

ART ACROSS THE CURRICULUM | HISTORY

COLONY TO NATION: CHANGES TO AUSTRALIA'S ENVIRONMENT DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

LEVELS 5–6

OVERVIEW

In this resource, students will examine the ways the Australian environment was altered by colonial settlement and European pastoral and agricultural practices during the nineteenth century. Prompted by John Glover's depictions of Van Diemen's Land, students will evaluate the causes and effects of these environmental changes and generate ideas to counter and reverse them. Students will then produce and present an illustrated poster promoting a course of action that could reverse the negative environmental impact of the colonisation and settlement of Australia.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Analyse and interpret ideas about and attitudes towards the Australian environment in John Glover's artworks.
- Identify the causes and effects of significant environmental changes in Australia during the nineteenth century.
- Describe the ways these changes impacted upon the lives of Aboriginal peoples, as well as the native flora and fauna/environment.
- Design and present a poster suggesting courses of action to restore balance to the natural environment.

LINKS TO THE VICTORIAN HISTORY CURRICULUM

Levels 5 & 6

- Describe perspectives and identify ideas, beliefs and values of people and groups in the past (VCHHC084)
- Describe the nature of convict or colonial presence, the factors that influenced changing patterns of development, how the environment changed, and aspects of the daily life of the inhabitants, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (VCHHK089)

ABOUT THE WORKS

1. INTRODUCTION TO JOHN GLOVER

The increased arrival of free settlers from the 1820s onwards saw the colony of Van Diemen's Land (now known as Tasmania) evolve from a brutal penal settlement into an economically sound and vibrant cultural centre. With its pleasant climate, few droughts and floods, and open grassland, Van Diemen's Land seemed pre-prepared for aspiring pastoralists. By 1830, almost a third of the arrivals to Australia settled in the south, and the small island experienced economic prosperity.

One of these free settlers was British artist John Glover (1767–1849). Developing an interest in drawing from nature from an early age, Glover became highly successful as a landscape artist known for his oil paintings and watercolours. As was popular at the time in England, his landscapes are picturesque and idyllic.¹

Glover moved to Australia with his wife and son in 1831. He arrived in Van Diemen's Land on his 64th birthday and settled in Patterdale, south of Launceston. Upon their arrival, the trio were reunited with two of Glover's other sons who had previously immigrated. He received many commissions within the colony and was able to send work back to London for exhibition and sale. He died at Patterdale in 1849.²

1.1 ***THE RIVER NILE, VAN DIEMEN'S LAND, FROM MR GLOVER'S FARM, 1837***

John GLOVER
The River Nile, Van Diemen's Land, from Mr Glover's farm 1837
oil on canvas
76.4 × 114.6 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1956



John Glover was fascinated with the Tasmanian landscape. He observed it very closely, recording detailed impressions with his paintbrush and paint palette. The style reflects the traditional, idealised aesthetic of his background; while he visually documented the landscape as he saw it, some elements are also exaggerated and constructed. This might have been to venerate its natural splendour or to evoke feeling and emotion in his artwork.

The River Nile, Van Diemen's Land, from Mr Glover's farm, 1837, is based on the view from John Glover's farm. The scene is picturesque and pristine, featuring Tasmanian Aboriginal people enjoying an idyllic life in harmony with nature. When he painted this work, Glover's aim might have been to record a rare and vanishing way of life since the reality for Tasmanian Aboriginal people was very different. Encounters between early colonisers and the original inhabitants of Tasmania were often characterised by violent conflict.³ Since colonial settlement the Aboriginal population had decreased significantly.⁴

1.2 JOHN GLOVER, *MOULTING LAGOON AND GREAT OYSTER BAY, FROM PINE HILL, C. 1838*

John GLOVER

Moulting Lagoon and Great Oyster Bay, from Pine Hill
(c. 1838)

oil on canvas on canvas
75.6 × 113.0 cm irreg. (image)
77.4 × 114.8 cm (canvas)
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne
Purchased with assistance of
an anonymous donor and the
M. G. Chapman Bequest, 2011



Moulting Lagoon and Great Oyster Bay, from Pine Hill, c. 1838, presents the view south from the head of Moulting Lagoon, looking past Great Swanport down Great Oyster Bay on the east coast of Tasmania. It corresponds to that from the top of Pine Hill, the highest point above Apsley Marsh, a property which was owned by John Lyne, one of the first settlers in the district.⁵ A man, possibly one of Lyne's shepherds, stands atop a lush knoll overlooking fertile pastures dotted with flocks of grazing sheep. With a commanding posture, staff in one hand, and a loyal dog at his side, he appears to be the master of a seemingly endless landscape void of any native fauna or people.

When this landscape was painted in the 1830s, the wool industry was beginning to dominate the local agricultural economy. So, John Glover could have painted this work to document the history of the settlement of Van Diemen's Land. However, artists at the time would often change, exaggerate or enhance the visible world in their paintings. Glover was no exception to this temptation and has made significant changes to the landscape. He exaggerated the size of Mt Freycenet and the Hazards, compressed the spread of Oyster Bay and eliminated the Apsley Marsh which enabled him to render Moulting Lagoon clear and blue in colour.⁶

WARM UP



IN SCHOOL

2. CHANGES TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

For centuries, human activity has influenced, shaped, changed and impacted the natural environment. As a class, think about the way we live our lives in contemporary Australia and brainstorm some responses to the following questions:

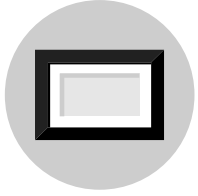
- What are some common changes humans make to the environment?
- What are the benefits of these changes?
- What are the disadvantages?

Now, imagine living in Australia in the mid-1800s. This was a time when many free settlers began occupying vast areas of natural landscape populated with many species of native plants and animals, and home to Indigenous communities. Upon the land, they established large properties and estates to facilitate European agricultural practices as well as sheep and cattle grazing.

- What kinds of changes to the environment do you think would have happened then?
- How may have they impacted the land, flora, fauna and people of Australia?

Make a list of your answers to refer to in the final project.

ACTIVITY



IN THE GALLERY



IN SCHOOL

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

This activity invites students to consider how artist John Glover depicted scenes of the Tasmanian landscape and documented changes to the environment in two paintings created between 1837 and 1838; *The River Nile, Van Diemen's Land, from Mr Glover's farm* and *Moulting Lagoon and Great Oyster Bay, from Pine Hill*.

3.1 THE RIVER NILE, VAN DIEMEN'S LAND, FROM MR GLOVER'S FARM

Begin by looking at *The River Nile, Van Diemen's Land, from Mr Glover's farm* and list as many things that you can see as possible. Nominate a scribe to keep a written list of the things the group observes.

Next, make a list of adjectives to describe the environment in the painting. You can choose to describe the vegetation in the foreground, what you can see in the distance, the climate, the overall mood or feeling in the painting etc. While the scribe keeps track of the words, invite students to explain why they chose to describe the environment in this way.

Now, imagine John Glover painted this scene to advertise what life in the colony of Van Diemen's Land is like to people still living in England. If you were someone living in a crowded and smoggy English town in 1837 and you saw this painting:

- What would you think?
- Would you want to make the voyage as a free settler to Van Diemen's Land? Why or why not?
- Would you believe this painting to be a true and honest representation of the environment? Why or why not?

3.2 MOULTING LAGOON AND GREAT OYSTER BAY, FROM PINE HILL

Move on to look at *Moulting Lagoon and Great Oyster Bay, from Pine Hill*, noting the date the painting was made (approximately one year after *The River Nile, Van Diemen's Land, from Mr Glover's farm* was painted).

Again, make a list of things that you can see in this painting, nominating a new scribe to take note of the observations made. Follow these observations with a list of adjectives to describe the environment depicted in the painting. Keep a list of these words and encourage students to explain their answers.

Now, imagine you are that same person living in that same crowded, smoggy English town, who – after seeing John Glover’s previous painting of Van Diemen’s Land – decided to stay in England. Looking at *Moulting Lagoon and Great Oyster Bay, from Pine Hill*:

- What differences in the landscape do you notice, when you compare it to that in the previous painting?
- Why do you think those changes might have occurred?
- What might entice you to go to Van Diemen’s Land this time around? Explain your answer.

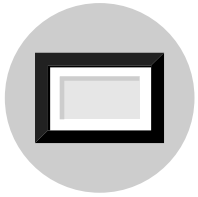
3.3 SETTLING IN VAN DIEMEN’S LAND

Finally, imagine after seeing both of these paintings by John Glover, you decided to pack up your belongings, sell your house, collect the entirety of your wealth from the bank and leave your crowded and smoggy hometown in England to become a free settler in Van Diemen’s land. Being pretty well off, you manage to secure a large portion of land on which you decide to build a homestead, grow your favourite English trees, flowering plants and vegetables and farm sheep and cattle.

- Draw a picture of your pocket of land in Van Diemen’s Land five years into establishment, thinking about how the development of your property might have affected the landscape.
- When you have finished, place your drawing in a cluster of four-five other drawings.
- If each drawing was an actual real-life property, what impacts would this amass of farms have on the environment? Discuss this with the other students in your group.

ACTIVITY

4. CAUSE AND EFFECT



IN THE GALLERY



IN SCHOOL

The two paintings by John Glover in this resource show how the environment in Australia was beginning to change in the early to mid-19th century. The farming practices of free settlers and the animals they brought from overseas transformed the Australian environment.

The printable worksheet overleaf details some of the causes and effects of change in the environment but is incomplete. Look to the clues in the artworks to help you fill in the gaps below, then add some more of your own.

CHANGES IN THE ENVIRONMENT	EFFECT
The hunting dogs that lived on the properties of free settlers to protect introduced farm animals fed on native fauna such as kangaroos.	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>	Many Aboriginal communities were forced off their traditional homelands.
The free settlers that arrived in Australia after 1820 were very ambitious and keen to expand their wealth through farming practices.	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
Flocks of sheep grazed near creeks and rivers which supplied water to Indigenous communities. When sheep drank from the creeks and rivers they fouled the water with dung and eroded the riverbeds.	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>	Many Aboriginal people became incredibly sick and died due to their lack of immunity.
Native plants were cleared to make way for introduced species of flora.	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
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PROJECT



IN SCHOOL

5. POSTER DESIGN: A PROPOSAL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION

Reflecting upon their investigation of depictions of the Australian landscape, students will design, produce and present an illustrated poster displaying at least one course of action that could reverse the negative impacts of colonial settlement on the natural environment.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

Refer to the list of environmental changes you made in the warm up activity and to the chart you completed in Activity 4.

Choose one change which you feel passionate about to be the focus of your poster.

PLANNING THE SOLUTION

Now that you've narrowed down your list it's time to think about:

1. What negative impacts the change has had on the environment
2. What the restoration of the environmental impact might look like
3. What courses of action might reverse the negative impacts they made on the land, flora, fauna, and people affected

You can organise your thoughts and ideas in a table like this, using the suggestion below as an example:

Environmental Change	1. IMPACTS	2. RESTORATION	3. POSSIBLE ACTIONS
Clearing of the land for agriculture and farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removal of native plants.• Land becoming dry in drought.• Destruction of native food sources and habitats for animals.• Displacement of Aboriginal communities – resulting in disconnection to land and Country, spiritual loss, poor health, loss of culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regeneration of native flora.• Seeing native birds and animals return to the area.• Aboriginal people reconnecting to their Country.• Introduction of Aboriginal practices for caring for land and cultivating crops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invite local Aboriginal people to share traditional land management knowledge.• Set up Indigenous/non-indigenous community farms.• Create gardens for native plants on farms.• Community food fairs, festivals and events that involve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal growers.

DESIGNING AND PRODUCING YOUR POSTER

Now think about how you are going to communicate your ideas for environmental restoration on your poster. You'll need to consider:

- A title or heading for your poster
- How you will use words
- What images you might use to illustrate your ideas
- Whether you will use charts or diagrams to communicate the processes involved in your plans to bring restoration to the environment

When you're ready, draw a sketch or plan of your poster before producing your final presentation.

PRESENT YOUR PROPOSAL FOR RESTORATION

Present your project to your classmates, explaining the following elements:

- The environmental change you chose to focus on
- Your suggested course of action to restore balance to the environment
- How you aimed to communicate this effectively with words, images and/or diagrams in your work
- Why you believe it's important to address and reverse the negative environmental impacts explored in your poster

NOTES

1. Robert Nelson, 'John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque', 2004, *The age*, <https://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/john-glover-and-the-colonial-picturesque-20040818-gdyh1l.html>, accessed July 31 2020.
2. National Gallery of Victoria, *Australia Speaks* resource.
3. National Gallery of Victoria and Victorian Association for Teaching of English, 'VCE English Contexts; Innovative ideas for using artworks in the NGV collection as a resource', 2014, *National Gallery of Victoria*, p. 4, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NGV-English-Contexts.pdf>, accessed July 20 2020.
4. National Gallery of Victoria, 'Watch John Glover: An English Artist Painting Australia Curator Talk', NGV, Victorian Government, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/multimedia/john-glover-the-artist/>, accessed 20 July 2020.
5. David Hansen, Important Australian Art, Lot 45, John Glover, British, Moulting Lagoon and Great Oyster Bay, From Pine Hill, 2020, *Sotheby's*, <<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2008/important-australian-art-au0722/lot.45.html>>, accessed July 20 2020.
6. *ibid.*

FURTHER RESOURCES

Cathy Leahy & Judith Ryan (eds), *Colony Australia 1770–1861 / Frontier Wars*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2018, p. 60.

National Gallery of Victoria, 'Colony to Nation', 2020, NGV, Victorian Government, https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/school_resource/colony-to-nation

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