

## YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

### Writing about Art: Something to Write Home About

*In this activity, students are asked to look at an individual depicted in a landscape painting and think about what that person sees. After observation and discussion, students write a postcard from this character's point of view describing what they would see in front of them. This activity works well with paintings that depict western America in the 1870s—for example, Albert Bierstadt's Yosemite Valley, Glacier Point Trail (ca. 1873). Topics such as railroad development and western migration provide students with a social context for looking at and discussing the painting. (The activity can be adapted for other works of art, too.)*

**Required Materials:** paper, pencils, clipboards

**Grade Level:** 5-12

**Subject Area Connections:** language arts; social studies; visual arts

**Step 1:** Students choose a landscape painting that includes depictions of people. They should consider what the person is thinking or feeling based on what they see in the painting.

*Looking Questions:*

1. What is the location of this painting? How can you tell?
2. What do you see happening in this painting? Look at the foreground, middle ground and background. Where do you see the action?
3. What are these people seeing or doing in this painting? What do you see that makes you say this?
4. Given the social context of the time, why do you think the artist included these people in this painting?

**Step 2.** Students write a postcard from the perspective of one of the people in the painting. Based on what they see within the painting (the setting and environment), what might the person have to say in a postcard written to a friend back home? Remind students to include observations of the painting based on social and historical contexts.

**Step 3.** Ask students to share their postcard message with the class and discuss their observations of the painting from their character's perspective.



Albert Bierstadt (American, born Germany, 1830–1902)  
*Yosemite Valley, Glacier Point Trail*, ca. 1873  
Oil on canvas, 54 x 84 3/4 in. (137.2 x 215.3 cm)  
Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Mrs. Vincenzo Ardenghi  
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