ART SMART

5th Grade / November

THEME:
Early America

WORKS:
1. Maple Sugaring
2. Trotting Cracks at the Forge
3. Preparing for Market
4. The Whale Fishery
5-6 AMERICAN HISTORY: LIVING IN EARLY AMERICA

In these reproductions, the early history of America's settlers unfolds in a colorful panorama, graphically captured by the artists of the 18th and 19th centuries. American life in its developing stages gains a sense of immediacy through these reproductions; they are a handsome and valuable complement to textbook materials.

953 Currier & Ives Market Preparation

ABOUT THE REPRODUCTIONS

Currier and Ives
The firm of Currier and Ives, located in New York City, employed or commissioned many artists to supply the diverse drawings that were transferred to their lithographer's stones and later hand colored. They were produced for a vast popular market in an era when the kind of mass media communications we know today were nonexistent and these romanticized visions of American life were eagerly received. Currier and Ives produced many lithographs depicting nineteenth-century American life. These lithographs, joyous celebrations of everyday events, were copied from contemporary paintings or drawn by artists especially for the lithographer's stones. Though they are often romanticized to suit the popular taste, we may glean from them the quality of daily life and the ideas and issues important to men of their time.

Currier and Ives

American Forest Scenes - Maple Sugaring (1856)
In colonial times maple sugar was prized along with wild honey as a source of sugar. By the time this lithograph was printed, however, other sources of sugar were available, and maple-sugaring had become a yearly adventure, with maple groves located close enough to settled areas to provide a pleasant day's excursion. Maple trees were tapped as soon as sap began to run and showed at the end of the twigs; this was late in winter if the weather was mild, or early in spring. A small hollow plug or spout was inserted into the heart of the trunk and a bucket, hung from the plug, gathered the sap. The contents of the small collecting buckets were poured into one large iron kettle and boiled down over an open fire in the woods. This was always an occasion for a sugaring-off party, a picnic combined with a work party, where children dropped hot syrup onto bowls of snow to make a kind of candy, parents talk and took turns stirring the kettle, and when sugaring day was over, everybody went home to a good hot dinner. It was a colorful and exciting occasion that was looked forward to annually.

Among the more popular subjects were scenes of the sea, the whaling industry, and the great clipper ships. The details of these ships were depicted with a great deal of skill and accuracy by such artists as Charles Parsons.
“Trotting Cracks” at the Forge (1869)
This lithograph is based on a drawing by Thomas Worth, an artist and racing fan who often sketched on the spot and supplied Currier and Ives with the finest trotting-horse prints in their catalogues. The racing of horses was a favorite leisure time activity, and the “Trotting Cracks” (aficionados of racing and horsemanship) usually supervised all aspects of the care of the horses (whether their own or their neighbors’) including visits to the blacksmith. In this lithograph we see a group of men waiting in the forge for their horses to be shod. The smithy, wearing a leather apron, holds the handle of the bellows, and iron horseshoes lie at his feet. On the walls are posters, perhaps printed by Currier and Ives, announcing racing events. A small boy whisks flies from a waiting horse. Although the horses are accurately drawn, it is the details that indicate the character of the men and the atmosphere of the room that distinguish this lithograph.

The entire population of Southern New England doubled between 1810 and 1860. Improved transportation, especially the extension and development of roads and the new markets provided by the growing factory towns, helped the farmer make the transition from farming for a living to farming for a profit. Where the pioneer family had produced all they required, the farmer could now produce for a market and buy factory-made shoes, clothing, tools, furniture and foodstuffs. Though the soils were rocky, hard-working New England farmers made the land productive. Farms varied from isolated homesteads to villages which were ringed by their farms and provided all the essential services of a community. Growing towns, meanwhile, increasingly provided an alternative to farm living.

Preparing for Market (1856)
This lithograph, drawn by Louis Maurer for Currier and Ives, presents a New England farm family preparing to take their surplus produce and livestock to market. Everybody is busy and helpful; even the baby watches with interest as mother and father load the wagon, big brother holds the horses, and in the background one hired hand chops wood while another tends the animals. That this is a prosperous farm is indicated by the numerous livestock, the produce being taken to market, the well-built farmhouse and outbuildings, and the hired men assisting the farmer.
The Whale Fishery

Before the eighteenth century whale fishing was mostly incidental - the catching and killing of whales that came in at low tide and could not get out to deep water before the next high tide. Whaling grew to be an important industry as whale bones were needed for ladies’ corsets and whale oil for industrial lubricants, lamps and soap. The first important whaling port was Nantucket, but, as the whales permanently migrated away from the Atlantic coast, it became necessary to use larger ships and go on longer journeys. The usual whaling voyage lasted from one to three years and often circumnavigated the globe. Salem, New London, and New Bedford became principal whaling ports not only of the United States but the entire world.

This lithograph depicts a boat full of men setting out to harpoon a whale. The men in the small boat appear fragile beside the bulk of the huge animal. Such a juxtaposition gives a clear idea of the skills and dangers involved in this rough but adventurous business. If the harpooning party merely irritated its catch, the result might be death for all men in the boat. When a whale was harpooned it was often marked with a flag or other device to indicate it was the property of a particular ship (see the red flag in the background whale with the scavenger birds hovering over it). The whale was then towed to the mother ship (seen in the background) where the blubber was rendered into oil. (The smoke rising from the ship indicates that this process is taking place.)

Barnstable, Mass.
W.A. Wall (1801 - 1885)

This painting of the village green in this Cape Cod town was executed by William A. Wall, an artist from New Bedford, Massachusetts, who painted both in the United States and Europe, but is best known for his New Bedford landscapes. The date is possibly the Fourth of July, for the town is decorated with American flags flying in a light breeze. The number of stars on the flags would indicate the number of states in the union at the time of this painting. This harmonious view of the town melting into the surrounding countryside is implemented by small details that make this an historically interesting painting: children at play, two riders on horseback, a wagon loaded with hay and a small boy with a pitchfork sitting on top of it, a farm within the town limits, a white frame house, a church whose delicate spire reaches gracefully skyward, and a cannon sitting unexpectedly in the churchyard. Color is added in unexpected spots: a feather on a hat, the reins and bridles of the horses, the interior of the carriage awaiting an approaching couple.
AMERICAN HISTORY: LIVING IN EARLY AMERICA

1. What is the medium used to create this picture? (watercolor, oil, pastel, print)

2. Is this print abstract or realistic? Why? Does it tell a story? What story?

3. Can you tell what area of Colonial America is depicted in this print? What clues led you to your decision?

4. Pick out details from the print that tell us about life in the 19th century America.

5. Explain how the author used foreground and background in the picture. What does the artist want your eye to go to? How was this achieved?

6. Describe the colors in the picture. Did the author use color in a way that draws your attention to a particular part of the picture?