

## Learning Targets

- Identify genre conventions for nature paintings.
- Explore how visual texts can convey Transcendentalist themes.

## Before Reading

1. **Quickwrite:** Based on what you now know about Transcendentalism, what sort of conventions of style, content, and/or themes might typify Transcendentalist artwork?
2. As you read the following description of the Hudson River School of painters, from [www.askart.com](http://www.askart.com), use the space in the margins to note links to the characteristics of Transcendentalism you identified as you completed your research in Activity 4.3.

*The Hudson River School of painters was America's first so-called school of painting and the dominant landscape style until the Civil War. The name derives from a group of 19th-century landscape painters working in New York state. With realistic composition, they depicted romantic views of unsettled areas of the Hudson River Valley especially lakes, rocky gorges, and forests in the Catskill Mountains.*

*Thomas Cole is considered the leader of the movement, which began in 1825 when other artists discovered Cole's landscapes whose loftiness and sense of high drama suggested communication with God through nature. For Cole, and later his followers, the landscape was a sacred place.*

*Hudson River School adherents included Asher Durand, who often did panoramic views in a romantic, semi-realist style, with an underlying mood of serenity and contemplation.*

*The School is credited with making landscape for the first time a legitimate subject for canvas and for conveying a sense of place that was uniquely American. Although the compositional and stylistic devices were Old World—at least 36 of the Hudson River artists had been trained in European academies—the subject matter infused Americans with the confidence to turn away from European subjects to their own culture.*

## During Reading

3. With your understanding of Transcendentalism and the Hudson River artists in mind, analyze the following paintings: “The Oxbow,” by Cole and Durand’s “Kindred Spirits.” OPTIC is a strategy for analyzing visual texts. You may remember that OPTIC is an acronym for the following: **O**verview, **P**arts, **T**itle, **I**nterrelationships, and **C**onclusion. Use the parts of the chart on the next page to note the elements of each painting that contribute to its thematic meaning.

**LEARNING STRATEGIES:**  
Quickwrite, Visual/Auditory Prompt, OPTIC, Think-Pair-Share, Discussion Groups, Jigsaw

## My Notes

# Another Transcendental View

## OPTIC Analysis

**Overview:** Take a first look at the artwork, noticing the subject. Brainstorm some questions about it.

**Parts:** Look closely at the artwork, making note of important elements and details. Consider composition, lighting, framing, etc.

**Title:** Pay attention to the title and any captions.

**Interrelationships:** Look for connections between and among the title, caption, and the parts of the art.

**Conclusion:** Form a conclusion about the meaning of the artwork. Remember the questions you asked when you first examined it: How does the painting evoke or express Transcendentalism? Be prepared to support your conclusion with evidence.

## My Notes

### After Reading

4. Based on these two examples, if Hudson River landscape paintings are considered an artistic genre, what are some genre conventions you would expect other texts of this genre to display? In other words, what are some characteristics they both share that other paintings of this school would also likely share, both in terms of their style and their content?

**Writing Prompt:** Which painting better reflects the beliefs of the Transcendental movement, Durand's or Cole's? Write a paragraph that answers this question, using details from the painting and specific information about the movement. Be sure to:

- Introduce a precise claim with a topic sentence that clarifies your position.
- Support your claim with references to the genre conventions you have defined.
- Vividly describe the painting and the details that reflect the Transcendental movement.

### Check Your Understanding

What conventions most closely link the Hudson River painters to Transcendentalism?