? If so, where?

Writing and Research Assignments

Choose one or more of the topics below about which to write two or three paragraphs.

**Note: Some topics may not be addressed in the text book for your class.*

- Discuss how the election of Andrew Jackson for president affected Indian removal.
- Describe how the Indians made an effort to assimilate into the white man's society.
- Discuss how the Indian Removal Act affected Indians.
- Describe the removal of the Chickasaw tribe and explain why it was the least harmful.
- Describe how enticement was used to make western lands more attractive to the Indians.
- Explain the separation of the Seminoles from the Creeks and concluded with an explanation of why the Seminoles rejected the government's idea of rejoining the two tribes for removal.
- List the following information concerning each of the Five Tribes: name of the tribe, name of the removal treaty, date of forced removal, leader or leaders, and place assigned in Oklahoma.
- Explain how all removals could be called the "Trail of Tears" even though the term was first applied to the Cherokees.
- Choose any one of the Five Tribes and use a map of the United States to show their removal route. Determine how far the tribe had to travel. If the people were able to travel ten miles a day, how long would their trip take?
- Pretend that you have been notified that you are going to be moved to Nevada in one month. Write a paragraph on how this will affect your family and the life you know here in Oklahoma today. Write a second paragraph to explain the emotions you would have about this move.
- Discuss how using art to tell the story of the Trail of Tears can convey messages or emotions that may not be easy in writing.
- Charles Banks Wilson once said, "An artist is important because he is a reflection of his time." What do you think this meant?
- When creating this mural, Wilson said it had the strongest personal statement for him than any other mural. Do you see anywhere he added his opinion in the way he painted? How is it expressed?
- Describe the difference in objects in the foreground, middle ground, and background of the painting.

Final Analysis

After completing the readings and activities, go back and look at the artwork again. Now that the students are more familiar with the subject matter, ask them to write a few paragraphs about their interpretation of the artwork. In their own words, the writing should address the following:

- Description of the artwork and who/what is in it
- How the elements of art and principles of design are used within the artwork
- What feelings, emotions, or information the artwork depicts
- Their opinion of the artwork

Pass Objectives

Grade 4- Social Studies

Standard 4: The student will describe the human systems (e.g., migrations, settlements, cultural mosaics, and economic interdependence) identified with the major regions of the United States, including human interaction with the environment.

5. Describe the causes of movement of large groups of people into the United States from other countries and within the United States now and long ago.

Standard 5: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the unique features which contributed to the settlement of the state of Oklahoma.

2. Describe major events of Oklahoma's past, such as settlements by Native Americans, cattle drives, land runs, statehood, and the discovery of oil.
5. Develop an understanding of and an appreciation for the cultural diversity of his or her community by examining the historical and contemporary racial, ethnic, and cultural groups of the area.

Grade 8- U.S. History

Standard 7: The student will examine the significance of the Jacksonian era.

4. Compare and contrast the policies toward Native Americans pursued by presidential administrations through the Jacksonian era, and evaluate the impact on Native Americans of white expansion, including the resistance and removal of the Five Tribes (i.e., Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee).

Standard 9: The student will evaluate and explain the westward expansion of the United States from 1801 to 1877.

8. Describe the importance of trade on the frontiers and assess the impact of westward expansion on Native American peoples, including their displacement and removal, and the Indian Wars of 1850s-1870s.

High School- Oklahoma History

Standard 1: The student will demonstrate process skills in social studies.

1. Identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary sources (e.g., artifacts, diaries, letters, art, music, literature, photographs, documents, newspapers, and contemporary media).
4. Construct and examine timelines of Oklahoma history (e.g., removal and relocation of Native American groups, economic cycles, immigration patterns, and the results of redistricting and statewide elections).

Standard 3: The student will evaluate the social, economic, and political development and contributions of Native Americans from prehistoric settlement through modern times.

1. Identify and describe significant phases of prehistoric cultures, including the Paleo Indians (Clovis points), Archaic Indians (Folsom points), the Mound Builders, and the Plains Tribes.
2. Trace the movement of other North American peoples into present-day Oklahoma, including the Five Tribes, Plains Tribes, and Eastern Tribes.
3. Compare and contrast cultural perspectives (e.g., land ownership and use, agricultural methods, production and distribution of commodities, and trading practices) of Native Americans and European Americans.

PASS OBJECTIVES FOR VISUAL ARTS:

Standard 1: Language of Visual Art - The student will identify visual art terms and vocabulary.

Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.

Standard 4: Visual Art Appreciation - The student will appreciate visual art as a vehicle of human expression.