
Masterpiece: *The Dancing Class, 1874* by Edgar Degas

Pronounced: Ed-Gar DAY-GAH

Keywords: Movement, Rhythm,
Impressionism

Grade: 3rd Grade

Month: September/October

Activity: Proportional Study of a
Figure in Motion

TIME: 1 hour

Meet The Artist:

- Born in Paris France, 1834-1917 (born before the automobile was invented.)
- He had an American mother and Italian/French father who was a banker. They sent Edgar to an expensive boarding school as a child. His father was not happy when Edgar wanted to be a painter instead of a lawyer. At one point, his father cut him off financially, but Edgar survived on his own trying to be an artist. Eventually his father was impressed with his son's determination and helped support him.
- At 18, Degas was sent to art school in Paris and became friends with other artists known as the Impressionists.
- Degas was a deep believer in the traditional style of painting like the old masters- Da Vinci and Michelangelo had painted. He would spend his days studying their style and did not consider himself an Impressionist. However, he eventually incorporated both styles into his own work. He painted in the method of the old masters but also liked to use light and color much like the Impressionists did.
- Degas is most famous for capturing moments and movement in his work. He liked to paint his subjects as if they didn't know they were being watched. He also loved to paint the human form changing shape. Painting ballerinas on stage and in class was a way that he could do both.
- About the time he was 50, Degas' eyesight started to fail. As he grew older, he did less painting and more pastel drawings and sculpture. He died at age 83.



Discussion on Impressionism:

Impressionism was a style of painting that became popular over 100 years ago mainly in France. Up to this point in the art world, artists painted in a realistic manner. A painting by Monet, named "Impression: Sunrise" was the inspiration for the term Impressionism. Originally it was meant as an insult, but Monet embraced the name. The art institutes of the day thought that the paintings looked unfinished, or childlike. As a technique, impressionists used dabs of paint (often straight out of a paint tube) to recreate the impression they saw of the light and the effects the light had on color. Due to this, most Impressionistic artists painted in the "plein-air", French for open air. The emphasis was capturing the moment, the impression. In the 3rd grade lessons, the emphasis is this short span of time and how impressionism evolved. Emphasis on the term impressionism is used throughout this year. All six of the artists being taught this year brought something new and a little different to help move along the Impressionistic years. Eventually, impressionism spawned many other styles of art, from expressionism to abstract art

Possible Questions

- What do you see in this picture?
- What are the students doing?
- Is anyone actually dancing?
- What is a gesture? (A movement of the body or limbs that expresses an idea or attitude.)
- Do you see anyone making a gesture in this painting? What do these gestures tell you? (Girl scratching her back, playing with tutu and bow, hands behind neck, talking behind the teacher etc.)
- How does your eye travel around this picture? What do you see first? (The light plays off the tutus of the ballerinas, directing our sight around the composition. -You may have the student come to the board and map this out with his/her hand.) This is how the artist uses Rhythm and Movement.
Movement is the path that our eyes follow as we look at a work of art. If the artist has created a **Rhythmic flow**, then our eyes are easily led from one place to another. Do you think there is a Rhythmic flow in this painting?
Does anyone see the picture differently?
- What do you like about this painting? What grade would you give the artist?
- Would you have this painting in your bedroom?

Activity: Proportional Study of a Figure in Motion

Materials Needed: Art mannequins (wooden figure models), 9"x12" light colored construction paper, colored tissue paper cut into credit card sizes, glue sticks

Explain Activity: students will be creating a human figure in motion on paper using torn pieces of tissue paper and adding a background. Please allow 40 minutes for this activity.

Process:

1. Divide students into groups of 4-6 and place a wooden figure model on each workstation.
2. Hand out paper and glue stick to each student and place a pile of the cut tissue papers in center of workstation.
3. Label back of paper with student/teacher name.
4. Place the wooden model in the center of each group. Brainstorm with each group on an active pose. Have students carefully arrange the wooden model into a pose.
5. Demonstrate how to build a human figure on the construction paper. Start with the head. Discuss the size, position, and shape of the head and where to locate the head on the paper to indicate the body leaping, bowing, stretching, etc.
6. Give the students a moment to study their mannequin.
7. Demonstrate how to tear the tissue paper into smaller pieces as well as how to use the glue stick.
8. Begin to assemble their figure's pose from their vantage point by tearing the tissue paper into smaller, half inch pieces.
9. After students have their assembly, they may begin to glue the pieces down.
10. Instruct students to keep adding small pieces of tissue paper to amend the shape as it develops.
11. Students who finish their figure quickly should be encouraged to develop a foreground, a sky or even other figures or animals.
12. This activity was created without the use of pencil sketching as it can frustrate the student in trying to "stay within the lines". However, if student is struggling with the concept, they may create a light sketch of the figure in motion and proceed with the tissue paper.

Photograph and Self Portraits of Edgar Degas and Other Works



