

The Treaty Trail:
U. S. - Indian Treaty Councils in the Northwest



This image of Toowe-tak-hes (also known as Chief Joseph) was created by Gustav Sohon on May 29, 1855.

Courtesy Washington State Historical Society.

RESPONDING TO ART AS A PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHEET

Observe and describe:
Create an inventory of what you see...

Who and what is in the picture? List characteristics of facial features, gender, skin, hair style, hat, clothing, jewelry, objects...

Tuekakas (also known as Chief Joseph) is wearing his hair in two long braids with no hat. His shirt is collared and of Euro-American origin.

Which art elements did the artist use to create the picture? List colors, lines, shapes, space, textures, values...

This picture was done in a monochromatic value. The lines of the picture are flowing and appear to travel from the artist's hand as one continuous thought. The figure itself is the only one in the drawing and in the center of the page.

Is the picture a photograph, a painting, a drawing?

This picture is a pencil sketch.

List any words or numbers on the picture...Is there a signature by the artist who made it?

Gustav Sohon signed in the bottom of the picture and dated it May 29, 1855. Underneath Tuekakas is written "Joseph Toowe-tak-hes, Chief of the Nez perce Indians".

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Question and analyze:

Investigate what you see by examining the details...

Consider the artist's choices in making the art...

How has the artist used art elements (line, shape, texture, value) to communicate information about the person's identity?

Sohon has centered the person in the drawing to draw attention to him. Most of the detail centers around the face, with harsh lines around eyes and mouth revealing a wary or cautious demeanor. The shirt he wears is sketched with less detail, drawing attention to his face and hair.

Where do you see the most detail in the picture?

Is the picture realistic?

Most of the detail in the drawing is in Tuekakas' face. It also shows a very distinctive fold of hair on his head, the meaning of which isn't clear. The picture seems to be a realistic depiction of what he may have actually looked like.

Where and how does the artist create emphasis or draw attention to parts of the portrait?

Sohon created emphasis in this picture by placing the figure in the foreground center. He drew attention to certain aspects of Tuekakas' image by using detail and shading to show both age and character.

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Use observations and clues to develop a historical interpretation of the art:
What is the artist communicating about time, place, and the interaction of cultures?

What does this portrait communicate about the identity of the person it depicts: What status or role did the person have? What emotions or character traits are expressed? Use descriptive words, details, and ideas about the artist's choices documented on this worksheet as evidence to support your interpretation.

Joseph is labeled as "Chief of the Nez Perce". He looks cautious and on edge from the way that the artist has portrayed his furrowed eyebrows and unsmiling expression.

In thinking about the greater context (time and place) of 1855 Washington Territory History, why do you think this portrait was made?

The pictures drawn by Sohon were used as part of Isaac Stevens' final report of explorations. Stevens intended to give an account of his treaty explorations in the future and planned to use these dramatic illustrations to enhance his narrative. This account was not written, however, as Stevens perished during a battle in the Civil War.

Who might look at the portrait at the time it was made?

These portraits were probably looked at by the U.S. government during reports made by Governor Stevens. They may also have been used as examples of what Euro-Americans perceived as "Northwest Chiefs" or leaders of the many tribes in Washington.

Is there evidence of the interaction of cultures during this time period seen in this portrait? Look at articles of clothing, objects, or jewelry and think about their source. Describe.

Yes. The shirt worn by Tuekakas shows evidence of interaction between Euro-American and Native cultures. The collar on it as well as the material (which looks as if it may have been linen of some kind) displays clothing styles similar to those worn by settlers. Another example of interaction may be found in the caption at the bottom of the portrait, referring to Tuekakas as "Joseph", a name which he was given by Euro-Americans.