

### Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California, 1865 by Albert Bierstadt [1830 -1902]

1. Where do you see trees reflected in water?
2. Describe the texture of the rocks.
3. Write three or four words that you think of when you first see this painting. Write each word down. Explain what made you think of this word.
4. How many times are words that refer to size and grandeur mentioned?
5. If a person were standing in the middle of this scene, about how large would he or she seem? Compare a six-foot tall person to one of the trees; imagine how this person would feel in comparison to these mountains. How might he or she describe this scene?
6. How has Bierstadt created an illusion of great distance or depth?
7. What did you see first when you look at this painting?
8. How does this light add to the drama of this scene?
9. On a map, locate Yosemite National Park. Locate and compare photographs of Yosemite Valley with Bierstadt's painting to understand how he exaggerated the size of the rock formations.
10. Is the sun in the painting rising or setting in this painting?
11. Consult a map for the orientation of the rock formations—in the painting Cathedral Spires and Sentinel Rock are on the left and El Capitán is on the right.
12. Bierstadt painted some of the rock formations in this painting taller than they really were. Do you think this exaggeration was dishonest?
13. Explain why you do or do not believe that it is all right for an artist to exaggerate features in a scene like this.
14. In addition to exaggerating the size of the rocks, how else did Bierstadt make the West seem even grander than it was?
15. What national event America was recovering from in 1865, when this scene was painted?
16. Why did a scene like this offer hope to Americans?
17. Explain the role Bierstadt's paintings played in the development of tourism to the West.

**Historical Connections:** conservation movement; national parks; Westward Expansion

**Historical Figures:** Theodore Roosevelt; John Muir

**Geography:** Yosemite Valley; Sierra Nevada

**Science:** ecology; conservation; geology

**Literary Connections and Primary**

**Documents:** *Nature*, Ralph Waldo Emerson; *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, John Muir

**Arts:** Hudson River School; compare with the works of Frederic Church