

**Curriculum for “Allen True’s West”  
On exhibit February 4, 2011 - May 15, 2011**



**The Golden Age of Illustration**

From the late 19th century until World War II, America experienced the Golden Age of Illustration, a period of extraordinary production of images for newspapers, magazines and books. Although illustrated writings have existed for thousands of years, for most of that time images were one of a kind, drawn or painted directly into a manuscript. With the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, books could be illustrated with black-and-white images, translated from artists’ original paintings or drawings by an engraver into graphic and printable images.



*Portrait of the Artist  
Allen True  
Photograph  
1908*

Following the Civil War, demand for reading material began to rise in the United States, in part due to the introduction of public education, which greatly reduced illiteracy. In fact, literacy rates before 1900 surpass those at any other time in American history. The rise in public libraries and a growing amount of leisure time for Americans came as new printing and reproduction techniques were being developed that changed the publishing industry dramatically. High-speed power presses, inexpensive pulp-based paper and – beginning about 1900 – the ability to directly reproduce paintings and drawings as photo-mechanical images saved time and money for publishers who could then produce books and magazines cheaply for mass consumption. That consumption was encouraged by the wealth of great images as books and magazines provided a prime source of entertainment.

Publishers paid impressive fees in order to secure images from major artist-illustrators, including N.C. Wyeth, Maynard Dixon, Dean Cornwell, Harvey Dunn, Charles M. Russell, Frederic Remington, Frank Tenney Johnson and Allen True. Many American painters began as illustrators, the commissions they received offering security often unavailable in the unpredictable world of fine art sales galleries. So critical were great images to popular publications that some artists established schools specifically to train illustrators.

By the 1930s, competition, such as the motion picture industry, was eroding the hold that illustrated publications had on the public. Also, the rise in colorful, but relentless advertising imagery lessened the public’s appreciation for the work of illustrators and graphic artists.

**Allen True and American Illustration**

Allen True was raised and educated in Denver and gained profound inspiration from his Western roots. In his early 20s, he discovered a penchant for art and his family enrolled him in the country’s most eminent academy for budding illustrators, Howard Pyle’s school in Wilmington, Delaware.



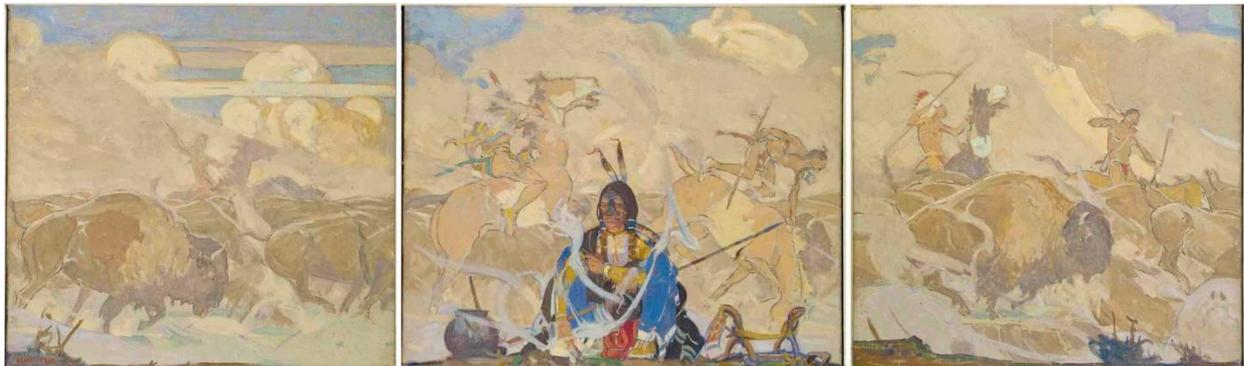
*The Mountain Pony  
Illustration and article  
1908*

Pyle had a dozen students in 1902, the year True joined his class. He instructed them to view their world as stories and to make every effort to live the scenes they painted. True dreamed of recording the West in his art, especially his beloved Colorado and its people. His most successful illustrations were those that pictured scenes from the Rocky Mountains, particularly those that illustrated stories that he also wrote like “The Teaming of the West” and “The Mountain Pony.”

During the first decade of the 20th century, True illustrated many magazine articles and books. His mature illustrations, such as those produced for “The Mountain Pony” in *Outing Magazine*, combine man, horse and wilderness into one universal, symbolic whole. True rose in the ranks of his peers to become one of the great pictorial chroniclers in America’s golden age of illustration.

### **The Muralist**

During the artist’s longest creative period, spanning the years from 1914 to the early 1950s, True’s work as a muralist was highly respected and extremely varied. The artist had the good fortune to study in England with British muralist Frank Brangwyn, and later worked on several of Brangwyn’s public projects, including the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. Eventually True received many important public commissions of his own ranging from the stunning series called *Indian Memories* for the Colorado National Bank, several branches of the Denver Public Library and the state capitols of Colorado, Wyoming and Missouri.

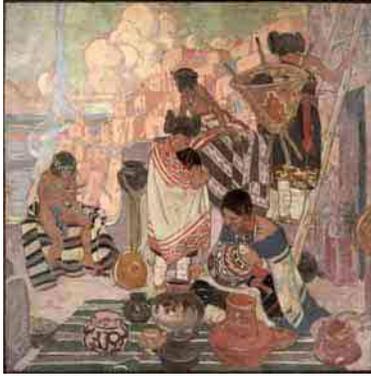


*Buffalo Hunt, Three Studies for the Colorado National Bank “Indian Memories”*  
oil on canvas  
1921

### **The Fine Artist**

Allen True was a complex artistic personality. Hardly had he begun to achieve success and national recognition as an illustrator than he embarked on a dream to find notice as an easel painter, too.

As early as 1912, True began to show his fine art works publically. In Denver his new paintings were received enthusiastically. Critics felt that he was a local master and that his canvases were representative of a quintessentially American form of art. His paintings were enjoyed and critiqued from Los Angeles to Cincinnati. He was considered technically advanced for his years. His art, according to one authority, was unique, possessed of a “freedom and happy abandon rarely seen in American art.”



*The Hopi Potter*  
oil on canvas  
1916

By the middle of the decade, True began to separate himself from Brangwyn's influence. He changed his style to a softer palette and sought out themes from the Southwest, especially New Mexico. *The Hopi Potter* is exemplary of his aspirations to present, in a quiet, pastoral way, "something of the Spirit" of the Indian people as well as pioneers and backwoods adventures.

True's love of the West remained the basis of his artistic commitment and philosophy throughout his career. Although his training took place on the east coast of the United States and in Europe, his subject matter reflected the American West in fact, spirit and myth.

Source: Denver Art Museum

### Activity Ideas

**Art/Language Arts**—Option 1: Have students design and illustrate a mural on a long blank wall or use canvas or butcher paper for a more mobile version. Map out the general outline of the drawings then have students in groups or individually fill in the mural design. Themes can be chosen based on any subject matter. Students can create a visual timeline of significant discoveries in a particular field of study from the first landmark to the most current. Or, have students create a mural of their life so far, as well as visualizing what they hope to occur in the future.

Option 2: Create illustrations of scenes from recently read books (or refer to the book list available online for the exhibit "**To Picture the Words: Illustrators of the American West.**") Display and discuss some of the illustrations. What does this picture make you think about? What happened prior to this moment in time? What might happen next? Did the artist create a sense of mystery? How did they draw your attention to specific parts of the illustration?

Option 3: For younger students, create an alphabet book. Assign each student a letter of the alphabet. Ask children to think of a word that begins with each letter, starting with A. Say a few words that begin with the letter to help them to hear the first letter sound—apple, alligator and ant—then have students illustrate their letter with appropriate images. Create a front and back cover and bind the pages together to create a finished book.