

★ Let US Teach That For You!

History Through Art

Overview: This activity uses art (painting) to challenge students to look closely at a work of art and make references to historical learning objectives.



Painting Title: "Night Scene"

Painting Subject: Cattle Drive Camp at Night

About the Artist: Marie Pruett Tumlinson (1917-2007)

Marie Pruett Tumlinson was born in 1917 in California, instead of Texas where her family made their home. Her mother Flossie and her brother were visiting Marie's father, Henry Pruett who was stationed at the naval base in San Diego when Marie was born before her mother could return to Texas as planned. Her father served during World War I aboard the USS Texan that is now in harbor at Houston, Texas. For a time, the Pruett family lived on Long Island, New York where her father was a fisherman. Again Texas called them back where he continued to fish along the Texas coast, finally settling the family at San Perlita.

In 1943 Marie married her childhood sweetheart, Sam Tumlinson who was in the U.S. Army during World War II. She and their four children traveled with him to many parts of the world, including a lengthy stay in Japan. Sam's family was one of the original 300 families who came to Texas with Stephen F. Austin and he had a life-long passion for Texas history. Marie accompanied Sam on his research trips throughout Texas, sketching the places he researched.

Marie studied under some of the most important artists of her day, and has been a teacher and encourager of other artists throughout her career. Her work has been shown in galleries and collections in Virginia, Washington D.C., Oregon, Washington State, Canada and Texas. Marie Tumlinson died in Abilene, Texas in 2007.

“Night Scene”



Cattle Drive: Night Scene recreates some of the magic and mystic of cowboy life, past and present. The painting helps us feel we are a part of the scene through its use of dark, but not foreboding hues of blue and orange.

For Discussion:

1. What is happening in this picture? Name at least three things that you see.
2. What is the mood of the painting? How does color add to the mood?
3. Describe how perspective is used in this painting.
4. When do you think this cattle drive took place—a long time ago, or last year? Why?
5. What questions would you like to ask the artist if you could?
6. Does this picture make you want to participate in a cattle drive? Why or Why not?

Historical Context:

Chuck Wagons and Campfire Cooking

The challenge of keeping a group of hungry cowboys fed on the trail without the convenience of a kitchen was solved when Charles Goodnight, famous trail driver and cattleman, introduced the chuck wagon.

Being a cook on a cattle drive was one of the most difficult and important jobs on the trail. To keep the crew happy and well fed, cooks would typically get up as early as four o'clock in the morning and would end their day when the last cowboy was fed and the chuck box lid finally closed for the night. During branding season this could be as late as 10:30 at night. The Chuck Wagon was the cowboy's home away from home and the center of social activity during the drive. Most cooks took great pride in their ability to make the best food possible under difficult conditions.

A cook had to be able to solve problems ranging from locating suitable water during times of drought to keeping a fire going during a downpour. Most wagons had a “fly,” which is a large tarp fastened to the front or side of the wagon that could be stretched out and staked down with ropes and iron stakes.

Tarps were also used to roll around bedding to give some protection from the rain or snow since sleeping in a wet bed is not the most comfortable way to spend a night. A cowboy might stay on the trail for weeks at a time. Their bathtub might be a bar of soap in stock tank, but running river or creek water was definitely preferred for bathing and laundry. Clothes were hung on mesquite to dry, and could be ironed by rolling them in the bed roll and sleeping on them.

Sour-dough biscuits and beans were standard fare on the trail. Small animals such as rabbit could be cooked up in a stew, and deer or antelope were killed when possible. Since they had no refrigeration in the early days, ranchers were reluctant to sacrifice a calf that could be sold for a profit.

Material Referenced: Boltz, Richard: Forty Years Behind the Lid. 1974.