

ANCHORAGE MUSEUM

GRADE 3: ART AND ENVIRONMENT



THOMAS HILL
MUIR GLACIER, 1889

Oil paint, canvas
1976.050.001

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Hill (1829-1908) was born in Birmingham, England and at the age of 15 moved to the United States with his family. He worked as a carriage and ornamental painter in Massachusetts until 1853 when he attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Hill became a recognized American landscape painter known for his paintings of Yosemite, the Pacific Northwest, Yellowstone, the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and Alaska.

Arriving in Alaska in 1887, Hill was commissioned by the naturalist John Muir to paint Muir Glacier, now part of Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve in southeastern Alaska. *Muir Glacier* is one of several large works completed in his California studio after the trip.

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Thomas Hill produced many views of the California landscape, the Yosemite Valley, and the White Mountains of New Hampshire, where he sketched alongside members of the Hudson River School.

In keeping with the Hudson River School (described below) philosophy, Hill's *Muir Glacier* is characterized by a detailed and idealized portrayal of nature. The canoes and figure on the shore contrast with the immensity of the surrounding glacier, while the steamship hints at the increasing accessibility of Alaska and its potential as a tourist destination in the late 1880s.

QUOTES ABOUT THE ARTWORK

John Muir wrote *Travels in Alaska* (published 1915) to record his journeys and explorations of the state. The following are excerpts which describe his experience of Glacier Bay.

- “They told us that the big bay was called by them *Sit-a-da-kay*, or Ice Bay; that there were many large ice-mountains in it, but no gold-mines; and that the ice-mountain they knew the best was at the head of the bay, where most of the seals were found.”
- “I reached a height of fifteen hundred feet, on the ridge that bounds the second of the great glaciers. All the landscape was smothered in clouds and I began to fear that as far as wide views were concerned I had climbed in vain. But at length the clouds lifted a little, and beneath their gray fringes I saw the berg-filled expanse of the bay, and the feet of the mountains that stand about it, and the imposing fronts of five huge glaciers, the nearest being immediately beneath me. This was my first general view of Glacier Bay, a solitude of ice and snow and newborn rocks, dim, dreary, mysterious. I held the ground I had so dearly won for an hour or two, sheltering myself from the blast as best I could, while the benumbed fingers I sketched what I could see of the landscape, and wrote a few lines in my notebook. Then, breasting the snow again, crossing the shifting avalanche slopes and torrents, I reached camp about dark, wet and weary and glad.”



KEY TERMS

<i>Glacier</i>	A large mass of ice and packed snow as well as sediment and other liquid that moves slowly
<i>Tidewater Glacier</i>	A glacier which terminates (or ends) in the ocean
<i>Valley Glacier</i>	A glacier bounded by valley walls
<i>Landscape</i>	An area of land and collection of landforms; culturally this may include the resources found in that area and the interaction of those resources with human inhabitants; the term may also reference a visual representation of an area of land. As a term in the visual arts, landscape is a type or genre of subject depicting scenes of nature, such as mountains and seascapes, and urban sceneries that may feature people, animals, or architecture. Landscape is derived from the Dutch word of <i>landschap</i>
<i>Place Name</i>	A name for a geographical location

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Glacier Bay Park and Preserve is located in Southeast Alaska near the community of Gustavus. Designated a national monument in 1924 by President Calvin Coolidge, President Jimmy Carter subsequently expanded the monument in 1978 and in 1980, created Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve.

What we now call Glacier Bay was habitable for thousands of years before the last glacial surge, about 300 years ago. Lingít peoples inhabited the area until 1700, when the glacier surged forward, encasing much of the area in ice around. The Lingít dispersed, but as the glacier receded, they eventually returned to their homelands. When explorers and scientists like Muir came to the area, Lingít peoples helped them navigate through the glacial fields.

Through romanticizing paintings and writings, the area gained notoriety, and tourism soon came to Glacier Bay. The designation of the area as a park helped to preserve the lands and habitats of flora and fauna. The park continues to serve as a popular destination. In 2018, 2.97 million people visited the park. The creation of the park had a significant impact on the harvest practices of Lingít peoples of the area. It was not until legislation in 2006 that the Lingít peoples were once again permitted to harvest the eggs of the glaucous-winged gull, a cultural food integral to the traditions of this community. Today, tourism continues to be a major industry.

Muir Glacier has experienced dramatic retreat over the last two centuries. Between 1941 and 2004 alone, the glacier retreated over seven miles and thinned by at least 875 yards. Images of Muir Glacier taken shortly after Thomas Hill's visit evidence the significant change of the past hundred years. Muir Glacier was previously a tidewater glacier reaching all the way to the ocean. Today, Muir Glacier is a valley glacier, bounded by mountains and no longer extending to the shore.



SECONDARY TERMS

- John Muir (1838-1914)* Scottish-American environmental philosopher, glaciologist, and early advocate of preservation of wilderness in US. Muir travelled through Glacier Bay in 1879 with a party that included a minister and an Alaska Native guide in 1879.
- Hudson River School* Emerged in the 1850s in New York City under the influence of British-born artist Thomas Cole (1801-1848). Hudson River School artists painted scenic and monumental landscape, applying the British aesthetic theory of the *sublime* (a sense of the awe and fear found in nature) to the American landscape. Thomas Hill was deeply influenced by the Hudson River School.
- Landscape painting* Before the rise of landscape as a subject of artistic depiction in 17th century, landscape was treated as a background to religious, historical, and genre paintings. In contemporary art, artists explore landscape in a variety of media. The term 'landscape' may also refer to the format of a picture plane with a horizontal orientation, where the width is greater than the height. Today's artists utilize the subject of landscape to explore aesthetics as well as a variety of political and social issues.
- Artistic movements that influenced landscape painting: Seventeenth and eighteenth-century landscape paintings sought to depict a vision of nature that was ideal, and classical in that the depictions were infused with biblical or Roman narratives. In the mid-19th century, a group of French artists known as the Barbizon rejected these influences and began emphasizing the realism of landscape. Barbizon painters sketched and painted directly from nature (*en plein air*), and often depicted everyday people and scenes.
- Romanticism* First defined as an aesthetic in literary criticism in the early 1800s, Romanticism gained prominence as a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Romanticism emphasizes individualism, emotion, devotion to beauty, imagination, and worship of nature and solitary life instead of life in society. In Romantic art, nature is depicted with *sublime* qualities: uncontrollable, unpredictable and capable of cataclysmic violence. In Romantic portraiture, artists explore psychology and emotional states of the subject. American literary examples of Romanticism include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman.



INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE

Begin this art lesson by looking and discussing about the artwork together for 15 minutes.

CLOSE-LOOKING

Invite students to look closely, quietly at the artwork.

OBSERVE

Invite students to share observations about the artwork.

ASK

- *What is going on in this painting?*
- *Describe the sensory experience you imagine. What would you smell, taste, touch, and hear if you were in this painting? .*
- *What colors does the artist use?*
- *What moods does the colors create?*
- *What does this painting remind you of?*
- *What more do you see?*
- *What more can you find?*

DISCUSS

USE [20 Questions Deck](#) for more group discussion questions about the artwork.

LEARN MORE

About John Muir: pbs.org/nationalparks/people/historical/muir

Travels in Alaska online: vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/travels_in_alaska

About Glacier Bay: nps.gov/glba/learn/index.htm

Images of Muir Glacier in the 19th century and in the 2000s: cbsnews.com/pictures/repeat-photography-of-alaskan-glaciers/4

About the Hudson River School:

metmuseum.org/toah/hd/hurs/hd_hurs.htm

tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime



CLOSE-LOOKING SKETCHING

TIME FRAME	40-45 minutes
MATERIALS	<p>Paper Pencils</p> <p>NPS Map with Place Names as handout: nps.gov/glba/learn/historyculture/tlingit-place-names-of-the-huna-kaawu.htm Recordings of place names</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lingít name for Glacier Bay before the glacier surged forward <i>S'e Shuyee</i> or 'edge of the glacial silt' nps.gov/glba/learn/historyculture/upload/seshuyee.mp3• Contemporary Lingít name <i>Sit' Eeti Gheeyi</i> or 'the bay in place of the glacier' nps.gov/glba/learn/historyculture/upload/siteetigheiyi.mp3
DIRECTIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. [2 mins] Begin with quiet looking of the artwork. Share the artwork without the title or background information. [3 mins] Invite students to sketch a detail that first attracts their attention. [5 mins] Encourage participants to share what they sketched and initial observations. <i>What details drew your attention? How do these details relate to the whole?</i>2. [10-15 mins] Group discussion: <i>What do you think the artist is trying to communicate with this work? What do you think the artist wants you to feel or know from looking at this work?</i>3. [4 mins] In pairs, come up with a title for this piece.4. Introduce background information, including the title of the piece and the history of Muir's exploration of the area. Share the map of place names and recordings of names used for Glacier Bay by the Lingít peoples who have stewarded these lands for thousands of years before Muir's exploration.5. [15 mins] Group Discussion: <i>How does the name of Muir Glacier impact the way that we understand this painting? How does that name relate to the history of exploration in Alaska? How does naming something change how you look at an artwork?</i>



PLACE OF IMPORTANCE

TIME FRAME 40-45 minutes

MATERIALS Paper
Vellum or tracing paper
Pencils

DIRECTIONS John Muir commissioned Thomas Hill to paint Muir Glacier, a place of importance to him. After visiting this place, Hill then began and completed the painting in his studio based on his memory and sketches.

1. [5-10 mins] Invite students to consider a place that is important to them. This place could be an interior room, a special outdoor location, or somewhere they have visited. On regular drawing paper, students then create a landscape—drawing the place important to them. Encourage students to include as much detail as they are able.

2. Once drawings are complete, students turn the drawing over to ensure that their peers do not see what they have drawn.

3. [6 mins] In pairs, students describe the important place in as much details as possible, without showing their partner their drawing, or telling the partner the name of the place being described. Be sure to leave time for each partner to describe. Encourage students to listen well.

4. [6 mins] After this sharing exercise, students create a drawing on vellum or tracing paper of their partner's place based on what they heard described to them. Encourage students to simply to draw from memory and to not ask questions of their partner. Invite the student to title their drawing of their peer's important place.

5. [3 mins] Invite pairs to share with one another the vellum/tracing paper drawings of each other's places. Invite partners to reveal the name of the place they described.

6. [5-10 mins] Students may layer their partner's vellum drawing on top of their first drawing on paper. Notice the similarities and differences in the student's first drawing of their place in comparison to the partner's interpretation on the vellum.

Group Discussion: *What important details did your partner capture? What did they leave out? How does their name for the place relate to yours?*

7. [5-10 mins] Group gallery walk: place and partner drawings side by side around the classroom. Students walk around classroom and appreciate each other's work. *What do you notice about what your classmates have created? What similarities can be found across the places? What differences?*



GLACIER WATERCOLOR

TIME FRAME 45-60 minutes

MATERIALS Ice cube trays
Short popsicle sticks or half popsicle sticks
Food coloring
Water
Access to freezer
Watercolor paper or thick cardstock

DIRECTIONS John Muir selected Thomas Hill to record the beauty of Glacier Bay because he was particularly known for painting ice. This activity facilitates painting with ice.

1. Prep trays. Note: creation of the paints can be done with the class if time allows, and students can mix their own colors in their tray.

Or, preparation of materials can be completed by the educator in advance. Pour water into ice cube tray evenly, adding desired food coloring (2-4 drops depending on desired saturation) per cube. Insert a short popsicle stick partially into each cube and place tray in freezer.

2. [5 mins] Invite students to imagine a scene of snow and ice. *What colors are in the scene? What colors can be found not only in the snow and ice, but in the sky and other parts of the landscape?*

3. [20+ mins] Using the glacier watercolors, invite students to capture those colors. Because these watercolors are less precise than using a brush, the result will be more abstract.

4. [10 mins] Group discussion: *How did using a material that was changing and melting as you were using it affect your experience creating your piece? How did you have to adjust to the unexpected?*

5. [10 mins] Group gallery walk: place watercolors side by side around the classroom.

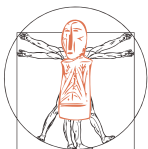
Students walk around classroom and appreciate each other's work. *What do you notice about what your classmates have created? What similarities can be found across the watercolors? What differences?*

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed based on their participation in the discussion, completion of the two projects, and art presentation to class.

For more teaching resources, visit anchoragemuseum.org/teachingresources

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