

Walter Ellison



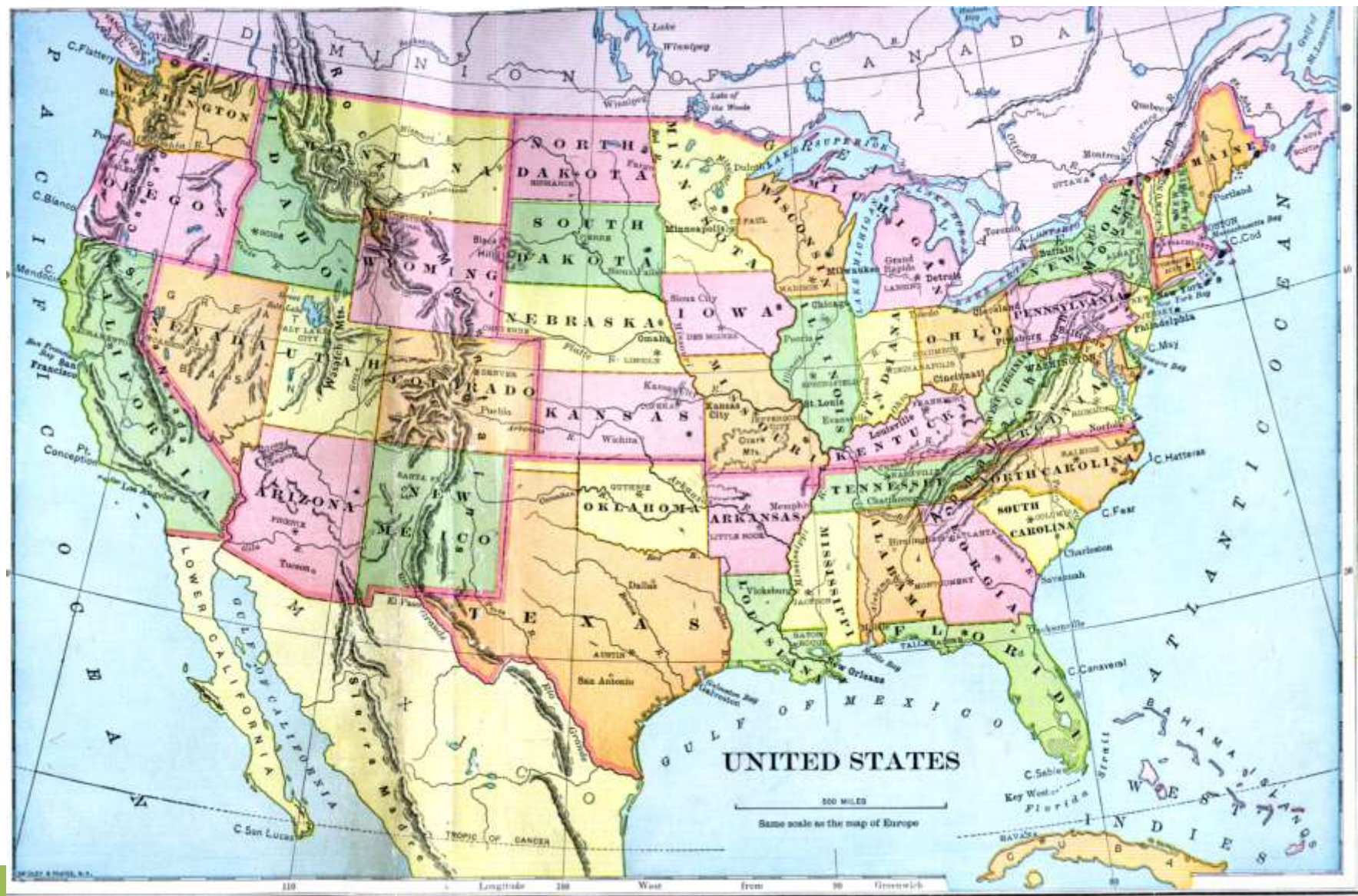
TRAIN STATION

Art Awareness Program
First Grade

Walter Ellison was an American painter, born in 1899 in the state of Georgia.

That was over 100 years ago. What was life like in 1899? It was very different from our life now!

This is a map of the United States from 1897, just two years before Walter Ellison was born. Can you find Georgia on the map? Can anyone tell me what part of the country it is in (North, South, East or West?)



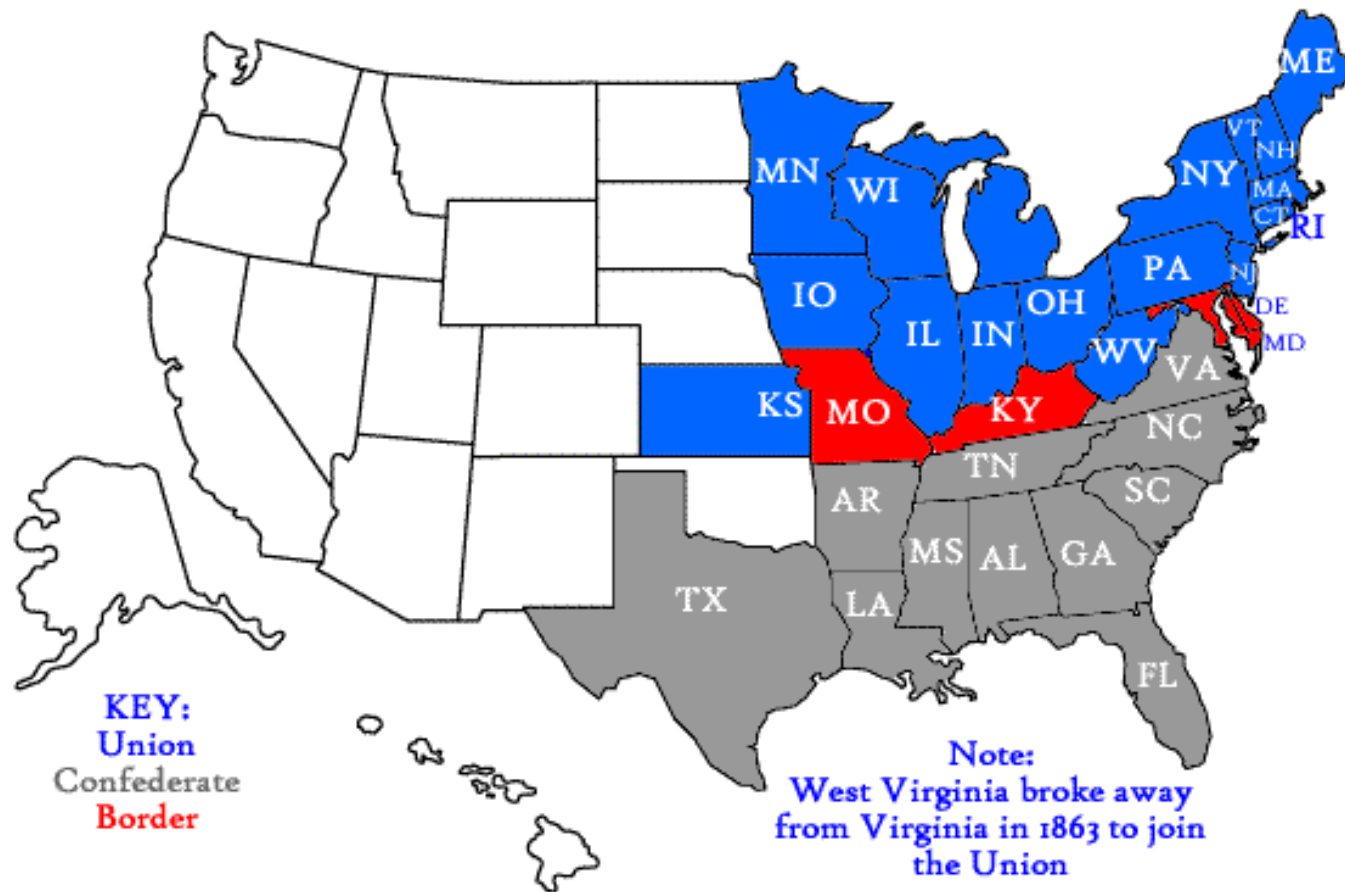
Georgia was in the southern United States. The North (called the Union, and led by Abraham Lincoln) and the South (called the Confederacy and led by Jefferson Davis) had just fought a very long and bloody battle. Does anyone know what war that was? Does anyone know who won?



Abraham Lincoln



Jefferson Davis



The war was the Civil War, and although it only lasted four years, it caused a lot of death and destruction – especially in the south. When the war ended, the North won, and slavery in the south ended. But, life in the south was very hard for African-Americans.

Although the war, and slavery, ended in 1865, there were still many problems for African Americans at the turn of the century. Many people in the south didn't want African Americans to have equal rights, a good education, or even a job. Life was hard for them.



Many African Americans left the South and moved North in search of better opportunities.



When Walter was a teenager, another war started in Europe. The United States entered this war in 1917, when Walter was 18 years old. This was World War I.



During the years of the war, which lasted (in Europe) from 1914-1918, immigration from Europe virtually stopped. That means that people couldn't come from Europe to the United States because of the war. Immigrants from Europe used to come and work in a lot of the factories in the United States. What do you think happened when they stopped coming?

This was the start of the Great Migration. Between 1916 and 1970, seven MILLION African Americans left the South and moved North. In fact, 500,000 of them moved to Chicago, which had a lot of jobs for them.



Walter Ellison was one of these African Americans, who boarded a train north to Chicago in search of education and jobs. He studied at the Art Institute, and started painting. He became involved in his community and in the struggle for Civil Rights.

Let's look
at some of
his
paintings



Lincoln and Washington, 1928 (Walter Ellison)



Til We Meet Again, 1935
Oil and sand on cardboard
Walter Ellison

This one was done on cardboard, instead of canvas. Why do you think that was? What do you think the title means?



What a Man, color monotype (print) 1930
Walter Ellison

He not only painted, he created prints as well, often focusing on African Americans.



Bronzeville, 1940
Oil
Walter Ellison



This is his most famous painting, which is in the Art Institute of Chicago. It's called "Train Station."



The painting is divided into different sections; do you see how? The sections together make up a letter of the alphabet. Can you see what letter? I'll give you a hint: think of Walter Ellison's name.



Look at the two outside sections. To where are the passengers on the right side heading? What about the passengers on the left side? How are the passengers different?



The white passengers in this painting are headed south toward Miami for vacations. How are they dressed? Where is Miami? Why do you think Miami is a popular vacation spot?



The African American passengers are headed north in search of more freedom and better paying jobs. How are they dressed? How is this different from the white passengers? How do you think each set of passengers is feeling about their journey?



What kinds of jobs you think were available in Chicago for the African American passengers? Are these jobs still needed today? Do you think that they paid well?



Who are the people in the orange uniforms?
Which passengers are they helping?



Some people think that this train station is the same one in Macon, Georgia where Walter Ellison boarded a train heading north to Chicago.



You can see the original painting “Train Station” at the Art Institute of Chicago.



People are drawn to it because it captures the struggles of African American families so vividly. Walter Ellison tells us a story, without using any words.

Walter Ellison died in 1977, but the struggle for equality for all people continues today.

Artists like Ellison can be part of that struggle, by helping people – through their art - understand what life is like for different groups of people.