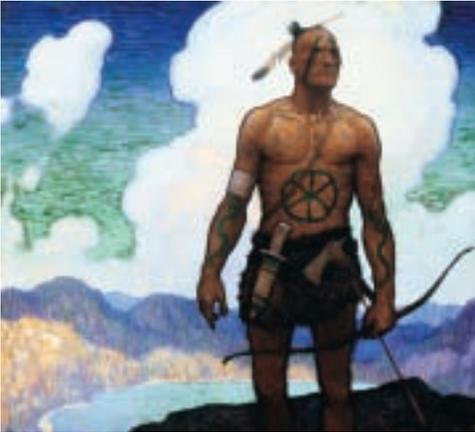


5-B Cover Illustration for *The Last of the Mohicans*, 1919

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)



5-B N. C. Wyeth (1882–1945), cover illustration for *The Last of the Mohicans*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 26 x 31 ¾ in. (66 x 80.6 cm.). Collection of the Brandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford, Pa., Anonymous gift, 1981. Reprinted with the permission of Atheneum Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, from *The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper, illustrated by N. C. Wyeth. Illustrations © 1919 Charles Scribner's Sons; copyright renewed 1947 Carolyn B. Wyeth.

The Art

This painting of an American Indian became the cover for the new edition of a book called *The Last of the Mohicans*. The book was written by James Fenimore Cooper and published in 1826. The painting is an illustration of Uncas, one of the book's characters. The artist painted Uncas as a hero. He shows Uncas as many European Americans thought American Indians looked. He has a bare chest, is decorated with paint, wears a feather in his head, and carries a dagger, tomahawk, and bow and arrow. He appears larger than life and is positioned in such a way that it seems people are peering up at him. His figure is framed by clouds. The painter, Newell Convers (N.C.) Wyeth, visited the Lake George area of New York, where the novel takes place, to prepare for his painting. The painting captures the hills and rivers of that area and includes various sky-blue tones.

The Artist

Wyeth was born in 1882 in Massachusetts. During his life, he created more than 3,000 paintings and illustrated 112 books. In addition to *The Last of the Mohicans*, he also illustrated *Treasure Island*, *Robin Hood*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Rip Van Winkle*. Wyeth's art teacher taught students to paint from experience. Wyeth made two trips to Lake George so he could experience the hills, lake, and surroundings he was illustrating in the book, hiking through the woods and cooking over an open fire. The blue skies, the lake, and the mountains were the inspiration for this book cover.

The Historical Perspective

The story of *The Last of the Mohicans* takes place in 1757 during the French and Indian War, when the British and French fought over land that had long been home to Eastern Woodlands tribes. Though rooted in history, the story in the book came mostly from the writer's imagination. This was also true of Wyeth, whose idea of Uncas was not based on first-hand knowledge of American Indians but rather reflected his idea of what they were like. Most of what Cooper knew about the lives of American Indians came from books or stories his father shared.



Conversations and Teaching Activities

Head Start Children ages 3 to 5

Encourage children to look closely at this painting—the objects, the background, the colors used. Introduce new vocabulary and find books that relate to the painting.

Describing



- ✓ What do you see in this painting?
- ✓ What tells you where this man is? (He is outside and on a mountain/hilltop.)
- ✓ How did the artist show something far away in this painting? (The mountains and river are small compared to the man in the picture. The landscape is behind him, giving a wide view.)
- ✓ Show children a book. What is a book cover? What is it for?

Analyzing and Interpreting



Ask the following questions to stimulate thinking and discussion:

- Why is the Indian man dressed as he is? In the early 1900s, most Americans thought American Indian men dressed this way. Since the illustrator did not know how Indians dressed, he imagined him in these clothes. We know now that Indians dressed differently in everyday life.
- What is an illustrator?
- Are there other things you would like to tell me about this painting?



Connecting and Extending

Introducing Vocabulary

American Indian	bow and arrow	leather/hide
artist	foreground	symbol
background	illustrator	tomahawk
body paint	Indian	warrior

Books

Hawk, I'm Your Brother by Byrd Baylor (Aladdin Books, 1986)

A American Indian boy captures a hawk hoping he can gain the bird's ability to fly.

Hiawatha by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Puffin, 1996)

Verses from Longfellow's epic poem depict the boyhood of the Iroquois Indian, Hiawatha.

More than Moccasins by Laurie Carlson (Chicago Review Press, 1994)

Children learn Indian crafts and games.

*Connecting and Extending
continued...***Related Educational
Experiences**

- ✓ Have the children sit outside and paint the colors they see.
- ✓ Take children on a hike through nature looking for things they see in the picture.
- ✓ Put out a collection of books or visit a library or bookstore to look at other book covers and what they say about the stories.
- ✓ Read stories to the children about the outdoors.
- ✓ Teachers can make a list of things to find outside, placing a picture next to a word—for example, acorn, squirrel running, oak leaf. Children find each item and check it off or place it in a paper bag to bring in and discuss in class.
- ✓ Children can write a story together about their hunt. The teacher types the story and adds pictures taken during the hike.
- ✓ Allow each child to draw a picture and tell you about it. Write what the child says. Pages can be laminated and put in the children’s library for sharing.

The ideas listed are just a few of the many activities that could be used to introduce or extend children’s learning. Your knowledge of your children and families supports your ability to ensure positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. As an educator, you probably have ideas for books, songs, finger plays, and activities that you have thought of when introducing or extending children’s learning related to the “A Head Start on Picturing America” artworks. We encourage you to confer with your colleagues, visit the local library or bookstore, and share your ideas with others.

**Related Family Literacy Experiences**

Parents and children can:

- ✓ walk outside and draw/talk about different-shaped clouds.
- ✓ read *More than Moccasins* or another book and pick an activity to do together.