

THINKING OUTSIDE THE FRAME

Exhibition Focus: *California Mexicana: Missions to Murals, 1820-1930*

Background

Charles Christian Nahl is often considered the first great Californian painter. His work in the state from the late 19th century helped establish the founding myths of California. While California was new to the union, the history of the state was already rich and layered. Nahl's work helped cement what Americans deemed romantic about California's past into its cultural identity. His work *Sunday Morning in Monterey* depicts a fantastic scene from the past with many interesting characters and stories to consider and analyze. While his certificate for the Society of California Pioneers highlights which symbols and icons settlers deemed historically significant to California's past.

Lesson Overview

Images, such as paintings, often tell the viewer a story. Paintings like Charles Christian Nahl's *Sunday Morning in Monterey* can tell many stories all at once. Students will consider the concept of narrative, and will engage creative thinking and writing techniques while imagining what exists just beyond, before or after, the scene in the painting. They'll imagine and create a rounded character based on a figure within the painting. Then after looking at Nahl's *Society of California Pioneers Certificate* they'll learn about how artists use symbolism and motifs to create a crest or certificate inspired by the *Society of California Pioneers Certificate* for their character.

Learning Objectives

- Students will learn how to carefully analyze and "read" a scene depicted within a painting.
- Students will learn about narrative devices artists employ within an image and use creative thinking and writing skills to imagine a world outside the frame of a painting.
- Students will learn how artists use iconography, symbols and motifs to illustrate important landmarks in history, how these establish ideas about heritage.

Materials

- Image of *Morning in Monterey* and *Society of California Pioneers Certificate*
- Question sheet for image/ figure analysis.
- Paper for short story, and brainstorming
- Template for certificate printed on multi-media paper
- Pencils
- Colored pencils

Lesson Steps

- Step One

LAGUNA ART MUSEUM

Project designed by the Laguna Art Museum Education Department

- After viewing *Sunday Morning in Monterey* students will choose a character from the scene whom they deem to be the protagonist of the story. Teachers can ask “While you look at this painting, whose story is this?”
- Students fill out the question sheet, and write a short story after developing their chosen character’s background.
- Step Two
 - After looking at the *Society of California Pioneers Certificate*, students learn how Nahl used motifs from California’s history to emphasize what was important to the society. (They depicted the missions, the grizzly bear, the rancheros, and the miners, etc.)
 - Then students receive the template for their character’s crest/certificate
 - Students think about what icons, symbols, or motifs would be central to their character.
 - Teachers can ask students to think about what images might represent their characters (their home, their family, their animals, symbols of their career, passions, etc.) or motifs (their parents walking with them as a younger child, their character building their home with their family, etc.)
 - Students draw 4-5 motifs or symbols for their character’s crest, and color them with colored pencils.

