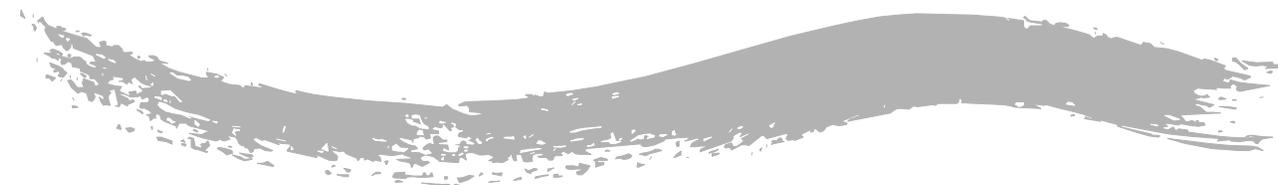


# Impressionism

## Paintings Collected by European Museums

### A Resource Packet for Educators

The High Museum of Art  
The Seattle Art Museum  
The Denver Art Museum



#### Acknowledgements

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#### **High Museum of Art, Atlanta**

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*We regret the omission of sponsors confirmed after December 31, 1998.*

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## About the Packet

This packet introduces you to Impressionist painting and provides tools for curriculum design. The resources will be useful whether you have an hour or a week to devote to Impressionism. You are encouraged to share the curriculum ideas with other teachers.

### What the Packet Includes

#### 1. Introduction to the Major Themes of Impressionism

The introduction provides a discussion of Impressionism, its development, and its historical context in general terms. Also highlighted are six major themes:

- *Radicalism of Impressionism: “Trees are Not Violet; The Sky is Not Butter!”* Although it may be difficult to imagine now, the new style of painting was considered radical and even offensive at first to some people.
- *The Painting of Modern and Real Life Subjects.* The Impressionists liked to paint scenes of everyday life: contemporary people at work and play.
- *Busy City and Quiet Countryside Settings.* The Impressionists often painted people in city and country settings.
- *En Plein Air and “The Painter of the Passing Moment.”* Most Impressionists chose to paint *en plein air*, or outdoors, instead of, or in addition to, painting in their studios. They liked to capture their subjects in the middle of quiet, contemplative moments.
- *Optical Innovations: Images of “Magical Instantaneity.”* Many scientific and color theory innovations of the late 19th century enabled the impressionists to experiment in the ways that they did.

- *Collecting Impressionism: “Something Solid and Durable.”* Impressionist paintings have become increasingly popular over the years.

#### 2. Introduction to the Premise of the Exhibition

This section provides general information about the premise of the exhibition *Impressionism: Paintings Collected by European Museums*. The provenance, or history of a painting’s ownership, is explored in the exhibition and in this introduction.

#### 3. Nine Overhead Color Transparencies

These transparencies represent nine of the works included in the exhibition. Each image illustrates the various themes found within the exhibition and can help prepare students to participate in activities and discussions. Use these transparencies on an overhead projector or as posters by placing a white piece of paper on the reverse side.

#### 4. Information, Looking Questions, and Activities that Correspond to the Color Transparencies

- *Information* for each image represented in a transparency is provided for quick reference about the artist, style, and subject.
- *Looking Questions* enrich the student’s consideration of a painting by encouraging discussion and careful looking. Some questions also reinforce the themes of radicalism, the depiction of modern and real life, city and country settings, *en plein air* painting, and optical innovations. Your students may generate diverse answers to the looking questions.  
The looking questions are a starting point for teachers to facilitate the student’s close viewing. The questions may be expanded to be more...

- *interpretive* – “What do you think the artist’s intent was in...?”
- *comparative* - similarities and differences between paintings...
- *hypothetical* – “What if...?”
- *Suggested Activities* engage students in various experiences relating to Impressionism. Additionally, these activities will help cultivate learning skills that involve the arts, math, science, language arts, and social studies. You can develop these activities further according to the level and needs of your students. We urge you to share the interdisciplinary curriculum activities in this packet with teachers of other subject areas.

## About Impressionism

### Radicalism of Impressionism: “Trees are Not Violet; The Sky is Not Butter!”

In 1874, fifty-five artists held the first independent group show of Impressionist art. Most of them - including Cézanne, Pissarro, Renoir, Degas, Monet, Manet, and his sister-in-law Berthe Morisot (“a bunch of lunatics and a woman,” muttered one observer) - had been rejected by the **Salon**, the annual French state-sponsored exhibition that offered the only real opportunity for artists to display and sell their work. Never mind, they told each other. At the **Salon**, paintings were stacked three or four high, and crowded too closely together on the walls. At their independent exhibition, mounted in what was formerly a photographer’s studio, the artists could hang their works at eye level with space between them. Although the artists didn’t call themselves “Impressionists” at first, this occasion would be the first of eight such “Impressionist” exhibits over the next twelve years.

## 5. Glossary

Printed in bold text throughout the packet are important terms for understanding Impressionism and the culture in which it existed. For definitions, please refer to the glossary at the back of the packet.

## 6. Resources

The books, videos, and other resources for teachers and students provide for further investigation of Impressionism, the artists, art history, and world events.

An outraged critic, Louis Leroy, coined the label “Impressionist.” He looked at Monet’s *Impression Sunrise*, the artist’s sensory response to a harbor at dawn, painted with sketchy brushstrokes. “Impression!” the journalist snorted. “Wallpaper in its embryonic state is more finished!” Within a year, the name Impressionism was an accepted term in the art world.

If the name was accepted, the art itself was not. “Try to make Monsieur Pissarro understand that trees are not violet; that the sky is not the color of fresh butter...and that no sensible human being could countenance such aberrations...try to explain to Monsieur Renoir that a woman’s torso is not a mass of decomposing flesh with those purplish-green stains,” wrote art critic Albert Wolff after the second Impressionist exhibition. Although some people appreciated the new paintings, many did not. The critics and the public agreed the Impressionists couldn’t draw and their colors were considered vulgar. Their **compositions** were strange. Their short, slapdash brushstrokes made their paintings practically illegible. Why didn’t these artists take the time to finish their canvases, viewers wondered?

Indeed, Impressionism broke every rule of the **French Academy of Fine Arts**, the conservative school that had dominated art training and taste since 1648. Impressionist scenes of modern urban and country life were

a far cry from the **Academic** efforts to teach moral lessons through historic, mythological, and Biblical themes. This tradition, drawn from ancient Greek and Roman art, featured idealized images. Symmetrical compositions, hard outlines, and meticulously smooth paint surfaces characterized academic paintings.

Despite the Academy's power, seeds of artistic and political unrest had been sown long before 1874. The early- and mid-19th century was a time of political instability in France. Between 1830 and 1850, the population of Paris doubled. During the Revolution of 1848, Parisian workers with socialist goals overthrew the monarchy, only to see conservatives seize the reins of government later that year. Fear of further uprisings created widespread distrust among the aristocracy, the poor, and the newly prosperous bourgeoisie or middle class.

At the same time, the far-reaching Industrial Revolution fostered a new faith in the individual and his unlimited potential. Romantic painters such as Eugène Delacroix began to celebrate individuality in terms of painting technique with warm colors and vigorous brush- strokes. Delacroix's journals would later provide ideas about color theory and painting techniques to the Impressionists. Later in the 19th century, **Barbizon School** painters Corot, Millet, and Rousseau abandoned classical studio themes to go outside and paint the landscape around them. Realist Gustave Courbet, a mentor to several Impressionists, painted the rural poor just as he saw them. His rough-textured technique displeased the Academy.

The Impressionists, or "Independents," as they preferred to be called, brought together a wide variety of these influences, beliefs, and styles when they first exhibited and met in Paris cafés to discuss art. Their rejection of the Academy and the Academy's rejection of them united the group.

## **The Painting of Modern Life and Real Life Subjects**

The sturdiest thread linking the Impressionists was an interest in the world around them. For subject matter, they looked to contemporary people at work and play. Inventions such as the steam engine, power loom, streetlights, camera, ready-made fashions, cast iron, and steel had changed the lives of ordinary people. Underlying the Industrial Revolution was a belief that technological progress was key to all human progress. In this climate of discovery, people felt they could do anything.

The Industrial Revolution brought economic prosperity to France, and Emperor Napoleon III set out to make Paris the showpiece of Europe. He hired civic planner Baron Hausmann, Prefect of the Seine, to replace the dirty, old medieval city with wide boulevards, parks, and monuments. The new steel-ribbed railroad stations and bridges were feats of modern engineering. Cafés, restaurants, and theaters lured the bourgeoisie, the powerful new merchant class who had made their homes in and around Paris.

## **Busy City and Quiet Countryside Settings**

Most Impressionists were born in the bourgeoisie class, and this was the world they painted. "Make us see and understand, with brush or with pencil, how great and poetic we are in our cravats and our leather boots," the poet Charles Baudelaire challenged his friend Édouard Manet. Baudelaire's essay, *The Painter of Modern Life*, inspired other Impressionists to portray real life themes, too. Degas prowled behind the scenes of the opera and ballet for his subjects. Monet immortalized Paris railroad stations. Nearly all the Impressionist artists painted people hurrying through busy streets and enjoying their leisure time on the boulevard, at the racetrack, in café-concerts, shops, restaurants, and parks.

However, it was not just city bustle that intrigued the Impressionists. Country themes appealed to them, too. Railroads gave people a new mobility. They could hop on a train and be in the countryside in an hour. Commuters

escaped the crowded city to the suburbs that sprouted around Paris. The Seine River, parks, and gardens provided recreation for weekend picnickers, swimmers, and boat parties, which the Impressionists duly recorded. One key to Impressionism's popularity, it has been written, is that the artist often put the viewer in the position of someone on holiday enjoying a beautiful scene. "Monet never painted weekdays," one critic noted wryly.

The home offered other real-life subjects. It was unacceptable for women painters like Berthe Morisot or Mary Cassatt to set up an easel in most public places. They relied on domestic scenes of women from their own social class cuddling babies, playing with their children, dressing in the boudoir, or tending their gardens. The garden was central to late 19th-century life. Monet, Manet, and Renoir often painted their gardens. Monet called his flowerbeds "my most beautiful work of art."

## **En Plein Air and "The Painter of the Passing Moment"**

Painting the sidewalk café, the racetrack, or the boating party attracted the Impressionists to work outdoors, or *en plein air*. Most Impressionists worked directly and spontaneously from nature. It was **Barbizon** painter Camille Corot who first advised artists to "submit to the first impression" of what they saw - a real landscape without the contrived classical ruins or Biblical parables of French Academic painting.

Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, and others preferred to record their initial sensory reactions rather than idealize a subject. A painter friend of Monet recalled the master giving him this advice: "He (Monet) said he wished he had been born blind and then had suddenly gained his sight so that he could have begun to paint in this way without knowing what the objects were that he saw before him. He held that the first real look at the motif was likely to be the truest and most unprejudiced one." The Impressionists thought that painting their experiences was

more truthful, and thus more ethical, than copying the art of the past.

Impressionist landscapes often contained people, or showed the effects of man's presence - on a bridge or path, for example. The Impressionists wanted to catch people in candid rather than staged or posed moments. It is as if the artist and we, the viewers, are watching a private, contemplative moment. We see men, women, and children floating in a rowboat, strolling under the trees, or just watching the river flow.

Impressionists often depicted people mid-task. Degas caught opera audience members watching each other instead of the stage and ballet dancers stretching or adjusting their costumes before a performance. Renoir's guitar player strums her instrument by herself. Pissarro's Parisian pedestrians hurriedly cross the city streets.

A wish to capture nature's fleeting moment led many Impressionists to paint the same scene at different times and in different weather. They had to work fast to capture the moment, or to finish an outdoor painting before the light changed. Artists had often made quick sketches in pencil or diluted oil paint on location, but now the sketch became the finished work. Impressionist painters adopted a distinctive style of rapid, broken brushstrokes: lines for people on a busy street, or specks to re-create flowers in a meadow.

These artists often applied paint so thickly that it created a rough texture on the canvas. Impressionists mixed colors right on the canvas or stroked on the hues next to each other and let the viewer's eye do the blending. This process was called optical color mixing. Not only did this sketchy technique suggest motion, but it also captured the shimmering effects of light that engaged these artists. The rough, brilliant paintings of Impressionism were a drastic departure from the slick, highly finished canvases of Academic painters. Although the Impressionists wanted their work to look almost accidental, it's no surprise that early critics called it "lazy" and unfinished.

## Optical Innovations: Images of “Magical Instantaneity”

### Color Theory

In its use of color, Impressionism dramatically broke away from tradition. Advances in the fields of optics and color theory fascinated these painters. Working outdoors, Impressionists rendered the play of sunlight and the hues of nature with a **palette** of bolder, lighter colors than classical studio painters used. In 1666, Sir Isaac Newton had shown that white light could be split into many colors - including the three **primary colors**, red, blue, and yellow - by a prism. The Impressionists learned how to create the prismatic colors with a **palette** of pure, intense pigments and white. Unlike Academy painters, who covered their canvases with a dark **underpainting**, Impressionists worked on unprimed white canvas or a pale gray or cream **background** for a lighter, brighter effect.

Eugene Chevreul's 1839 book, *On the Law of Simultaneous Contrast of Colors*, guided the Impressionist practice of laying down strokes of pure, contrasting colors. Chevreul found that colors change in relation to the other colors near them. **Complementary colors**, or those directly opposite each other on his color wheel, create the most intense effects when placed next to each other, he wrote. Red-green or blue-orange combinations cause an actual vibration in the viewer's eye so that color appears to leap off the canvas. No wonder viewers react emotionally to the glittering sunlight on Monet's rivers or the splash of orange costume on Degas' ballet dancers. “I want my red to sound like a bell!” Renoir said. “If I don't manage it at first, I put in more red, and also other colors, until I've got it.”

### Art Materials

New technology in art materials made a wider range of color pigments available. In the past, artists had to grind and mix their own pigments with oil. Now, color merchants sold ready-to-use paints and other materials from

storefront establishments. In addition, collapsible metal tubes replaced pigs-bladder pouches as storage vessels for paint. Tubes preserved the pigment longer, allowing artists to take extended painting trips outdoors.

### Photography

Perhaps no invention of the Industrial Revolution influenced Impressionism more than the camera. Black and white photography not only recorded the scene for later study, it arrested the very real-life moments that Impressionists pursued. Most of the Impressionists had cameras; in fact, Monet had four and Degas experimented with one of the early Kodak portable models. Their art took on the odd, unexpected, and asymmetrical **compositions** sometimes caught by the camera.

Rejecting the centered figural groups of traditional art, Impressionists thought nothing of cutting off a figure at the painting's edge, or pushing the action into corners and leaving the center of the composition empty. Degas called photography “an image of magical instantaneity,” and was particularly adept at the off-center composition. He was also intrigued by the newly invented motion picture machine, which took multiple photographs of moving animals at high shutter speeds. He used the machine to study movement and gesture. Impressionists eagerly studied panoramic landscape photography and adopted its flattened perspective. Monet noticed that slow shutter speeds blurred moving figures, and he began to smudge his painted figures similarly. To the human eye, of course, figures don't blur, and one early critic dismissed Monet's distant pedestrians as “black tongue licks.” Even those who praised the artist's ability to capture this “ant-like swarming... the instantaneity of movement” often missed the link to photography.

### Japonisme

Another visual influence on Impressionism was the phenomenon called *Japonisme*. The opening of Japan to Western trade and diplomacy in 1854 led to a rage in France for

all things Japanese. Japanese artifacts found an eager market in the growing middle class in Paris. In 1862, a Far Eastern curio shop called *Le Porte Chinoise* opened near the Louvre Museum. The shop sold fans, kimonos, lacquered boxes, hanging scrolls, ceramics, bronze statuary and other items the Impressionists used as props in their paintings. In particular, Impressionists admired Japanese wood-block prints and applied that art form's flat, decorative shapes, bright colors, and asymmetrical compositions to their own work.

The elegant Japanese prints (known as *ukiyo-e*, or "images of the floating world" of geishas and other popular entertainment) also inspired a new interest in printmaking. In addition to wood-block prints, Impressionists created lithographs (prints made from oil-based ink designs on wet stone) and etchings (prints from designs etched into metal plates with acid). These methods allowed Degas, Monet, Cassatt, and other artists to make multiple copies of their work and thus reach a larger audience.

### **Collecting Impressionism: "Something Solid and Durable"**

In the early years of Impressionism, artists struggled to find markets for their work, and many lived hand-to-mouth. Impressionism changed when artists quarreled with one another, withdrew from exhibitions, or, like Monet and Renoir, reverted to a more Academic style they hoped would lure buyers. Cézanne also turned away from Impressionism, disappointed that he hadn't been able "to make of Impressionism something solid and durable like the art of the museums."

However, one visionary Paris art dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, recognized the greatness of Impressionism as early as 1870. "A true picture dealer should also be an enlightened patron; he should, if necessary, sacrifice his immediate interest to his artistic convictions," Durand-Ruel wrote. He regularly bought, sold, and promoted Impressionist

paintings during the early years. Finally, in the 1880s and '90s, the world the Impressionists painted began to embrace them. American collectors were largely responsible for this reversal of fortune, buying enough paintings to keep several artists at work. The Musée de Luxembourg in Paris mounted the first museum exhibition of Impressionist art in 1897, and an exhibition at the 1900 World Exposition sealed the artists' reputations. Paintings sold twenty-five years earlier for a mere fifty francs, noted Durand-Ruel, now fetched 50,000 francs.

What caused the public's change of heart? "Ironically," writes art historian Ann Dumas, "the Impressionists" former status as renegades enhanced their appeal to the connoisseurship and speculative skills of the bourgeois collector...(it was) a new art for a new class that wanted images of the world they inhabited."

Perhaps more crucial to its present-day popularity is the broadly appealing color, spontaneity, and freshness of Impressionist art. Before the first exhibition in 1874, the art critic Armand Silvestre observed of these paintings, "A blond light pervades them, and everything is gaiety, clarity, spring festivals, golden evenings or apple trees in blossom. They are windows opening on the joyous countryside, on rivers full of pleasure boats stretching into the distance, on a sky which shines with light mists, on the outdoor life, panoramic and charming."

## **About the Exhibition**

### ***Impressionism: Paintings Collected by European Museums***

**E**arly paintings by the Impressionists shocked the public and infuriated many critics. "A frightening spectacle of human vanity so far adrift that it verges on sheer lunacy," scoffed Paris critic Albert Wolff in 1876. Just twenty-five years later, however, the work of Monet, Renoir, Manet,

Degas, Pissarro, Morisot and Caillebotte would be found in the collections of major museums through-out Europe and America. One hundred and twenty-five years later, Impressionism is one of the best known and loved types of art.

The **provenance**, or history of ownership of these Impressionist works, is a fascinating subject in itself. Who were the early heroes who dared to purchase this “difficult” art and hang it in their homes, offices, and galleries? How did these once-spurned paintings find their way into major museums and world capitals? What events drove the artwork out of the hands of artists to museum directors, private collectors, and ministers of culture? These questions constitute the reason for this exhibition.

The chief focus of *Impressionism: Paintings Collected by European Museums* is the earliest acquisitions by European museums. The Musée de Luxembourg’s 1897 exhibition featured thirty-eight Impressionist paintings, all bequeathed to the French government by the artist and collector Gustave Caillebotte. But not all museums welcomed Impressionism, even by 1900. London’s National Gallery turned down a gift of Degas’ *The Ballet Scene from Meyerbeer’s Opera “Robert le Diable”* in 1905 and refused to show Morisot’s *Summer’s Day* after acquiring it in 1913. “The National Gallery is and should remain a great Temple of Art” that would not tolerate “an exhibition of the works of the modern French art-rebels in the sacred precincts of Trafalgar Square,”

said a museum trustee of the Morisot exclusion.

Private collectors and one particularly tenacious gallery owner contributed largely to Impressionism’s acceptance. Art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel bought the early paintings of these neglected artists so that they could keep working. He offered them advice on style and subjects, gave them an alternative to state-run exhibitions - the art world’s first one-person art shows - and promoted their work in Europe and the United States.

Among the first private collectors of Impressionism were writers, fellow painters like Caillebotte, and other figures from the art world. The original owner of Claude Monet’s *Port at Argenteuil* was a painter working in a style similar to Monet’s. Vincent van Gogh willed all his work to his art-dealer brother, Theo, on whom he had depended emotionally and financially for most of his life. Many of those paintings, including *Self-Portrait with a Straw Hat*, remained in the van Gogh family for seventy years. Americans also collected Impressionism early on, as did other newly rich, “bourgeois” connoisseurs, who saw in these bold, colorful canvases a mirror of their own lives.

The artworks in the *Impressionism: Paintings Collected by European Museums* exhibition reflect the broad interests and varied styles of Impressionism at its peak. This exhibition is presented by the High Museum of Art, the Seattle Art Museum, and the Denver Art Museum.

## Overall Looking Questions

- Have all your students become familiar with all of the transparencies.
- What kinds of brushstrokes do you see in each painting?
- Where is the horizon line in each painting?
- Lights and shadows interested many Impressionist painters. Describe the colors and shapes of the shadows in each painting.
- Next, group the paintings by themes beginning with city or country life.
- What other categories or themes can you create?

# Activities

## The Arts

Up until the 1860s, European painters often painted idealized people and events from the Bible, mythology, or history. In contrast, Impressionist paintings often depict ordinary situations. We may think differently about ordinary situations in our own lives by drawing or writing about them. Ask students to list five things they do each day that might be appropriate for an Impressionist painting of a modern life subject. Vote on one subject and then have each of the students paint it. A busy, fleeting moment in a hallway or cafeteria, for instance, may seem more beautiful upon reflection. Explain that everyone will have a different “impression” of the scene. Try to emphasize the lights, shadows, and colors in the scene.

## Math or Science

All of these two-dimensional, flat works create an illusion of three-dimensional depth. Rank them from the composition that appears to be the closest to the viewer (or most shallow) to the composition with the greatest feeling of depth. Look for the ways that each painting depicts depth. For instance, are the colors softer in the background? Did the artist use perspective? Are objects smaller in the background than in the foreground? Do

objects in the foreground overlap objects in the background? Although there are no specific right answers, ask the students to hypothesize how many feet of depth each painting illustrates. What clues did the artist provide to support the hypotheses?

## Language Arts

Discuss the transparencies with the class. What are their favorite paintings? Why did they choose those? Have the students write an essay from the point of view of a collector or museum director who wants to purchase one of the paintings. Include why they chose the painting and how it will add to their current collections. For instance, a director of a self-portrait museum might want to add the self-portrait by van Gogh to his or her collection.

## Social Studies

Have the students stage an art exhibition of their own within the classroom. Send out invitations and design posters to advertise the exhibition. Some students will be traditional artists while others will be experimental artists. Other students will be critics and collectors. The artwork and written exercises that the students create based upon the activities in this packet would be appropriate for the exhibition.



© Photo RMN - H. Lewandowski - Musée d'Orsay, Paris

## Lesson #1

**Claude Monet (mow-NAY)**

**French, 1840-1926**

*The Port at Argenteuil, about 1872*

Oil on canvas

23 5/8 x 31 3/4 in.

Musée d'Orsay; Paris, France; bequest of Count Isaac de Camondo, 1911

### Subject

Monet probably painted this fresh, airy afternoon scene outdoors, *en plein air*. He often painted outdoors, then carefully reworked the details of his canvases in his studio. "My only merit," Monet wrote later in life, "lies in having painted directly in front of nature, seeking to render my impressions before the most fleeting moments." This is one of seventy-five works Monet painted of the Seine River in Argenteuil, a yachting center west of Paris. It combines two favorite Impressionist themes: fashionable, leisurely figures strolling, boating, and bathing, and an industrial backdrop of bridge and smokestack. Monet lived and painted in Argenteuil for several years; today the town is best known for his images of it. Additionally, Monet lured his Impressionist friends - Renoir, Sisley, Pissarro, Manet, and Caillebotte - to paint in Argenteuil, which was easily

accessible from Paris by railroad.

### Style

Like most of his work, *The Port at Argenteuil* shows Monet's fascination with the ever-changing quality of light and color in different weather, and at different times of the day. Notice the long stripes of tree shadows in the foreground. Against the bright sky, these deep shadow tones capture a breezy late afternoon in summer. Monet usually "primed" or covered his canvas with a layer of warm gray or light tan first and then painted his subject in the short, bold brushstrokes typical of Impressionism. The scene is composed of restful, horizontal elements - the shadows of trees, the water, bridge, and clouds. Monet arranged these elements in a series of planes to create depth. The plane closest to us contains the strollers, seated onlookers, boaters, and other figures; a second plane behind it has sailboats, a

steamship, and a boathouse; the last and most distant is the bridge and horizon.

### Artist

Monet grew up in Le Havre, France, where an aunt first financed his painting studies. Later, in Paris, he met and was influenced by future Impressionist colleagues Sisley, Renoir, and others. He was a leading figure in the Impressionists' first group exhibition in 1874, which one critic ridiculed as "a collection of freshly painted canvases smeared with floods of cream." It was Monet's painting of the Le Havre harbor in *Impression, Sunrise*, that gave the fledgling movement its name. Until late in his life, Monet suffered frequent personal and professional ups and downs. Yet, he never wavered in the quest to paint his direct, sensory impressions of nature without intellectual thought. "Paintings aren't made with doctrines," he declared.

## Looking Questions

- How many people do you see?
- What are they doing?
- What do you see on the left side of the painting?
- What do you see on the right side of the painting?
- What sort of boats are these? Sailing boats? Fishing boats? Cargo boats?
- Describe the weather. What season is it? What time of day is it? From what you see, can you tell the time of day?

## Activities

### The Arts

Have the students create a landscape with depth. Have them choose three objects that they want in their landscape. Decide which objects will go in the **foreground, middle ground, and back-ground**. Draw the **fore-ground** object first. They should make this object large. Next, decide what objects will go in the **middle ground**, drawing it slightly smaller in the middle portion of the paper. Finally, repeat this process for the **back-ground** object, making that object the smallest. To create a landscape with depth and **overlapping** forms, add more objects and horizontal lines to indicate land. Discuss **overlapping and back-ground, middle ground, and foreground**.

### Math or Science

Many Impressionists were interested in views of reality. Scenes were painted outside, with an emphasis upon what interested the artist on the day the painting was created. Approximately what percentage of this scene is sky? What percentage of the total area of this painting is used to describe the land that day? What percentage is buildings or water? What fraction reflects things made by people? What percentage of the ground is sunlit or shadow? What do you think interested Monet the most on the day he was painting this? Why do you think that?

### Language Arts

An impression is a vague notion, memory, or split-second look at something. Have your students glance at the transparency for thirty seconds and then cover it with paper. Ask them to write a poem beginning “My first impression was...” Next, ask

them to look at the transparency closely. Continue the poem by writing “But when I took a closer look I noticed...” Share the poems. Discuss the difference between an impression and an analysis of something.

### Social Studies

The people in the reproduction look as if they might be out relaxing on a weekend afternoon. What do you and your family do to relax during weekends? Have your students pick a partner and share what they enjoy doing with their families. Make a chart to compare and contrast leisure-time of their families with those depicted in this and other transparencies in the packet. How do they compare to what the people in the picture are doing? Have them find out about other forms of relaxation in the 19th century.



© The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England, Photo, V&A Picture Library

## Subject

Unlike most Impressionists, Degas never worked from nature. “Art is not a sport,” wrote this cool, cynical intellectual, the very image of the Paris dandy. Instead, he roamed behind the scenes of such popular city haunts as the opera, ballet, and racetrack. In this scene from the then-popular *Robert Le Diable* (Robert the Devil) opera, the spirits of dead nuns who have broken their vows dance wildly in a ghostly moonlit cloister, hoping to lure the hero Robert to damnation. Painting from an audience member’s viewpoint, Degas is more interested in what is going on at the edge of the theater’s orchestra pit than on the stage. Several musicians and audience members are painted as portraits of Degas’ opera-loving friends. Viewing this painting, we can almost reach out and touch the slicked-down hair of the man in the right **foreground**, as he and the gentlemen near

him look in every direction except toward the stage. What or who is the bearded man with the opera glasses (far left) eyeing? The painting’s focus is a far cry from the moralizing themes of French Academy art. Perhaps Degas was making fun of this heavy, melodramatic opera, with its ties to a traditional, Romantic past that the Impressionists wanted to escape.

## Style

The daring composition (like a photograph taken by someone in the audience) shows how photography influenced the Impressionists. As they gaze toward the painting’s edges, Degas’ subjects seem to say that life goes on outside this painting. The artist often made quick, location sketches with “essence”- oil paint thinned with turpentine - and then painted a finished work in his studio. Like other Impressionists, Degas was fascinated with light, but he

preferred artificial light to the *en plein air* kind. Notice how this painting’s three light sources create different moods: the bright lamps lighting the musicians’ scores, the eerie cast of footlights on the performers and the moonlight created by gas lights over the stage. “The fascinating thing,” Degas said, “is not to show the source of light, but the effect of light.”

## Artist

To Degas, a painting was “something which requires as much knavery, trickery, and deceit as the perpetration of a crime.” In his studio, Degas loved to experiment with composition and light, but unlike most Impressionists, he often painted from memory or imagination. He also worked in a variety of materials, including pastel, pastel-paint combinations, and sculpture. When a financial crisis forced him to sell his work in the mid-1870s, he turned to monotype

## Lesson #2

**Edgar Degas (duh-GAH)**

**French, 1834-1917**

***The Ballet Scene from Meyerbeer’s Opera, “Robert le Diable,” 1876***

Oil on canvas  
30 1/8 x 32 in.

The Victoria and Albert Museum,  
London, England

prints (made by applying colored or black paint to a metal plate) which could be

turned out quickly. However, he continued to paint until his

eyesight grew too weak at the end of his life.

## Looking Questions

- Where does this scene take place?
- Where are you, the viewer, located in relation to the scene in the painting?
- What musical instruments do you see?
- There are two horizontal lines in this painting. Where are they?
- Where are the lights coming from?
- What are the people on the stage doing?
- Where is the man in the lower left-hand corner looking?
- What colors do you see in the painting?
- What shapes are repeated in this painting?

## Activities

### The Arts

Discover how different kinds of lights affect colors and shadows of objects. Set up a still life for your students. Put a clear glass, a piece of cloth, and a tall, shiny object such as a colorful plastic cup on a large, white piece of paper. Use candlelight and a flashlight covered with tinted Mylar to add color, electric light, and sunlight. Record what happens to the colors, shadows, and shapes of the objects as the light changes. Create drawings from these experiments.

### Math or Science

Ask your students to look at this transparency next to the other Degas reproduction in this packet, *Before the Performance*. During the late 1800s, French mathematicians formalized some of Augustin Cauchy's and Evarist Galois's ideas into what we call algebra - math in which letters are used to represent basic number relationships. Some of these

letters are constants, values that do not change. Some letters in algebra are variables, values that change and are different. Have the students look for things that these two reproductions have in common (the constants) and how they are different (the variables). Then make a list of each category. Which is the longer list?

### Language Arts

This painting captures the experience of attending an opera, one of the artist's favorite forms of entertainment. Ask your students to write a review of a specific work from their own favorite form of entertainment. It may be a movie, play, computer game, or television show.

### Social Studies

The painting features three different types of people. The actors are on the stage. The musicians are in the orchestra pit. The audience members are sitting in the front rows. Divide the class into teams of about five students each. The small groups will work

together to develop their own script or story line for a music video. It must relate to the painting. It could be about the audience, stagehand, usher, musicians, and/or the activity on stage. Each team will develop a short story line or script describing their proposed video. What kind of music is being played? Are the actors dancing or posed standing still? Is the audience enjoying the performance? Try to make the video include some historically accurate details.



## Lesson #3

**Gustave Caillebotte**

**(KIE-ye-bot)**

**French, 1848-1894**

***Le Pont de l'Europe (The Bridge of Europe)*, 1876**

Oil on canvas

49 1/4 x 71 in.

Petit Palais Musée d' Art Moderne, Geneva, Switzerland. Image: © Petit Palais Musée d' Art Moderne, Geneva, Switzerland.

### Subject

*The Bridge of Europe* and two other Paris scenes exhibited at the third Impressionist exhibition established Caillebotte as a painter of modern-city life. He depicted a more sober, realist Paris than his fellow Impressionists, exposing the social tensions that underlay the industrial city and its new society. Six boulevards converged at the famous Bridge of Europe, a wonder of technology that straddled the rail yards of the Gare Saint-Lazare, one of Paris's major train stations. Here on the bridge is a moment from everyday life, juxtaposing two social classes that frequented the streets of the city. Leaning on the rail at the right is an artisan/laborer, while on the left, a man and woman of higher social stature walk toward us and gaze at each other.

The gentleman, who is rendered as a *flâneur*, or man-about-town and observer of modern life, may be a self-portrait of the artist. He is

separated symbolically and physically from the laborer but looks toward him. Simultaneously, the bridge rail creates a line of perspective from the laborer back to the couple. Perhaps this visual link reflects Caillebotte's personal struggle to bridge two worlds, those of wealthy gentleman and democratic Impressionist. The couple and even the dog in the **foreground** walk at the fast pace typical of city dwellers. Is the elegant gentleman trying to leave the lady with the parasol behind? Notice, too, how the immense steel girders of the bridge, the very essence of modern, industrial Paris, dominate the picture. This realist's viewpoint, in all its brute strength, dwarfs the Paris of strollers, tree-lined boulevards, and shimmering light.

### Style

The elements of perspective in this painting are remarkably deep. The lines created by the railroad

bridge, row of buildings, curb, and dog, which repeat the "X" shape of the bridge girder, draw us into the scene. Before he began to paint, Caillebotte made meticulous sketches on this bridge and in his studio, arranging and re-arranging the elements to achieve this intriguing composition. The painting's cool, stark lighting and crisp forms underscore this *flâneur*-artist's assessment of Paris's transformation.

### Artist

The great realist writer Emile Zola was so taken by the "beautiful truth" in Gustave Caillebotte's work that he wrote, "When his talent becomes a little more broken in, Monsieur Caillebotte will certainly be one of the boldest of the group." But the wealthy Caillebotte is probably better known for buying up the works of fellow Impressionists and, in 1894, bequeathing them to the French government for display at Paris's Musée de

Luxembourg. Of sixty-seven works, the museum accepted only thirty-eight, citing lack of space and the still-controversial image of Impressionist art. Included in the final bequest were two

works by Cézanne, seven by Degas, eight by Monet, seven by Pissarro, two by Manet, six by Sisley, and six by Renoir. Caillebotte's gift made up the first museum exhibition of Impressionist

art at the Musée de Luxembourg in 1897. Not until the 1950s did Caillebotte's own paintings win the attention they deserved.

## Looking Questions

- This is a painting of Paris. What does the artist include to show you that this is a city rather than a country scene?
- Describe the clothing each person is wearing.
- Is there anything that represents nature in this painting? Notice the sky and bits of green.
- What geometric shapes do you see? Where do you see "X" shapes? Where do you see ovals? What shapes are the shadows? What shapes repeat to create patterns?
- Notice the steam from the train and the clouds. Why do you think the artist chose to include these elements?
- What colors are the shadows?
- Do you see any red in the painting? Where?

## Activities

### The Arts

Create a lesson about one-point linear perspective. Put an overleaf of Mylar on this transparency and draw the receding lines of the bridge, street, and buildings. Show and explain the **vanishing points** and **horizon line**.

### Math or Science

The following terms are often used in science and/or math: growth, life forms, direction, rhythm, balance, repetition, weight, angles, light, shapes, triangle, rectangle, circle, square, curves, movement, direction, motion, size,

pattern. Have your students circle any of these words that they could use to talk about a part of this work of art. Ask them to write at least three sentences using the circled words to describe this painting. For example: "I see several cut-out shapes with curves on the bridge."

### Language Arts

Did you notice the dog in the painting? Why do you think the artist chose to include the dog? Have your students develop a short explanation of what the dog is thinking. Is the dog a stray or does he/she belong to someone in the painting? Where is he going? Why? Where does the dog

sleep? What does the dog eat? Notice the dog's tail. What feeling does the tail convey?

### Social Studies

Look closely at the painting. Discuss how clothing describes a person's place in society or reflects a certain occasion. Look at this painting and discuss each person's role. Have the students look through magazines and cut out images of fashion that describe a profession, an occasion, or even a class of society. Ask them to create a costume collage using the images.



## Lesson #4

**Berthe Morisot**(more-ee-SOH)

**French, 1841-1895**

***Summer's Day, about 1879***

Oil on canvas

18 x 29 5/8 in.

The National Gallery, London, England. Image: © The National Gallery, London, England.

### Subject

In this, perhaps her most famous painting, Berthe Morisot captures two apparently middle-class ladies in a moment of quiet thought. (The women have not been identified and probably are models who posed for Morisot.) They float lazily in a boat on the lake in the Bois de Boulogne, a large, wooded park on the edge of Paris. Morisot painted them as if she were sitting next to them, and well she might since the fashionable Bois was not far from her home. It was considered safe and acceptable for a woman of Morisot's social class to stroll, picnic, and even paint here. Unlike her male counterparts who could set up an easel in city streets and café-concerts, Morisot stayed close to home and painted real-life moments from her immediate world - elegant women getting out of bed, relaxing in the garden, or dressing in their boudoir for a night at the opera.

### Style

Intrigued by the play of light on her subjects, Morisot painted the swans, the reflections in the lake, and the ladies themselves in the quick, zigzag brushstrokes for which she's known. In typical Impressionist style, the composition is off center, with the blue-coated woman partially cropped by the edge of the scene. Yet notice how similar brushstrokes throughout the painting pull it together. This sketchy texture captures Morisot's open-air "impression" of the moment, though art critics of the time often mistook her loose style for sloppiness. "Why, with her talent, does she not take the trouble to finish?" complained one early reviewer. But other critics raved about Morisot's pearly, soft color harmonies. "She grinds flower petals onto her palette," gushed one writer, "so as to spread them later on her canvas...."

### Artist

Berthe Morisot struggled to be taken as seriously as male counterparts of the time. Reared in a conservative, cultured family, she received the art lessons given all young ladies of her class. She was excluded, as a woman, from nude life-drawing classes, but her ability emerged in paintings of the outdoors and domestic scenes. She married the brother of her mentor, Édouard Manet, and exhibited in all but one Impressionist show. During her lifetime, Morisot's canvases often fetched slightly higher prices than those of her male colleagues, but she remained modest. She had merely wanted to capture "something of what goes by...the smallest thing," she wrote in later life. "An attitude of Julie's (her daughter), a smile, a flower, a fruit, the branch of a tree, any of these things alone would be enough for me."

## Looking Questions

- What type of location do you see in the painting?
- What time of day is it?
- Describe the clothes that the women are wearing.
- Although there are very few outlines, what other kinds of lines do you see in the painting? Where do you see zigzag, curvy, or straight lines? What kinds of lines repeat?
- Is there any black in the picture? Where?
- The painting shows us part of the boat and the two women riding in it. What else do you think was in the boat outside of our view? Do you think the artist or someone else was in the boat?

## Activities

### The Arts

Many colors, lines, and shapes are combined to create the illusion of sunlit water in this painting. Have the students create drawings of water. Use felt tip pens to apply color in short zigzag strokes. Experiment with a variety of colors over the page rather than coloring in large blocks of one color. Draw a river or seascape, or arrange a still life with a glass of water as one of the objects.

### Math or Science

Ask the students to count the different blues they see in

this reproduction of Morisot's painting. How many greens and yellows are there? Are any other color groups represented? If you were designing a set of crayons for the colors in this painting, how many would be in the box? What would you name some of the colors? Just for fun, see if you can give them all science-type names, like Sulfur Yellow!

### Language Arts

The two women appear to be enjoying a relaxed, sunny day. Have your students write a dialogue between the two women in the boat. First, create a one-line description

of the characters. Next, create a dialogue between them. Perform the play for the rest of the class. You may want to include the artist as another character in your play.

### Social Studies

Ask your students to imagine that they are riding in the boat with the two women. Perhaps they are reporters interviewing the women about their lives. Write a short newspaper article from this interview. Read the information section about the artist and painting to give the articles more details.



## Lesson #5

**Claude Monet (mow-NAY)**

**French, 1840-1926**

***The Cliff at Fécamp, 1881***

Oil on canvas

25 5/8 x 32 in.

Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, Aberdeen, Scotland. Image: © Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, Aberdeen, Scotland

### Subject

This cliff painting is one of a series created at Grainval, just south of Fécamp on the Normandy coast. It reflects the artist's philosophy that "landscape is nothing but an impression - an instantaneous one." Monet waited and watched the shifting sun and shadows and then quickly brushed in the moment he wanted. He liked to paint the same scene many times so he could study the effects of changing light and weather. Children frequently trailed the artist and carried his canvases.

### Style

The writer Guy de Maupassant also followed Monet in his quest for impressions and vividly described the artist's gifts: "He would pick up with a few strokes of his brush the falling sun ray or the passing cloud, leaving aside the false and conventional. I saw him

seize a sparkling downpour of light on the white cliff and fix it in a shower of yellow tones which made the effect of this fleeting and blinding marvel seem strangely astonishing." This painting is Monet's reaction to a brisk spring day at Fécamp, as the breeze ruffles the sea, and clouds tumble by in a luminous sky. Like a true Impressionist, he has applied brushstrokes of brilliant blue, green, and yellow in contrasting patterns. Some viewers can see animal-like shapes in the rocks of *The Cliff at Fécamp* - perhaps the only sign of life in a scene that is without human evidence. The swirling ambiguity of cliffs and sea is dizzying and adds to the sense that we are there. Notice the off-center composition of the cliffs against the sea. Like other Impressionists, Monet was probably influenced by the asymmetrical compositions

of popular Japanese wood-block prints.

### Artist

Technological advances - portable easels and metal tubes that stored paint indefinitely - allowed Impressionists like Monet to take extended painting trips outdoors. A wide range of pigments was also available, though Monet used a small, typical Impressionist palette of eight to ten colors. "The real point," he wrote a friend, "is to know how to use the colors." Despite failing eyesight, the artist painted well into his eighties. The public discovered his work by 1890, and his fortunes quickly improved. By 1920, the painter who once had struggled to feed and clothe his family complained about the "too-frequent visits from buyers who often disturb and bore me."

## Looking Questions

- Describe the shapes that you see. What shapes are repeated?
- Notice brushstrokes of warm colors next to brushstrokes of cool colors.
- Name two colors that contrast.
- Where do the colors contrast?
- Do you see any outlines?
- Look carefully at the textures of the plants, rocks, water, and sky. How do the brushstrokes describe different textures?

## Activities

### The Arts

Join the students as you pick up an imaginary brush and pretend to paint this painting. Next, take the students outside (or work from visual resources like old calendars) to create a landscape using acrylic, tempera paint, or oil pastels. Look for different textures and colors as students paint directly on the paper or canvas without sketching in outlines. After they finish, have the students look at the painting again. What do they notice now about the painting that they didn't notice at first?

### Math or Science

Scientists John Dalton, Stanislo Cannizzaro, and Amedeo Avogadro all worked in Europe at the same time as the Impressionists

did. The Impressionist painters were interested in how smaller parts (like brushstrokes, bits and blobs of paint, and colored dots) make up the whole (a painting). The scientists made discoveries about atoms (smaller parts) and matter (the whole). Have the students make four headings on their paper - gas, liquid, solid, other. Next, analyze this whole painting by listing its smaller parts. Write under each of these four headings the parts that apply to it. For example, list breeze, air, and atmosphere under the heading of gas. Use the same headings and analyze other works in this set.

### Language Arts

Tell the students to imagine jumping into the painting. How would it feel to be on these cliffs? What would the

ground feel like? Is it warm or cool? Where is the light coming from? How does the scene smell? How is the weather? Ask the students to explain their thoughts by writing a paragraph that describes the experience of jumping into the painting.

### Social Studies

Have the students look at the land in the painting. Notice the plants, rocks, and view of the water. Imagine that the class owned the land represented in the reproduction. Generate a list of ways to use the land. Will it be kept as open space, become a park, or be developed into a resort hotel? What other uses can you think of? Vote on how you would use the land.



## Lesson #6

**Paul Cézanne (say-ZAHN)**  
**French, 1839-1906**  
***Still Life with Pears,***  
**about 1885**

Oil on canvas  
15 x 18 1/8 in.

Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, Germany.  
Image: © Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, Germany.

### Subject

This is one of more than 170 still life paintings Paul Cézanne created in his lifetime. At first glance, it's a simple arrangement of pears on a tabletop, but a second look shows us that the objects are not true to nature. What, for example, is the gauzy black mass to the right of the plate? Is that really drapery protruding stiffly beyond the table's edge? Indeed, Cézanne liked to make ordinary objects look unfamiliar, a radical idea in the late 19th century. To him, studying nature was merely the first step in making art. After that, Cézanne explained, the artist should "make pictures that teach us something." Often that "something" was to see a scene from different points of view. Like his fellow Impressionists, Cézanne was intrigued by the optic sciences. Notice how he distorted perspective in this painting by showing the tabletop parallel to the picture frame on the right, but pulled away from the wall on the

left. Is that a strip of wood slashing flat across the background? The artist seems to have lifted the back of the table and tipped it forward. The objects on it appear to slide into our laps.

### Style

Like other Impressionists, Cézanne painted with quick, visible brushstrokes, laying on colors next to each other. In this painting, the red pear appears more intensely red when placed among the green pears. Cézanne understood that when complementary colors like red and green (found on opposite sides of the color wheel) are placed adjacently in a painting, they vibrate with intensity. Many other Impressionist painters used contrasting colors to describe the play of light on the surfaces of forms. Cézanne often used colors to articulate the forms and the composition. For instance, in this painting the arrangement of the three pears on the right and the three pears on the plate is emphasized by bits of black and contrasted with the

one red pear. The odd-numbered groupings of simply shaped objects in contrasting colors are characteristic of Cézanne's still life paintings. Cézanne tried to show internal construction of the forms that he painted, "nature as cylinders, sphere, and cones," in his words.

### Artist

Paul Cézanne was born to a wealthy family in the town of Aix-en-Provence. Temperamental and shy, he became an artist against his father's wishes. Fellow artist Camille Pissarro introduced him to Impressionism in the 1870s and became a lifelong friend, encouraging Cézanne to paint from nature and providing emotional support. Still, Cézanne grew disillusioned with Impressionism, distrusted fellow artists, and refused to exhibit with the group after their second show. "I wanted to make of Impressionism something solid and enduring, like the art in museums," he once said.

## Looking Questions

- What is a still life? Why would someone paint a still life?
- Does this painting seem radical to you in any way?
- Discuss Cézanne's choice of objects. Do some of them seem odd or distorted?
- Are there any colors that surprise you?
- What circular shapes do you see? What do the circular shapes represent?
- Where do you see triangles?
- Straight lines? Curvy lines?
- Where do you see the color yellow in the painting? Why do you think the artist chose to use yellow?
- What shapes did he choose to repeat?
- Do some of the objects have similar colors?

## Activities

### The Arts

First, place a sheet of clear plastic over the transparency and draw the basic geometric shapes of the still life.

Cézanne said he wanted to “treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone.” Set up a still life of objects with simple shapes like soft drink cans or bottles and a bowl of fruit on a cafeteria tray. Ask the students to draw from it. Challenge your students to simplify the image by drawing only three-dimensional geometric shapes.

### Math or Science

Name at least three geometric solids or flat shapes represented in this composition. How many shapes or forms appear to be touching each other? How many are overlapping? Carefully copy at least two different shapes by drawing their outlines on a piece of paper and cutting them out. See if someone else can find which ones you copied.

### Language Arts

Discuss the definition of still life with your students. Then, tell them to “write a still life.” Each student lists their favorite personal objects and draws their outlines. Next, the objects are cut out and

glued to another piece of paper. After that, the students write descriptions of each object around the outline of the cut-out shape. This way, the students will have a written and visual description of the objects.

### Social Studies

The artist Paul Cézanne has moved through a time machine to be the art teacher for the class. The students have the opportunity to ask Cézanne questions about the choices he made as an artist. What questions are they curious about? Write down a few questions after reading the information and looking at the transparency



## Lesson #7

### Vincent van Gogh (van-GO) Dutch, 1853-1890 *Self-Portrait with a Straw Hat, 1887*

Oil on pasteboard  
16 x 12 3/4 in.

Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation),  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Image: © Van Gogh  
Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation),  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

### Subject

“Ah! Portraiture, portraiture with the thoughts, the soul of the model in it,” Vincent van Gogh exclaimed to his art-dealer brother, Theo. Van Gogh’s compassionate heart and interest in individual character - plus the wish of this lonely man to know himself and others - find expression in his portraits. Van Gogh was probably more interested in the human face than other Impressionists, whom he encountered for the first time in 1886. The artist painted twenty-two self-portraits while living with his brother in Paris from 1886-1888. Later ones, like this *Self-Portrait with a Straw Hat*, reveal the artist’s crumbling health. The three-quarter profile, deep shadows, and tight mouth suggest a man suffering physical and emotional stress. A haunted gaze from one blue and one green eye both pleads for our help and pushes us away.

Van Gogh is dressed in the yellow straw hat and work coat of the peasant laborer, an often-worn costume befitting his self-image as a working man’s artist.

### Style

Vincent van Gogh came to Impressionism late, as many of the movement’s founders took other paths. He embraced their palette of lighter colors over the dark, heavy forms of his early work. Notice how the daubs of paint change direction to express different forms and textures in the face. The blue-stroked background contrasts vividly with the yellows in the head. Van Gogh delighted in color and studied its combinations all his life. “I am always in hope of making a discovery there, to express the love of two lovers by a wedding of two complementary colors, their mingling and their opposition, the mysterious vibrations of kindred tones,”

he wrote. “To express the thought of a brow by the radiance of a light tone against a somber background.”

### Artist

The son of a Dutch clergyman, van Gogh tried and failed at dealing art, teaching, and religious evangelism before turning to drawing and painting at age twenty-seven. He was a self-taught and virtually unnoticed painter who sold only one artwork during his lifetime. Soon after finishing *Self-Portrait with a Straw Hat*, van Gogh left the bustle of Paris for the south of France. There he sought the direct inspiration of nature and the color, light, and natural forms he admired in Japanese prints. Unfortunately, his attacks of mental illness continued, and, at the age of thirty-seven, he took his own life.

## Looking Questions

- Describe with words the different ways lines are used in this painting.
- Next, ask students to answer without words by using their hands only. Have them pretend to use their hands to paint the short brushstrokes of the painting.
- How does the artist show shadows?
- How does the artist show the contours of the face?
- Where are primary colors used?
- What is the focal point? Why?
- What colors are the eyes?
- How would the painting be different if van Gogh were directly facing the viewer?

## Activities

### The Arts

Ask the students to pretend that they are the artist, van Gogh, in this picture. Have them explain what kind of day they had when they painted this picture. How did they feel? How would they describe the clothes they were wearing? Have them then create their own self-portraits. Use the same size paper as the painting, 16 x 12 3/4 inches, and use oil pastels and watercolors. Discuss costume, color, line, and mood. How do these elements affect the painting?

### Math or Science

Your students are all multimillionaires. They have just learned that this painting by van Gogh recently sold for fifty million dollars to a private investor. They have a chance to bid on the rights to the movie Titanic. They also have a chance to acquire the original of this van Gogh painting. If each costs exactly fifty million dollars, and this

painting is 16x12 inches, what is the price per square inch? If the movie runs 187 minutes, what is the price per minute? Should size or length factor in determining the cost of a work of art? If the students had the opportunity to own the original van Gogh painting, or the movie Titanic, would they spend the money on the painting or the movie rights? Why?

### Language Arts

The artist Vincent van Gogh was intrigued by the concept of painting portraits and self-portraits. When he lived in Paris, he painted twenty-two portraits in less than two weeks. He carefully selected colors for their potential to convey feeling and expression, in addition to a convincing representation. Have the students write a self-portrait, using only words to describe their personality, moods, and facial features. Have them use several descriptive colors from the color wheel. For instance, "Sometimes I feel

as blue as the deep blue velvet night sky."

### Social Studies

Vincent van Gogh and his brother Theo had a close and supportive relationship. When they were adults, Theo supported Vincent financially and emotionally. Vincent even lived with his brother for a while. Theo managed a Parisian art firm. He introduced Vincent to Impressionist artists such as Gauguin and Degas. Have your students find examples of supportive relationships in recent newspapers. Perhaps they will find articles about teachers who helped their students, sisters or brothers that helped each other, or heroes that sacrificed their own security to help others. Ask them to write an essay about supportiveness and encouragement with several examples.



## Lesson #8

**Pierre-Auguste Renoir**  
(ren-WHAR)

**French, 1841-1919**

***Woman Playing a Guitar, 1896-97***

Oil on canvas

31 7/8 x 25 5/8 in.

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, Lyon, France.

Image: © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, Lyon, France

### Subject

Julie Manet, daughter of Impressionist Berthe Morisot and Édouard Manet's brother, Eugène, was charmed to discover this painting in progress in Renoir's studio. "He's doing some ravishing things with a guitar;" she wrote, "a woman with a white muslin dress, held by pink bows, leans gracefully over a large brown guitar, with her feet on a yellow cushion... It's all colored, soft, delicious." Julie provides a perfect description of this work, which captures a contemplative moment. Julie no doubt saw other paintings from this series of men and women playing the guitar, done late in Renoir's career. The subject may have appealed to the artist for several reasons. Maybe the guitarists were successors to Renoir's earlier paintings of young women playing the piano. Or perhaps he was inspired by the seductive Spanish dancer "la Belle Otero," who performed with Paris's famous entertainment

review, the Folies-Bergères. The artist also loved the enchanting lute players of 18th-century French painting and, especially, the women playing musical instruments by 19th-century painter Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. Renoir's career veered from the Impressionist's contemporary Paris life, and the modern dress worn by his earlier models. This guitar-player wears a simple, white costume. The solid, triangular composition recalls the monumental figures of classical painters Titian and Rubens centuries earlier.

### Style

Color and composition make a dramatic impact in this painting. Notice the variety of colors in the skin and dress: warm yellow-gray and pink tones where the figure catches the light, and cool blue-gray and green shades in the shadows. Rich and glowing, the color harmonies capture the play of light and shadow that so interested the

Impressionists. In terms of composition, the woman, chair, and guitar are painted to emphasize and repeat voluptuous curves. The curves in the foreground are anchored in space by the crisp verticals and horizontals of the background.

### Artist

The son of a tailor, Pierre-Auguste Renoir studied with Monet at the classical École des Beaux-Arts. As an Impressionist, he painted human figures enjoying modern pastimes in light-filled gardens, outdoor restaurants, and cafes. Soft brushstrokes and luminous color characterize his work. "For me a picture should be a pleasant thing, joyful and pretty - yes pretty!" he said. Later in life, he favored the more conservative subjects, solid figures, and centered compositions of earlier, academic art. Like fellow artists Monet and Cassatt, he wondered if the Impressionists' views of a fleeting moment in modern

life would interest future generations.

### Looking Questions

- This painting shows us a woman playing a guitar as she sits on a cushioned chair. Describe the furnishings that you see.
- What shapes and colors are repeated in this image?
- Where do you see curving lines?
- What color are the shadows?
- What is the focal point of this painting?
- How did the artist indicate the focal point?

### Activities

#### The Arts

Ask the students to draw one of their hands. Try drawing the hand alone, and then depict it holding a pencil or paint brush. Have them use chalks or pastels and include all of the colors that are in their skin. Consider the pose or position. Does it look forceful or gentle? What colors did they use?

#### Math or Science

Many things are repeated in this painting. Play a counting game with your students to see how many things are repeated. Ask how many bows they see. The first

student that says the number must point out where the bows are. If they can identify that number of bows, they win that question. Repeat this process with the following things: circles, rectangles, straight lines, and curvy lines. The right answer is not the main goal of the game. The goal is to get the students to observe the painting closely.

#### Language Arts

Have the students pretend they are either the musician in this painting or the artist who is creating the painting. Then, have them create a diary as if they were one of these people. Have them describe the moments

surrounding the creation of this painting.

#### Social Studies

The woman in this painting is playing a guitar, which is a hobby or leisure-time activity. List other late 19th-century, leisure-time activities by looking at the other transparencies. Compare and contrast them to the leisure-time activities of present day. List the similarities and differences. How accurately did the artist depict the guitar and its playing? Check with the guitarists in the class.



## Lesson #9

**Edgar Degas (duh-GAH)**  
**French, 1834-1917**  
***Before the Performance,***  
**about 1896-98**

Oil on paper laid on canvas  
18 3/4 x 24 3/4 in.

National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland.  
Image: © National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh,  
Scotland

### Subject

Before the Performance depicts a favorite Degas subject, an off-guard moment in the life of the Paris ballet dancer. As the last minutes to curtain time tick by, these little “rats” (a common nickname for the company’s adolescent dancers) daydream, gossip, and adjust their costumes. By the 1890s, Degas had little need to sell his work, thanks to earlier commercial success and inherited wealth. He was able to take more risks artistically, as demonstrated in the moodiness of this painting. Notice how the dancers’ faces are blank and expressionless; they stand to the rear of the picture space, as if alienated from the viewer. The artist no longer tried to render his subjects’ feelings. “They call me the painter of dancers,” Degas said, “without understanding that for me the dancer has been the pretext for painting beautiful fabrics and rendering movement.”

### Style

The artist was fascinated by the succession of movements and gestures - one reason, no doubt, that he painted dancers in so many positions. He liked the artistic tension of arms and legs straining and twisting at odd angles, apparent in the two dancers on the right of this painting. The figure bisected by the picture frame (left) and the slash of trees across the background show the influence of photography on Degas’ compositions. Some photographs capture unusual, spontaneous compositions with figures, and objects cropped off rather than whole within the image. Blurred edges and delicate application of paint give the painting a two-dimensional, decorative feeling reminiscent of the Japanese prints so popular at the time. Degas also used more brilliant, expressive colors than in earlier works. The orange tutus are a soft smudge of paint, resembling the original

pastel that inspired this painting.

### Artist

Edgar Degas was born to an affluent Parisian banking family and briefly studied law before turning to art. Although a founding member of the Impressionist group exhibitions, Degas never really thought of himself as an Impressionist. He had received academic art training. He worked more realistically than the other Impressionists for much of his career. His drawing skills, obvious in the clear, deliberate lines around his painting subjects, also set him apart from Monet, Renoir, Sisley, and many others. Unlike his fellow Impressionists, who were criticized for sloppy brushwork and lack of finish, Degas was sometimes questioned for the “low-life” subjects he painted obsessively: laundresses, dancers, and street women. In later life, the artist moved away from realism toward a

looser style that would inspire a new generation of

painters. This looser style

was due, in part, to his failing eyesight.

## Looking Questions

- Squint your eyes and describe the colors, shapes, and patterns that you see.
- Where is the source of light?
- Name the colors that are repeated.
- What complementary colors do you see?
- What did the artist crop or cut off at the edges of this painting?
- Cover the bottom third of the transparency. How does it change?
- Cover all of the transparency except one of the dancers. What did the artist choose to simplify or eliminate?
- Imagine that all the dancers were wearing pink instead of yellow and orange. How would it change the mood of the painting?

## Activities

### The Arts

Look at all the different positions the dancers' bodies take in the painting. Recruit a few willing students to pose in the same positions the dancers took while the artist, Edgar Degas, sketched, photographed, or painted them. The rest of the students will sketch a series of quick drawings capturing the movement and gesture of the body rather than making it anatomically correct. Use charcoal crayons or soft pencils for this exercise.

### Math or Science

One influence on Impressionist painting was the invention of the camera in the middle of the 19th century. There was no longer a need to paint a person or event with complete accuracy because a photograph could

be taken instead. The computer was invented in the middle of the 20th century. What new kinds of art has the computer influenced or enabled? Ask the students to write an essay about these two inventions and their impact on the world of art.

### Language Arts

Have the students compose a story describing the movements of the dancers in the painting. List words that describe the dancers' actions. What happened after the moment you see in the image? The title of the painting is *Before the Performance*. Have the students write what they imagine the performance would be like.

### Social Studies

This painting has several colors, like buttery yellows and peachy oranges. Write a recipe for this painting. Include measurements, all the ingredients you can find, the time to prepare, and any special "cooking" or "viewing/consuming" instructions. Write another recipe for one of the other transparencies (maybe the other Degas) and see if someone else can guess which recipe matches each image. For example: "You will need orange, yellow, brown, black, white, and green paint. Mix paint to taste. Apply paint liberally to background, foreground, and dancers' costumes and sparingly to bodies and faces. Sprinkle white paint to garnish. Enjoy this satisfying painting again and again!"

# Glossary

**Academy or Academic art** - Art created according to the prescriptions of the official academies of painting and sculpture which flourished in Europe from the 17th to the 19th centuries. French Academic art of the late 19th century was characterized by idealized mythological or historical subject matter, mixed, modulated colors, and a smooth, highly polished finish.

**background** - The surface or area against which objects are seen or represented.

**Barbizon School** - A group of French painters who, from about 1830 to 1870, lived in or near the town of Barbizon, at the edge of the forest of Fontainebleau in France. There they painted the animals, landscapes, and people of the region. The group was distinguished by painting outdoors rather than in studios, as had generally been the practice. The work of the Barbizon painters included a wider scope of subject matter, greater realism, and fresher color than that of the other French painters of the time, who followed the traditions of historical scenes and idealized style favored by the conservative French Academy. The Barbizon painters are considered by many as the precursors of Impressionism in their informality and insistence on naturalness rather than idealism.

**color wheel** - Conventional means of arranging the primary colors (blue, red, and yellow), their principal mixtures or secondary colors (orange, green, and violet), and other principal mixtures or hues, so as to demonstrate their sequential relationship. Colors that fall directly opposite one another in the color circle are called complementary colors.

**complementary color** - A primary color whose placement opposite the secondary color produced by the other two primaries on the color circle makes it seem brighter or

stronger. For example, red strengthens green, blue strengthens orange, and yellow strengthens violet.

**composition** - The combination of elements in a painting or other work of art that provides order or structure to the scene.

**cool color** - A color that suggests sensations of coolness, such as blue or its associated hues, blue-green, and blue-violet. In painting, cool colors appear to recede from the picture plane and therefore suggest depth.

**dandy** - A man who affects extreme elegance in clothes and manners.

**flâneur** (Fr.) - This French word describes an idler or stroller.

**focal point** - The area in a pictorial composition to which the eye returns most naturally.

**foreground** - The part of a picture or view depicted as nearest to the viewer.

**horizon line** - In linear perspective, the line where sky and earth seem to meet. It is on this line that the vanishing point is located.

**Japonisme** (Fr.) - The widespread interest in all things Japanese - art, furnishings, costume, etc. - in France after the opening of Japan to Western trade in 1854. The color harmonies, simple designs, asymmetrical compositions, and flat forms of Japanese wood block prints strongly influenced Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art.

**landscape** - A landscape is a view or vista of natural scenery on land, or a representation, especially painting, of the outdoors.

**linear perspective** - Uses real or suggested lines converging on a vanishing point or points on the horizon line or at eye level, and linking receding planes as they converge. It provides a three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface.

**middle ground** - The part of a picture or view depicted as the middle to the viewer.

**one-point perspective** - Linear perspective in which the eye is drawn towards a single vanishing point in the center of the composition, usually on the horizon line. Synonym: centralized perspective.

**optical mixtures** - Pure primary colors used in small touches in close juxtaposition so that they seem to merge, producing secondary colors. This effect was used in Impressionist art.

**outline** - In drawing, an imaginary line which marks the boundary of an object or figure, without taking into consideration light, shade, internal modeling, or color.

**overlap** - To extend over and cover part of.

**palette** - 1. A portable tray (usually made of wood) on which an artist sets out his colors and also mixes them. 2. By extension, the choice of colors seen in his or her work.

**perspective** - The method of representing a three-dimensional object, or a particular volume of space, on a flat or nearly flat surface.

**(en) plein air painting** - 1. Painted out of doors. The practice may have been initiated by François Desportes in the early 18th century but was made a matter of doctrine by the Impressionists. 2. Sometimes incorrectly applied to landscapes painted in the studio which employ such a direct technique that they seem to have been done out of doors.

**primary colors** - Blue, yellow, and red. The colors from which all others are derived, and which cannot be resolved or decomposed into other colors.

**provenance** - The record of all known previous ownership and locations of a work of art.

**The Salon** - An official French exhibition of paintings was first held in 1667 under royal patronage in the Salon d'Apollon in the Louvre. From 1667 to 1737 the exhibit was held annually; from 1737 to the French Revolution it was held biannually. After the French Revolution (1789-99), the Salon took place once again annually. It continued to be officially administered until 1881, when the government withdrew. In that year a committee of ninety artists, elected by all who had exhibited in previous Salons, met to set up the Soc? ti? Nationale des Beaux-Arts. This organization held an annual exhibition of its own from 1880 onwards.

**self-portrait** - An artistic image of the artist, especially one showing the face.

**still life** - A painting of objects.

**underpainting** - In traditional oil painting, the process of painting the canvas in a neutral color as a first step in the development of tonal values and of the composition as a whole.

**vanishing point** - In perspective, the point towards which a set of lines, which are in reality parallel to each other, seem to converge.

**warm color** - A color which suggests sensations of warmth, such as red or yellow. Warm colors tend to project from the picture plane.

Resource for art terms: Lucie-Smith, Edward. The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Art Terms. London, 1984. Most of the definitions in the glossary are from this dictionary.

# Selected Bibliography & Resources for Educators

## Books

### Children

Bjork, Christina and Anderson, Lena. *Linnea in Monet's Garden*. Stockholm: R & S Books, 1987. This is a story of a little girl's interest in Monet and her visit to Monet's home.

Muhlberger, Richard. *What Makes a Degas a Degas?* New York: Viking/Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993. The book explores such art topics as style, composition, color, and subject matter as they relate to twelve works by Degas.

Muhlberger, Richard. *What Makes a Monet a Monet?* New York: Viking/Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993. The book explores such art topics as style, composition, color, and subject matter as they relate to twelve works by Monet.

Muhlberger, Richard. *What Makes a Van Gogh a Van Gogh?* New York: Viking/Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993. The book explores such art topics as style, composition, color, and subject matter as they relate to twelve works by van Gogh.

Salvi, Francesco. *The Impressionists: The Origin of Modern Painting*. [Masters of Arts Series]. New York: Peter Bedrich Boales, 1994. The book includes information on individual artists, list of key dates, historical background, and nice illustrations.

Skira-Venturi, Rosabianca. *A Weekend with Renoir*. New York: Rizzoli, 1991. The book

briefly examines his life and influences and has many reproductions of his works.

Skira-Venturi, Rosabianca. *A Weekend with Van Gogh*. New York: Rizzoli, 1993. It briefly examines his life and influences and has many reproductions of his works.

Welton, Jude. *Monet*. [Eyewitness Art series]. London: D. Kindersley/The Musée Marmottan, Paris, 1992. This book uses the same format for each artist with many reproductions, details, and text.

Welton, Jude. *Impressionism*. [Eyewitness Art series]. New York: D. Kindersley/The Art Institute of Chicago, 1993. This book combines biography and artistic analysis with photos of selected works. It has many detailed reproductions.

### Adults

Bade, Patrick. *Degas: The Masterworks*. New York: Portland House, 1991. The author outlines Degas' life, influences, and works and contains many color reproductions with commentary.

Denvir, Bernard. *The Impressionists at First Hand* [World of Art series]. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987. This paperback book has first hand accounts by Impressionist artists and writers about their lives.

de la Faille, J.B. *The Works of Vincent van Gogh: His Paintings and Drawings*. Amsterdam: Reynal and Co./Wm. Morrow, 1970. Described as the definitive catalog of van Gogh's work, and the only book that contains reproductions of all of his known paintings and drawings.

Lloyd, Christopher. *Pissarro*. New York: Phaidon, 1979. Forty-eight full-color plates with commentary and analysis.

Moffet, Charles S., Benson, Ruth and Wiseman, Fronia E. *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886*. Seattle: R. Barton

distributors for the United States and Canada, The University of Washington Press, ©1986, 1989. This catalogue provides an overview of the paintings in the Impressionist exhibition.

Nunhead, Nancy. *Claude Monet*. London: Park Lane, 1994. Nunhead briefly introduces Monet's life and the development of his work with over ninety large, full-color plates.

Rewald, John. *The History of Impressionism*. New York Graphic Society Boston/The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fourth revised edition, 1973. The 672-page book has 623 illustrations, and is a comprehensive reference.

Romano, Eileen. *The Impressionists Their Lives, Their World, and Their Paintings*. New York: Penguin Studio, 1997. This book is a concise introduction to Impressionism including the historical context.

Stuckey, Charles. *Berthe Morisot, Impressionist*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1987. It has biographical information and many full-color reproductions.

White, Barbara Ehrlich. *Renoir, His Life, Art and Letters*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, New York. 1984. The book has detailed information; 391 illustrations.

White, Barbara Ehrlich. *Impressionists Side by Side: Their Friendships, Rivalries and Artistic Exchanges*. New York: Knopf, 1996. White focuses on seven pairs of artists: Degas and Manet, Monet and Renoir, Cézanne and Pissarro, Manet and Morisot, Cassatt and Degas, Morisot and Renoir, Cassatt and Morisot. She compares their treatment of identical subjects using reproductions, and text.

Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987. The book has biographical data, his working methods, characteristic themes, color reproductions, and a selection of critical responses.

## Videos

### Children

*Linnea in Monet's Garden*. The Linnea Swedish Film Institute, Feature Institute Nordic Film, and TV Fund, 1993. This is a 30-minute story of a little girl's interest in Monet and her visit to Monet's home.

### Adults

*An Age of Reason, An Age of Passion: A Fresh View, Impressionism and Post-Impressionism*. Produced by WNET, New York. West Long Branch, NJ: Kultur, 1989. This two-part video series was presented by PBS and is 114 minutes long.

*The Landscape of Pleasure*. Written and presented by Robert Hughes, The Ambrose video publishers, New York, 1988. The Shock of The New series explains the basics of Impressionism in 52 minutes.

*Monet, a Legacy of Light*. Boston WGBH by Public Media Home Vision, 1989. It is a 30-minute introduction to Monet's life and art.

## Web Sites

### *The Claude Monet Home Page*

[www.columbia.edu/~jns16/monet\\_html/monet.html](http://www.columbia.edu/~jns16/monet_html/monet.html)

This is an introduction to Monet with biographical information and an overview of Impressionism. Discussion of Monet's methods and techniques, formal and thematic analysis of one of his works. Bibliography is provided. Some sections are all text. It has great reproductions and links to other sites.

### *Impressionism: Paintings Collected by European Museums*

[www.Impressionism.org](http://www.Impressionism.org)

This site, created for this exhibition, has activities for teachers and families, essays on

the artists, and images of many paintings in the exhibition.

***Inside Art: An Adventure  
in Art History***

[www.eduweb.com/insideart/  
index.html](http://www.eduweb.com/insideart/index.html)

This is a great activity page for kids. There is also a link to teacher resources.

***WebMuseum Impressionism***

[http://metalab.unc.edu/wm/  
paint/glo/impressionism/](http://metalab.unc.edu/wm/paint/glo/impressionism/)

This site (Sun Site Aalborg University, Denmark) has extensive information about the Impressionist artists, links to biographical information with pictures of the artists and their works. An example is the site for Alfred Sisley:

[http://metalab.unc.edu/wm/  
paint/auth/sisley/](http://metalab.unc.edu/wm/paint/auth/sisley/)

There is a biography, description of techniques, and color photos of his works.

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