

American Express Train by Currier and Ives (Fanny Palmer)

Print Facts

- Medium: 2 stone lithograph, hand colored
- Date: 1864
- Size: 17 5/8" x 27 3/4"
- Location:
- Period: Bauhaus
- Style:
- Genre: American Landscape
- Currier and Ives were two partners who owned a printing business in New York City. They employed many artists; this painting was done by Fanny Palmer.

Artist Facts

- Fanny Palmer was born in England in 1812 and died in 1876 in Brooklyn.
- She was the daughter of an attorney and attended a fine school for girls in Liecester, England known as Miss Linwood's School in London.
- Fanny Palmer is known as the first female American artist. She worked for Currier and Ives.
- It is estimated Fanny Palmer created over 200 scenes for Currier and Ives, although she rarely signed her work.
- When she did sign her work she used the initials F.F. Palmer to disguise the fact that she was a woman, since it was largely unacceptable for a woman to be working in the professional world.
- Her husband, a tavern keeper, died suddenly in 1859, ironically falling drunken down a flight of stairs in a hotel in Brooklyn.
- After experiencing financial trouble, her family moved from England to New York in 1843, where she began work for Currier and Ives.
- Currier and Ives was a very successful printmaking firm that operated from 1834-1907 in NYC. Nathaniel Currier founded the business in 1834 and in 1852 he brought his brother-in-law, James Ives, into the business and renamed the firm Currier & Ives five years later. (Some say in 1834 he went in on a partnership with Stodart, but it only lasted one year. Then in 1835 he established his own business.)
- Currier & Ives prints were hand-colored. They were neither lithographed in color nor printed in color, but lithographed and printed in just one color of ink and then colored by hand afterward.
- In the Currier & Ives shop the stock prints were colored by a staff of about twelve young women, all trained colorists and mostly of German descent. They worked at long tables from a model set up in the middle of the table, where it was visible to all. The models, many of which were colored by Louis Maurer and Fanny Palmer, were all first approved by one of the partners. Each colorist applied only one color and, when she had finished, passed the print on to the next worker, and so on until it was fully colored. The print would then go to the woman in charge, known as the "finisher," who would touch it up where necessary. The colors used were imported from Austria

- and were the finest available, especially valued because they did not fade in the light.
- When large numbers of the rush stock prints were needed, extra help was called in. Then stencils would be cut for the various colors and the extras would wash in the colors. The prints could then be touched up by the regular girls. The larger folios were sent out in lots with models to regular colorists who worked outside the shop. Usually twelve prints from one of the large folio plates were sent out at a time. These outside colorists were often indigent young artists who earned a modest living at this kind of work while awaiting the recognition of their own work. It is said that Currier & Ives paid one cent apiece to colorist for the small prints, and one dollar for coloring twelve of the large folios. Other reports say \$6.00 for each 100 prints.
 - Later technology made it possible to produce colored lithographs, which had a more “painted” effect.
 - Currier and Ives used the drawings of many celebrated artists of the day.
 - Currier and Ives was the most successful lithograph company and covered every area of American life—hunting, fishing, winter scenes, the Mississippi, still lifes, politics, rail roads, etc.
 - Currier and Ives prints were among the most popular wall hangings of their day.
 - Currier and Ives prints are now highly prized as collectibles.
 - A lithograph (from the Greek for “stone drawing”) is a print produced from a design drawn onto a limestone surface. The lithographic process relies on the principle that water and grease do not mix. The design is drawn, in mirror image, onto the surface of the limestone with a grease pencil or crayon. The surface of the drawing is covered with water and then with greasy ink, which adheres to the lines of the drawing. A damp sheet of paper is placed on top of the stone and placed in a special press. The pressure of the press transfers the drawing onto the piece of paper, but in reverse of the original design.
 - Currier & Ives printed 2 to 3 images every week for 64 years and is believed to have produced more than 7500 different lithographic prints.
 - For more info on lithography and Currier & Ives visit <http://www.ifpda.org/content/node/581>
 - Currier (1813-88) was left to support his mother and four children at the age of 8 (along with his older brother, 11) when his father unexpectedly died.
 - Currier worked odd jobs and then apprenticed with a lithographer at the age of 15.
 - James Merritt Ives was initially hired as a bookkeeper in 1852. Five years later he became Currier’s partner because he showed himself to be unusually adept at combining features from various sketches into a well-designed composition. This was important because so many of the prints came from the work of more than one artist.
 - The company was eventually liquidated in 1907 when other methods of producing art (including photography) made lithographs less in demand.

Key Element of Design to Teach

- **Perspective** is a technique of visually suggesting a feeling of depth in a flat presentation, by using points or lines that disappear at the vanishing point in relationship to pictured objects as the objects recede. Color can also be used, along with lines, to create perspective. The closer the image is, the more detailed it will appear and the larger it will be.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Perspective

- Is this train moving? How can you tell?

- What direction is the train moving? How does the smoke help you know this?
- Use paper strips or strings to help teach perspective. Yarn is in the packet. Attach the knotted end of the strings on the left side of the print at the vanishing point. Stretch out the strings and tape them down to help students see the lines and how they all start at the vanishing point and move out. Explain that the artist would have used something like this to help her know where and how big to paint things.
- Point out that items in the front of the train are bigger than those in the back of the picture, but in real life they are of course the same size. Talk about how all of their heads are about the same size. Tape big and little circles over the heads to show the difference in size.

Keywords

- Perspective, line, shape, contrast, Primary colors

Other Possible Questions

- What else do you see in this picture besides a train?
- What do you see on the river? Is it moving?
- How did people transport things in the 1800's?
- Would you like to ride the train or the boat?
- Do you see people on this train?
- What else do you think the train might carry?
- What is the weather like on this day? How can you tell?
- If you were in this picture do you think it would be noisy? What sounds would you hear? (Help the students create the sound of the train or let them listen to a recording of a train.)
- Take in a toy train and help the children compare the toy train to the one in the picture.
- What are the primary colors? (Use the color wheel to help teach students.)
- Can you see primary colors in this painting? Where?
- Do you see any other colors in this painting?
- Show a newspaper and point out the photographs. Explain that Currier and Ives couldn't take photographs, so they created these prints to let people see what things and events looked like. People hung them in their homes.