

TOEFL ITP® Reading Practice

Section 3: Reading Comprehension • Time: 15 Minutes • 10 Questions

Reading Passage

During the mid-nineteenth century, a distinct movement in American art emerged, known as the Hudson River School. Far from being a physical institution, this label was coined by later critics to describe a loose group of landscape painters whose work was united by a shared aesthetic philosophy and subject matter. Spearheaded by Thomas Cole in the 1820s, these artists turned away from the dominant European traditions of historical and portrait painting, choosing instead to portray the pristine, untamed wilderness of the American continent. The movement's name originally derived from the artists' frequent depictions of the Hudson River Valley, New York, though their geographic scope quickly expanded to include the White Mountains, the Adirondacks, and eventually the vast territories of the American West.

The fundamental ethos of the Hudson River School was deeply tied to the literary movement of American Romanticism, as well as the contemporary philosophical concept of the "sublime." Coined primarily in European philosophy but enthusiastically adopted by American thinkers, the sublime referred to an awe-inspiring experience of nature that evoked feelings of vastness, power, and overwhelming reverence. For Hudson River School artists, nature was not merely a decorative backdrop or a resource to be exploited; it was a divine manifestation. Their vast canvases featured sweeping vistas, dramatic interplay of light and shadow, and intricate, naturalistic details—from the delicate bark of a birch tree to towering mountain peaks shrouded in storm clouds.

As the United States expanded westward during the 1850s and 1860s, second-generation artists like Frederic Edwin Church and Albert Bierstadt took the movement's principles to grander heights. Church traveled to South America and the Arctic to paint dramatic, massive landscapes, while Bierstadt captured the majestic, untouched beauty of the Rocky Mountains and Yosemite Valley. These colossal paintings were often exhibited individually in theatrical settings, where audiences paid admission to gaze at panoramic views of places they might never visit in person.

Despite its immense popularity, the Hudson River School began to decline toward the end of the nineteenth century. The rise of industrialization rapidly transformed the wild landscapes that had inspired the painters, replacing ancient forests with factories and railways. Furthermore, European artistic trends—most notably French Impressionism—began to gain favor among American collectors, rendering the meticulous realism and moral grandiosity of the Hudson River School seemingly outdated. Nevertheless, the movement left an enduring legacy, leaving behind a rich visual record of the American wilderness and playing a crucial role in shaping early conservationist attitudes that ultimately led to the establishment of the U.S. National Park System.

Questions (1–10)

1. The phrase "coined" in paragraph 1 is closest in meaning to

- (A) purchased
- (B) invented
- (C) discarded
- (D) criticized

2. According to paragraph 1, the Hudson River School was

- (A) an official academy founded in New York
- (B) a formal group of artists focused exclusively on portraiture
- (C) an informal network of landscape painters sharing similar artistic goals
- (D) a European artistic organization that relocated to the American West

3. Why does the author mention "the White Mountains" and "the Adirondacks" in paragraph 1?

- (A) To list regions where Thomas Cole established formal art academies
- (B) To show that the painters' subject matter extended beyond the Hudson River area
- (C) To identify the primary locations where historical paintings were created
- (D) To illustrate areas that were heavily industrialized in the 1820s

4. The word "ethos" in paragraph 2 is closest in meaning to

- (A) location
- (B) financial cost
- (C) core belief
- (D) political victory

5. Which of the following best describes the concept of the "sublime" as used in the passage?

- (A) A meticulous technique used exclusively for painting trees and mountains
- (B) A feeling of awe and reverence inspired by the grandeur and power of nature
- (C) A philosophy that advocated for the rapid industrial development of wilderness
- (D) A preference for portrait painting over expansive landscape art

6. According to paragraph 2, Hudson River School painters viewed nature as

- (A) a divine manifestation
- (B) a threat to national expansion
- (C) a mere background for historical events
- (D) an unlimited resource for economic exploitation

7. According to paragraph 3, how were the large paintings of Bierstadt and Church often displayed?

- (A) In small private homes without public viewing

- (B) As part of permanent exhibitions in European museums
- (C) Individually in theatrical settings with paid admission
- (D) Alongside early French Impressionist works in competitive galleries

8. Which of the following is NOT mentioned in paragraph 4 as a reason for the decline of the Hudson River School?

- (A) The rise of industrialization altering the natural landscape
- (B) A shift in preference toward French Impressionism
- (C) A growing perception that the movement's style was outdated
- (D) A total loss of interest in establishing national parks

9. The word "enduring" in paragraph 4 is closest in meaning to

- (A) short-lived
- (B) lasting
- (C) fragile
- (D) controversial

10. It can be inferred from paragraph 4 that the Hudson River School influenced American society by

- (A) encouraging the destruction of wilderness for economic growth
- (B) leading to a permanent decline in American art appreciation
- (C) helping to foster early environmental and conservationist awareness
- (D) forcing artists to move exclusively to South America and the Arctic