

due 1/20

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Bare Bones Paper on a Work of Artprepared by: *Breon Lott*

Title	<i>Heart of the Andes 1871</i>	Accession No.
Artist	<i>Robert S. Duncanson</i>	
Type of work	<i>Oil Landscape</i>	

Brief Biography of artist:

Robert S. Duncanson (1821-1872) was a freeborn son of slaves. His early years were spent as a genre and portrait painter. Duncanson was a self-taught artist. He started painting landscapes in the early 1840's and within ten years, emerged as a principal landscape artist in the Ohio River Valley. He was influenced by a group of landscape painters known as the Hudson River School. Besides, *Heart of the Andes*, his most ambitious work is *The Land of the Lotus Eaters*. Some art critics believe that Duncanson's work reflects the racial oppression of the time.

Background Information and facts to bring out:

Heart of the Andes (1871), was painted in homage to Frederic Church's painting of the same name. Many of his paintings reflected a "paradisiacal" imagery (soft lavender background, tropical plants). The focus of the painting seems to be the vast landscape. Looking closer, you can see small figures and objects. The lighting is almost mysterious - a small beam on a tree in the foreground.

Formal Qualities (art elements & design principles) observed in the work:

Duncanson used unique coloring to indicate distance in his landscapes (misty lavender tones). His foliage, grasses and leaves, often represented a tropical flavor. In the foreground of his painting, there is a small detailed grouping of people. They are dwarfed in comparison to the natural landscape (trees, mountain, waterfall). The trunks of the trees seem to be animated.

Expressive Qualities felt in the work:

I felt there was a story being told in this painting. It is open to interpretation as to identity and purpose of these people? The soldiers and the American flag on the right foreground are open to many questions. Why were they there? Did they see the small group on the left? Are these figures part of the civil conflict? I saw a contrast between the solid, powerful, peaceful landscape and the drama of the miniature figures.

Questions to ask:

Standing back away from the painting: What kind of art is this?
How do you know that? Where is the light coming from? What is it that you think the artist wants you to see first? What about this picture tells you this?
Standing closer to the painting: What more do you see in this painting? Anything else?
Can you tell me about the figures? Why do you think so? What else do you notice? If you could choose to be in this painting, where would you be? Why?

Using the work in a tour:

Heart of the Andes is a good example of early American landscape painting. It is very important to note the artist is of African American descent and may metaphorically reflect his personal feelings. It is a specific time in American history. It demonstrates the concepts of foreground, middle ground and background. The light source is evident. The painting has a balanced organization.