

Teaching with *Non-Indian Settlement – 1870-1906* 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.

Non-Indian Settlement refers to the years 1870-1906 in which Unassigned Lands were open to all in the Land Run of 1889. A train overflowing with eager settlers rolls steadfast through the land. In the center of the mural a man atop a horse waves a banner reading “Go Forth And Possess The Promised Land,” a simple phrase that encapsulates the excitement of the time. The Boomers settlement of the land yielded the admission of Oklahoma into the Union on November 16, 1907.

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.

Visual Art Details



Oklahoma was a busy place full of activity around the time of the land runs. Charles Banks Wilson used crowded composition, diagonal lines, and various methods of transportation to convey the movement and activity of this time.

1. Wilson was so faithful to the historical accuracy of details, he even researched the type of smokestacks that would have been used by trains during the Run of 1889.
2. The way many of the figures are leaning forward at a diagonal is a method the artist used to create the illusion of movement.
3. Former House Speaker Bill Willis was the model for this figure.
4. Wilson did extensive research on railroad history to find out if this train would be burning wood or coal, therefore indicating what color the smoke would be.
5. The images in the background are much smaller than those in the foreground, creating the illusion of distance.

History Highlights



- In 1870, the federal government began to change its policy toward Native Americans from removal, treaties, and reservations to the breaking up of Indian nations.
- The Dawes Severalty Act of 1877 dissolved tribal ownership of land and gave specific amounts of land to each individual Indian.
- In 1893, the Dawes Severalty Act was extended to the Five Tribes.
- The 1898 Curtis Act threatened to destroy tribal governments if the Indians refused to accept allotments.
- Pressure mounted to open a tract of land in the heart of Indian Territory called the Unassigned Lands. Those who pushed for the opening of the land to white settlement were called Boomers.
- The U.S. Cavalry stopped several attempts at illegal settlement on the Unassigned Lands.
- The Springer Amendment called for the opening of the Unassigned Lands to settlements. Settlers who slipped by the troops and staked out choice claims early were referred to as Sooners.
- All of the Unassigned Lands were claimed within a few hours, and several towns were instantly established.
- The Organic Act of 1890 helped to establish the guidelines for the Territory of Oklahoma.
- The president appointed the territorial governors, beginning with George W. Steele. Frank Frantz was the last territorial governor.
- The territorial legislature provided for a system of public schools and colleges.
- Additional land openings of surplus Indian lands were done by lottery and auction.
- Making a new life in Oklahoma Territory was a series of trials for the new settlers – clearing the land for planting, digging wells, building fences and homes (often “soddies”), and enduring droughts.
- With hard work and a railroad connection, a town would evolve from a few simple frame structures huddled on the prairie to a thriving commercial center.

Suggested Reading

Oklahoma Adventure, Centennial Edition 2006 by Oklahoma History Press

Unit 3: Chapter 12: Boomer Sooner, **pages 113-117**

Unit 4: Chapter 13: The Final Conquest, **pages 120-127**

Unit 4: Chapter 14: Oklahoma Territory, **pages 128-136**

Unit 4: Chapter 15: The Land Openings and the Settlers, **pages 137-143**

Unit 4: Chapter 16: Statehood, **pages 144-153**

Oklahoma: Land of Contrasts by Clairmont Press

Chapter 12: Boomers, Sooners, and Oklahoma Territory, **pages 289-313**

The Story of Oklahoma, Second Edition by Baird and Goble

Unit 4: The Americanization of Oklahoma; Chapter 15: The Promised Land, **pages 240-251**

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

Auction- the sale of something to the highest bidder

Boomers- people who clamored most loudly and continuously to open up the Unassigned Lands to non-Indian settlement

Cornerstone- a specific marker to determine the boundary of a certain area

Homesteader- a person who could live on and improve his claim for five years when he would own it outright

Lottery- a way of distributing land whereby hopeful claimants entered their names to be drawn from large barrels

Plat- to mark off streets and alleys to create town lots to be sold

Provisional Government- a temporary form of government

Quarter Section- one-fourth of a square mile – or 160 acres – of publicly owned land

Severalty- an estate held or owned by individual right

Soddie- crude structure built of thick blocks of grass and dirt

Sooner- one who entered the Unassigned Lands to make a claim before the law allowed

Squatter- one who settles on unoccupied land in order to gain title to it

Surplus- an amount or quantity that is higher than what is needed

Territorial Government- a form of government used by citizens just prior to statehood

Vigilante- a person who takes law enforcement into their own hands

Visual Art Vocabulary

Line- an element of art; the path of a moving point; a line may define the edge of a shape; repeated, it can create texture or value; it may be thick or thin, smooth or long, light or dark

Movement- a principle of design; use of lines, shapes or colors to lead the eye of the viewer from one direction to another

Repetition- a principle of design; repeated use of an element such as color, shape or line within a work of art; repetition creates pattern, which may be found in manufactured or natural objects

Value- an element of art; the degree of dark or light tones or colors; a value scale shows the changing of tone from the darkest to the lightest or white; value may be created by simple shading, hatch marks (small repeated lines in the same direction), or crosshatching

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. What legislation called for the dissolving of tribal ownership of land?
2. What did the Boomers do in effort to settle in the Unassigned Lands before the lands were open for settlement?
3. List groups that would benefit from the opening of the Unassigned Land to non-Indian settlers.
4. How were the Indian leaders divided on the issue of opening their unoccupied lands for settlement?
5. Who were the groups who lobbied for opening the lands for settlement?
6. Who were the groups who lobbied against opening the lands for settlement?
7. What area did the first land run open to settlement?
8. What did a homesteader have to do to hold the claim on a piece of land?
9. Why did the Indians request the establishment of a federal court in Indian Territory?
10. How did the runs for land in the Cherokee Outlet and in the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation differ from previous land runs?
11. When did Oklahoma become a state?
12. Why was David Payne called the “Prince of Boomers?”
13. Name at least five towns that were established during the land run of 1889.
14. Wilson called the surveyor and water well driller, pictured in the left portion of the mural, “two unsung heroes in this state.” What do you think he meant by that?
15. Did the artist use repetition in the painting? If so, where?
16. Look at the smokestack on top of the train’s engine. How did the artist use value on the smokestack?

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.*

- Describe the attempt of William L. Couch and his followers to settle in the Unassigned Lands.
- Describe the rights of non-Indians to win property in Indian Territory from the time of Indian settlement to the opening of unoccupied lands for white settlement.
- Describe the living conditions of homesteaders in Oklahoma Territory.
- Describe the various ethnic groups that settled in the early days of territorial Oklahoma.

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.

2. Explain how people are influenced by, adapt to, and alter their environment, including agricultural efforts, housing, occupations, industries, transportation, and communication.
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.

1. Identify major historical individuals, entrepreneurs, and groups, and describe their major contributions (e.g., Sequoyah, the Boomers and the Sooners, and Frank Phillips).
2. Describe major events of Oklahoma's past, such as settlements by Native Americans, cattle drives, land runs, statehood, and the discovery of oil.
3. Analyze the use of Oklahoma's natural resources (e.g., salt, bison, oil, coal, timber, and sod) by early visitors and settlers.

Grade 5- Social Studies

Standard 6: The student will explore the growth and progress of the new nation.

3. Relate some of the major influences on westward expansion (e.g., the Monroe Doctrine, canals and river systems, railroads, economic incentives, Manifest Destiny, and the frontier spirit) to the distribution and movement of people, goods, and services.

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.
9. Evaluate the impact of the Homestead Act of 1862 and the resulting movement westward to "free land".

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).

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

1. Trace the movement of other North American peoples into present-day Oklahoma, including the Five Tribes, Plains Tribes, and Eastern Tribes.
2. 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.

Standard 4: The student will evaluate the major political and economic events prior to statehood.

4. Evaluate the impact and importance of the various means of distributing land in Oklahoma (e.g., allotments, land runs, lottery, and Supreme Court settlement).

Tab 6: PASS Objectives (continued)

Standard 5: The student will describe the development of constitutional government in Oklahoma.

1. Examine the work of the Dawes Commission and the distribution of lands to non-Native American settlers.
2. Analyze the development of governments among the Native American tribes; the movement towards the all-Indian state of Sequoyah; the movement for single statehood, and the impact and influence of the Enabling Act and the Constitutional Convention.

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.