Whose America Emerged?

Art, faith, schools, and books shaped a contested national identity.

SS24.US1.6b "Investigate and share information on the influence of individuals and movements of art, religion, education, and literature on the emergence of a national identity."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each named person or movement. Circle the words that show how that person or movement shaped ideas about what it meant to be American.

Who Shaped the Nation's Story?

1. In the 1830s, visitors to a New York gallery could see Thomas Cole's paintings of dramatic rivers, mountains, and forests. Cole helped launch the Hudson River School, a movement whose artists treated American landscapes as subjects worthy of major art. Their paintings offered viewers a shared image of a nation with scenery unlike Europe's. Yet that image hid a conflict: places shown as empty wilderness were often homelands of Native peoples. The paintings could build pride in the United States while making it easier for viewers to overlook the people already living on the land.

2. At the same time, religious revivals drew crowds across the United States. During the Second Great Awakening, preacher Charles Grandison Finney argued that people could choose to change their lives and improve society. Some revival participants joined the movement to end slavery, connecting national ideals of freedom with demands for action. Others disagreed about which reforms religion required. These debates gave Americans a language for asking whether their country lived up to its promises. The revivals did not create one shared faith. Instead, they made arguments about moral responsibility part of public life.

3. Schools and books also shaped the nation's self-image. In Massachusetts, education reformer Horace Mann promoted tax-supported common schools, arguing that children from different backgrounds should learn together and become informed citizens. Yet access to schooling remained unequal. In 1836, Ralph Waldo Emerson published *Nature*, an essay urging readers to seek fresh insight from the natural world rather than simply copy European traditions. Common schools spread civic lessons, while Emerson's writing invited readers to imagine an original American voice. Neither effort represented everyone: whose experiences counted as American remained a question people contested.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Hudson River School's paintings help build national pride, and whose experiences could that image leave out?

2. How did some participants in the Second Great Awakening connect religious ideas to a debate about the nation?

3. What kind of national community did Horace Mann hope common schools would help create, and what limited that goal?

4. How did Emerson's *Nature* invite readers to think about an American identity distinct from Europe's?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 65 to 85 word letter to a newspaper editor as if you lived in the 1840s. Make a claim about how two influences from different fields in the passage could shape a shared national identity, and explain whose perspective that identity might leave out.

ANSWER KEY

Whose America Emerged?

GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.6b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each named person or movement. Circle the words that show how that person or movement shaped ideas about what it meant to be American. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Hudson River School's paintings help build national pride, and whose experiences could that image leave out?	**The paintings presented American scenery as distinctive and worthy of pride, but images of empty wilderness could hide Native peoples' homelands.**
2	How did some participants in the Second Great Awakening connect religious ideas to a debate about the nation?	**Some joined the movement to end slavery, using ideals of freedom and moral responsibility to question whether the nation kept its promises.**
3	What kind of national community did Horace Mann hope common schools would help create, and what limited that goal?	**Mann hoped children from different backgrounds would learn together and become informed citizens, but access to schooling remained unequal.**
4	How did Emerson's *Nature* invite readers to think about an American identity distinct from Europe's?	**Emerson urged readers to seek fresh insight from nature instead of copying European traditions, suggesting that Americans could develop an original voice.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

To the editor: Our country needs more than a flag to become a nation. Common schools can help children learn to discuss public questions with neighbors whose families differ from their own. Paintings of our rivers and forests can give those neighbors places to recognize as part of a shared home. But we must not call a landscape empty when Native nations live there, or praise common schooling while some children cannot enter its classrooms.

Accept other passage-supported connections between an influence and national identity. For the letter, look for two different fields, a clear claim, and a specific perspective or group that the proposed identity could exclude.