

# Thomas Cole

c. 1801–1848



**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** Thomas Cole was one of the most important landscape painters of his time. He influenced the art world and provided a visual record of early America.



*As you read the biography below, think about how Thomas Cole's creativity helped him become a recorder of history.*

Thomas Cole began his artistic career as an engraver's assistant in England before coming to the United States with his family in 1818. He lived in Philadelphia for a year before joining his family in Ohio. While in Ohio, Cole became interested in the beauty of the American wilderness. Cole learned the basic skills of oil painting while in Ohio, but only after he returned to Pennsylvania did he become serious about art.

After working with members of the Philadelphia Academy and improving his mostly self-taught techniques, Cole moved to New York. While on a sketching trip in 1825, Cole discovered the magnificence of the Catskill Mountains of New York. He painted several detailed landscapes of the Hudson River Valley and the Catskills. These paintings were exhibited and became a sensation in the art world. Prominent artists of the time befriended Cole and he was made a fellow of the National Academy while still in his 20s.

Cole became the leader of the Hudson River School art **movement**. Artists in this movement painted romantic images of America's wilderness. Their use of light effects is an important characteristic of their paintings.



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## VOCABULARY

**movement** trend

After his success in New York, Cole traveled to Europe and spent time painting the Italian countryside. Upon his return to the United States, Cole was commissioned to paint several important artworks. A second trip to Europe gave Cole the opportunity to improve his mastery of painting techniques.

Cole is best remembered for providing a historical visual record of early America, a new country with new possibilities. Cole was well loved and his premature death at the age of 48 shocked the art world. His paintings are exceptional examples of detailed landscapes. They also serve as reminders of the beauty of America's beginning.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Why are Cole's paintings important from a historical perspective?

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- 2. Expressing an Opinion** Why do you think artists painted scenes of America during this time?

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### ACTIVITY

Draw or paint a landscape in the style of Thomas Cole. Research and study examples of Cole's paintings before beginning your painting. Cole's paintings are very detailed representations of American landscapes, which seemed beautiful to Cole.