



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2004 Volume III: Representations of American Culture, 1760-1960: Art and Literature

Discovering American Identity through Writings and Paintings, 1800-1845

Guide for Curriculum Unit 04.03.10
by David Reynolds

This is an *art and literature* course, using pioneering methods of teaching *both* in order to make some difficult texts, and a difficult period of American history, more exciting and accessible to students who usually find this material challenging if not downright off-putting. The selected readings and paintings span America's development from the end of the Revolutionary War to the Civil War. The Revolutionary War gave birth to the American nation, the Constitution, and a newly formed society of American citizens. This period, known in part as the Era of Good Feeling, was characterized by optimism among many Americans - if not those native to the country or enslaved within it - and the crossing of frontiers. The U.S. was growing, and in the process a national identity began to emerge. Yet despite the unifying effects of the Revolutionary War, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, American citizens remained divided on how to view society, life, and purpose. Some held on to the Puritan ideal, others embraced the wild unexplored West, while others remained enslaved in the capitalist American system. Through diverse, influential paintings and writings, this unit explores the development of American identity in its infancy.

(Recommended for U.S History and Literature, grade 10.)

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University
For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>