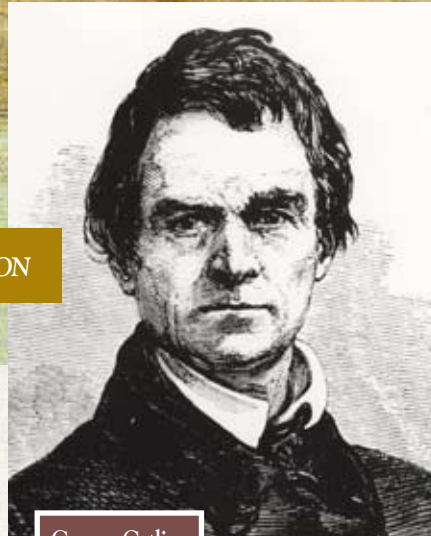


George Catlin

1796-1872

HISTORICAL ERA: WESTWARD EXPANSION



George Catlin

George Catlin was born in 1796 in Wikes-Barre, Pennsylvania. As a child, he had strong interests in the out-of-doors and less in schooling. Although he studied and practiced law briefly, he enjoyed art more. In 1823, he quit his practice and traveled to Philadelphia to take up the latter profession. He became friends with a number of local artists, including Rembrandt Peale. He became proficient enough at art to gain membership standing in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts by 1824.

With a letter of introduction to William Clark, he traveled to St. Louis in 1830 and later that year and the next accompanied Governor Clark to Native American council meetings held on the middle Missouri. This was the start of his portraits of Indians and their environment. For the next six years, his typical experience was to spend the winters in or around St. Louis making money by painting portraits of the local inhabitants and the summers in Indian territory.

In 1836, he went to New York City and opened a show of his works and artifacts he had collected. He later opened shows in London and Paris. All were enthusiastically received. Due to financial misdealings, he

Historical Significance:

To introduce students to one of America's greatest artists who helped others preserve and understand the Great Plains Indians through his art.

Related Vocabulary:

portrait
Great Plains
teepee
internecine

entered a state of bankruptcy in 1852. His paintings and materials were purchased by Joseph Harrison, an American, who then shipped all goods home to Philadelphia where they remained in storage until seven years after the artist's death.

Catlin returned home and from 1852 to 1860 traveled widely, both in North and South America. He repainted many of his older paintings from sketches and memory.

Following the death of Joseph Harrison in 1879, his heirs offered the Catlin materials to the United States government. The materials were transferred to the Smithsonian Institution and are now on view at various locations in Washington, D.C. The second set of paintings was purchased by the American Museum of Natural History and the New York Historical Society. Catlin's paintings capture for us an image what Indian society was like before the groups had been decimated by small pox or internecine warfare.



Suggested Activity:

View a variety of Catlin prints. Have students make a list of the items they can observe about “Life on the American Plains,” taking note of clothing, housing and activities. Allow students to use the information that they observed to make their own drawing of Plains Indians. Make a gallery of the works and have students explain their art inspirations.

CD/DVD References:

1. PA Academic Standards
2. Available materials in print compiled for GPHS.

Related Areas of Study:

- Life of Native Americans Past & Present
- Portrait Painting
- The Smithsonian and other museums

Sources:

Secondary Sources:

Hassrick, Royal B.: *The George Catlin Book of American Indians*. 1977 Promontory Press. Brown cover art with gilt lettering on spine. Illustration throughout with art of George Catlin.

Neumann, Heinz: *Karl May and George Catlin: eine Hypothese*. M-KMG, Monat 12, 1970, Nr. 6, S. 19.

Poppe, Werner: *Karl May and George Catlin*. M-KMG, Monat 6, 1972, Nr. 12, S. 22.

Schneider, Alfred: *George Catlin, Die Indianer Nordamerikas*. M-KMG, Monat 6, 1973, Nr. 16, S.30.

Wolff, Gabriele: *George Catlin: Die Indianer Nord-Amerikas*. Das Material zum Traum.

Additional Online Sources:

Smithsonian American Art Museum
National Gallery of Art
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Additional site, see: Art Cyclopedia

