

## Harn Museum of Art Educator Resources

A guide for using ART to support classroom teaching and Florida  
State Standards in Language Arts, Visual Arts, Science and Social Studies



### Frank Hamilton Taylor *A Trip on the Oklawaha, 1880* Mixed media drawing on paper



## **Historical Background**

During the first half of the 1800s, steamboating had become popular along the St. John's River. In 1860, Hubbard Hart decided to open up the Oklawaha to such travel. He noticed an increase in Northerners coming south to buy land and plant orange trees along river country, and he was determined to introduce the Oklawaha to this traffic. The combined hazards of the Oklawaha including many tortuous turns, the accumulation of stumps, and sunken logs made it inaccessible except to the smallest of water craft, so Hart invested considerable expense to open it up to steamboats from the mouth of the river at Welaka to Silver Springs.

From the 1870s to the 1890s, the steamboat business was booming. Following the Civil War and the subsequent period of Reconstruction, nationally-circulated magazines, newspapers and travel guidebooks featured stories about Florida's unique landscape, amazing river experiences, opportunities for sportsmen as well as the climate's healing qualities for invalids (commonly people suffering from breathing difficulties related to Tuberculosis). At the same time, the U.S. economy recovered and Americans began to have expendable income for tourist travel.

Many of the written accounts of Florida at the time contained a mixture of high-praise and pointed-criticism for the unrefined landscape and the exotic flora and fauna to be found. These appealed to a traveler's sense of adventure and desire for new experiences, even though they came with warnings about the "mosquito-cursed, half-civilized and barren bog hole" environment.

In 1880, former president Ulysses S. Grant re-entered political life and joined the race for the presidential election. His previous two terms had ended in 1877, but his popularity rose again following a world tour he undertook from 1877 to 1879.

During his campaign for the Republican nomination of 1880, Grant visited and toured Florida, Cuba and Mexico. Reporters and artists were included in the trip so that stories and images could be shared with voters through the popular press. One of the highlighted portions of his trip was his journey along the Oklawaha on the Hart Line's "Osceola" steamer. An article in "Harper's Weekly" (February 14, 1880) described the Grant party's delight in the picturesque journey that featured overhanging cypress and palmetto trees, draping moss, thousands of water fowl, and Florida alligators.

## **About the Artist**

Frank Hamilton Taylor was born in New York State in 1846. As a teenager and young adult, he served in the Civil War. Following the war, Taylor settled in Philadelphia and began working as an illustrator and apprentice lithographer in a printing business. By 1878, Taylor was well-established as an illustrator and art-journalist for noted newspapers and magazines such as "The Daily Graphic," "The Public Ledger," "Harper's Weekly," and "The Saturday Evening Post."

In 1880, Taylor received a prestigious assignment by "Harper's Weekly" to serve as their illustrator to accompany former president Ulysses S. Grant during his campaign tour of Florida, Cuba and Mexico. During this tour, Taylor produced many sketches and drawings that were used to create engravings for publication. These drawings, along with many images he created for Philadelphia guidebooks, established Taylor as one of the country's best illustrators.

### **About the Art**

*A Trip on the Oklawaha* is a pen and ink drawing with gouache highlights and a brown wash on paper. It is one of 53 drawings and watercolors in the Harn Museum's collection that was made by Frank Hamilton Taylor during President Grant's campaign tour of Florida, Cuba and Mexico in 1880. All of the drawings reveal Taylor's skill and proficiency as an artist and illustrator, especially considering the time pressure involved in creating and sending images to be printed for press publication.

The drawing measures 12 5/8 inches tall by 9 5/8 inches wide. It pictures the "Osceola" steamer in the midst of the Oklawaha River, with a reflection of the boat and details of natural foliage. Figures can be seen sitting and standing on various levels of the boat. The central figure on the right side of the upper staircase wears a top hat and may represent President Grant. Water hyacinths, cypress knees and palmetto branches appear in the foreground, with tall palms, thick forest and oak trees dripping with moss surrounding the steamer along the shore.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Have you ever visited the rivers or springs around Gainesville and North Florida? What do you see in the picture that reminds you of your experience? What do you see that looks different from your visit?
2. This picture represents a river journey that took place in January. Imagine yourself onboard the Osceola in real life. What does the movement of the boat feel like? What do you notice about the weather? What do you hear or smell? How would you describe your riverboat ride to a friend back home?
3. Think about a place that you have never visited but have heard about and would like to visit? What is it about this place that interests you? Describe what you think it would be like to be there.

### **Resources**

Barbour, George M. and Emmet Peter. Florida for Tourists, Invalids, and Settlers. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964 facsimile reproduction with introduction of 1882 edition.

FDH, "THE TRUTH ABOUT FLORIDA: Not a Paradise for Invalids--A Poor Place." Chicago Daily Tribune, Chicago, Illinois. Jan 31, 1885, pg. 13.

Gustke, Nancy L. The Special Artist in American Culture. New York: Peter Lange Publishing Inc., 1995

Nelson, Wallace Martin. The Economic Development of Florida, 1870-1930. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 1962.

"Steamboats Wrote Colorful History of Oklawaha River." Ocala Star-Banner, Ocala, Florida. June 12, 1955, page 14.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. Palmetto Leaves. Florida, 1872.

### Suggested Lesson: Nature Journal

Creating a Nature Journal will support and advance your students' observation skills and give them practice writing descriptive and informative text about the world around them. It will also create an opportunity to take a nature hike to observe plants and animals and to develop a greater sense of awareness and appreciation for the environment.

#### Make a Journal

A simple journal with 6 interior pages can be made from one sheet of paper. Use additional sheets for more interior pages. (If possible, use  $\frac{1}{2}$  sheet of cardstock for the cover to provide additional writing support in the field.)

1. Cut one 8  $\frac{1}{2}$ " by 11" sheet of paper in half ("hamburger style") to create two 8  $\frac{1}{2}$ " by 5  $\frac{1}{2}$ " sheets.
2. Stack the two smaller sheets together and fold them in half to make a book (4  $\frac{3}{4}$ " by 5  $\frac{1}{2}$ ").
3. Punch two holes along the spine, equal distance apart and from the edges.
4. Open the book up, thread ribbon or string through the holes, and tie them together on the outside of the book.



#### Practice scientific observation and description

1. Take a nature walk with students – the more natural areas of a school campus will provide things to observe.
2. Ask students to find an animal or plant that interests them and write a detailed description of it in their nature journal. Here are some tips to provide:
  - a. Never depend on your memory. Write your observations down at the moment of observation.
  - b. Write down your exact location.
  - c. Imagine that you're writing for someone who isn't with you and needs to understand completely from your description.
  - d. If you don't understand something you observe, don't be afraid to say so in your journal.
3. Have students draw their chosen animal or plant in their journal.
4. Encourage students to find a natural object to attach to a page in their journal – a leaf, feather, blade of grass, etc. Ask students to write a description of how and where they found the object and why they chose to collect it.
5. In a later classroom discussion, have students review their journal entries & assess whether their writing represents description or opinion. Here are some questions to prompt them:
  - a. Are my thoughts on the reasons for behavior based on good evidence? Did I state what the evidence is?
  - b. Would my writing be stronger if I learned more about the plant or animal?
  - c. Where could I go to learn more?