

“Learning to Look” Teacher’s Handbook Impressionist & Post-Impressionist Art

Curriculum Overview

Class 1: Portraiture

1. Overview: Elements of Art
2. Artworks Discussed
 - a. *The Monet Family in their Garden*, painted in 1874 by Edouard Manet



- b. *Spring: Margot Standing in a Garden*, painted in 1900 by Mary Cassatt



3. Optional Modern Discussion: *The Official Portrait of Barack Obama*, painted in 2018 by Kehinde Wiley



4. Project Ideas
 - a. Project A. Have the students draw or photograph themselves in a class or activity that they enjoy. Ask them to consider the following questions: What makes this a self-portrait versus just a photograph or image of the subject? Which colors are used, and what does that signify? Is the portrait of one subject only, or of many subjects? Is the subject posing, or in a natural stance? What is in the foreground and the background, and what is the significance of such placement? **Supplies Needed:** Various coloring supplies available in the Learning to Look closet or colored pencils available in the classroom.
 - b. Project B. Have the students bring in a baby photo selected by his/her parents. The photo will be included in the Learning to Look binder, so please ask parents to send in a photo that we can keep. Ask the children to describe the photo and to explain to the class why his or her parents chose to send in that particular photograph. What does the photograph suggest about the child's personality?

Class 2: Landscape

1. Overview: Elements of a Landscape
2. Artworks Discussed
 - a. *The Boulevard Montmartre on a Winter Morning*, painted in 1897 by Camille Pissarro



- b. *Poplars*, painted in 1891 by Claude Monet



3. Optional Modern Discussion: *Nightview, New York*, photographed in 1932 by Berenice Abbott



4. Project Ideas
 - a. Project A. Give each child a piece of paper and a pencil. Have them fold the paper in thirds the way they would to fit a business letter into an envelope. These thirds become the foreground, middle-ground and background of their picture. Then instruct them to draw two lines starting far apart at the bottom of the paper and gradually coming closer together until they meet somewhere along the top fold of the paper. Show them that this creates a road that disappears in the distance the way Pissaro's does. Have the children add objects (houses, trees, etc. that begin larger and more distinct at the bottom of the page and gradually get smaller and less detailed as they reach the background. **Supplies Needed:** Cut paper to size to fit into project books before having children fold the sheets. (White paper is available in the LTL closet)
 - b. Project B. Ask each child to draw a familiar landscape (i.e. backyard, Fox Meadow School, Scarsdale Village). **Supplies Needed:** Choose any medium appropriate for your class.

Class 3: Narrative

1. Overview: Elements of a Narrative Work
2. Artworks Discussed
 - a. *Dance Class*, painted in 1874 by Edgar Degas



- b. *Study for A Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte*, painted in 1884 by Georges Seurat



3. Optional Modern Discussion: *Museo del Prado 1, Madrid*, photographed in 2005 by Thomas Struth



4. Project Ideas
 - a. Project A. Ask the children to tell a story about their weekends using markers and colored pencils (i.e. playing in a soccer game, performing in a dance recital, hanging out with your parents).
 - b. Project B. Give each child one section of the black & white copy of *A Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte* by Seurat. (If this is a larger class, two children may need to work together on a single section.). Have the child “color” the section with a marker making dots. Attach all the pieces together to create the original look of the painting. Ask the teacher in advance if the assembled project can be displayed. Photograph the assembled painting, which will be included in each child’s Learning to Look Binder. **Supplies needed:** Complete sets of the black & white version of the painting *Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte* are assembled into packets and available in the Learning to Look closet. Use dot markers, or regular markers, both available in the closet.

Class 4: Still Life

1. Overview: Elements of a Still Life
2. Artworks Discussed
 - a. *Vase of Roses*, painted in 1890 by Vincent van Gogh



- b. *Still Life with Apples*, painted in 1890 by Paul Cézanne



3. Optional Modern Discussion: *Still Life with Apples, After Cézanne*, created in 2004 by Vik Muniz



4. Project Ideas
 - a. Project A. Have the kids set up and create their own still life using cut-outs from magazines or newspapers. **Supplies Needed:** Learning to Look volunteers to supply magazine cutouts, scraps of colorful paper. Cut out enough objects so each child has 5 or 6 images to choose from.
 - b. Project B. Divide the class into 5 groups, giving each group a bag of 6-7 “still life objects”. Ask each group to arrange a still life, using the same objects, and then photograph the resulting still-life. **Supplies Needed:** “Still life object” bags are available in the Learning to Look closet.

Elements of Art

- Line
- Shape
- Color
- Texture
- Light

Eye Exercises

- Every Learning to Look art class begins with eye exercises which help to refresh the students' eyes and focus them on the task at hand. The exercises mark a beginning to the session and quiet the group in order to prepare them for concentrated looking.
 1. Open your eyes wide like owls.
 2. Shut them tightly like mice.
 3. Look up to the ceiling, down to the floor, up to the ceiling, down to the floor. Do not move your head!
 4. Moving only your eyes, look to the right, look to the left, to the right, to the left.
 5. Close your eyes and place your fingertips lightly on your eyelids. RELAX.
(During this time the teacher reveals the first work of art to be studied).
 6. Open your eyes: you are now ready to look!

First Class: Styles of Portraiture

Introduce yourself and welcome students to a new year of "Learning to Look." Inquire if there are any students who have never had a "Learning to Look" class before. If so, ask some of their classmates to explain what we do together during the four times of the year that this class meets.

Stress the importance of looking and of not being afraid to express one's ideas and feelings. Both the viewing and making of art should be enjoyable! In the process, everyone will also learn a great deal as well.

Take a few minutes at the beginning of this class to review the Elements of Art--color, line, shape, texture, light, and space.

Teachers should review the material on pages 8-35 of the Learning to Look Handbook, available on the PTA website at <https://www.scarsdaleschools.k12.ny.us/Page/27108>. Please select several points to discuss with your class on each of the elements.

This year we will be looking at a specific period in French art history -- the second half of the nineteenth century. Write the dates 1850-1900 on the blackboard to make this clear. We will also be focusing on a specific group of artists known as the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Not all were born in France but all of them lived there at some time during their careers.

Have the students find France on a map.

What is the capital of France? Point out Paris and explain to them that Paris was the center of much art activity one hundred years ago.

The artists we will be studying created very new styles of painting.

As we look at their canvases this year, we will be asking ourselves, what was new in their art. Why was it considered so modern, shocking or even revolutionary?

And why are the same canvases that were severely criticized in the 1870s now beloved by almost everyone and sold at auction for some of the highest prices ever paid for art -- in the hundreds of millions of dollars!

The Monet Family in their Garden, painted by Edouard Manet, in 1874, oil on canvas



Background Information (for teacher)

Edouard Manet was born in Paris to well-to-do parents. As a young man, he went to sea to avoid having to study law. Almost a decade older than Monet and Renoir, he is often considered, along with Degas, as the elder brother of Impressionism.

Yet Manet never called himself an Impressionist and didn't exhibit with the group. Having begun his art studies with the academic painter, Couture, in 1850, Manet never wanted to forego exhibiting in the official Salons.

He was strongly influenced by the Old Masters, especially the Spanish artists Velasquez and Goya. Yet the pictures he painted revolutionized the art world and the way people look at art. He rejected many academic conventions in his search for a way to make painting more immediate, more a reflection of what the eye sees.

For example, he painted in broad, flat areas and eliminated half-tones, the traditional way of painting based on intermediate tones progressing from dark to light. His subject matter, drawn from contemporary life, was often considered scandalous.

His famous picture, *Dejeuner Sur L'Herbe*, depicts a picnic at which a seated, nude woman is surrounded by clothed males. The Impressionists were especially influenced by his daring simplifications, his choice of subject matter from everyday Parisian life, and his new compositional devices.

Yet Manet was also influenced by the Impressionists. The painting we are looking at shows this influence at its height. Manet has adopted here the broken color and sketchy brush strokes of Monet, whom he visited frequently at his country home in Argenteuil during the Summer of 1874.

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

Show the students Manet's painting of *The Monet Family in their Garden*.

This painting by the French artist, Edouard Manet.

How many people are shown in this scene?

- Three

What do you call a portrait of more than one person?

- A group portrait

Do you think these people are related? Why or why not?

- They seem to be related because of their familiar poses. The boy lays against the woman.
- This is in fact a family portrait of the artist Claude Monet, his wife Camille and their son Jean. (Write the names Manet and Monet on the blackboard and underline the one letter in which they differ.)

What is the setting for this portrait? That is, where does Manet show the Monet family?

- In their garden.
- The title of this painting is The Monet Family in their Garden.

What season do you think it is?

- Most students will say summer.
- Green grass and trees, out of doors, working in garden.

Where did Manet set up his easel to paint this picture?

- Directly in front of Mme Monet. Out-of-doors.
- The Impressionists not only sketched outside like earlier artists, they also made finished paintings outside. They painted quickly because they were interested in capturing the changing light and colors of nature and how they are taken in rapidly by the human eye.

Could you tell that Monet was an artist from the way Manet shows him in this portrait? What is Monet doing?

- Monet is working in his garden. He loved to garden and his gardens in Giverny in France can still be visited.
- He appears to be holding a red flower, perhaps to pick it.

Can you find: a watering can, a rooster, a duck, a baby duckling, a red fan?

Is this a formal or an informal pose?

- Informal

- The people don't seem to be posing at all.
- Monet is shown bending over and his son is lying down.

What is the mood of this painting?

- Casual, relaxed, warm and happy.

This painting is an example of a new style of painting that developed in France in the 1870s. It is called Impressionism. We will learn more about the meaning of its name in another class.

Claude Monet was one of the leaders of the Impressionists.

Manet was older than Monet and never really considered himself an Impressionist, but in 1874 when this painting was done, Manet visited Monet a number of times at his house along the banks of the Seine River in the town of Argenteuil, northwest of Paris. Monet influenced Manet to paint in the new style.

What does it mean when you say you got an impression?

- That you got its main image or idea but not all the precise details.

Let me tell you a true story that will help you recapture the day this painting was painted. Manet was not the only visitor to the Monet family that summer day. The Impressionist painter Renoir also came and painted Mme Monet and Jean as they were posing for Manet. Manet teasingly whispered to Monet about Renoir, "He has no talent at all, that boy!

You, who are his friend, tell him please to give up painting." Monet also painted a picture that day, one of Manet at work on this canvas. (This picture is now lost.). At the end of the day, Renoir and Manet gave their paintings to Monet as a thank you for having them visit.

Now let's see if we can figure out what the Impressionists were interested in in their art.

Can you see the brush strokes in Manet's painting or are they all smoothed over the way they were by artists of the earlier generation?

- The brush strokes are very clear.
- Manet has applied his paints like the Impressionists in dabs and dashes like a sketch.

What about the contour lines here, are they easy to see?

- Manet's outlines are blurry, not clear or detailed.
- Notice how when you look closely, the red flower is merely a dab of red paint

Does Manet use a somber background or are his colors bright all over?

- Manet's colors are bright, sunlight.

Does Manet try to re-create all the different textures in this painting?

- No, he paints all the objects with the same texture. Notice how he uses the same brush strokes for Mme Monet's dress as he does for the grass.

What texture is most important to Manet here?

- The texture of the paint itself.

Is this composition symmetrical (balanced on each side of the center line)?

- No. Mme Monet and Jean are somewhat off center to counterbalance Monet and the animals on the left.

The painters we call the Impressionists did not choose that name to describe themselves. The term was first coined by an art critic who took the name from one of Monet's paintings, *Impression, Sunrise*.

In the spring of 1874 Monet, Renoir, Degas, Pissarro and others held a special exhibition of their works in Paris because so many of them had been rejected by the Salon (the official exhibition of the French Royal Academy).

After viewing one of Monet's paintings at the show, *Impression, Sunrise*, a sarcastic art critic coined the term Impressionism and complained that the paintings looked like "palette-scrapings placed uniformly on a dirty canvas."

The critics who attacked the Impressionists were reacting to what they thought was the unfinished nature of their pictures.

Let's look closely today at what was new and different in Impressionist art.

Mary Cassatt, *Spring: Margot Standing in a Garden*, painted in 1900, oil on canvas.



Background Information (for teacher)

Mary Cassatt was the first recognized American woman artist and her work is still highly regarded today. She enjoys the distinction of having been the only American officially associated with the Impressionist movement in France.

Born in what is today part of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to well-to-do parents, Mary spent from 1851 to 1855 with her family in Europe. Returning to Philadelphia, she spent four years (1861-65) studying art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

In 1865, she went to Paris to further her studies, spending long hours copying old master paintings and sketching.

She also traveled to study art in Italy, Spain, Holland and Belgium. In 1877, her parents and sister Lydia moved to Paris to live with her. Cassatt did not return to America again until 1898 and then only for a visit.

She never married and stayed within a close circle of family and friends. One of those who encouraged her work was the painter Degas. In 1877 he invited her to join the group of independent artists who were holding separate exhibitions of their painting.

Cassatt exhibited in four of the eight Impressionist exhibitions.

Cassatt's work was especially influenced by Degas and, like him, she preferred figure painting. She painted no still-lives or landscapes without figures and relatively few portraits of men.

Her specialty was women and children whom she rendered with warmth and naturalism. Her depictions of motherhood avoid all false sentimentality and create a feeling of intimacy and psychological truth. Cassatt also was a gifted printmaker.

Her more than 200 prints reflect the influence of Japanese printmaking style with its cropped

figures, high horizon line, asymmetrical composition, and decorative patterning.

Cassatt also played an important role in American art as an advisor to wealthy collectors such as Louisine Havemeyer. She encouraged them to buy works of new artists such as the Impressionists as well as old masters. Many of the works in the Havemeyer Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art were purchased with her advice.

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

Now we are going to look at a picture by an artist who also loved to paint women and children. Her name was Mary Cassatt and she was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She was the only American to be an established member of the French Impressionist group.

(This is a good time to remind students that not all Impressionist artists are men. Despite the limits placed by society at the time on the independent activities of women in the nineteenth century--they couldn't go out alone in Paris or wander about freely, Cassatt was able to flourish as an artist and earn a living as a professional painter. She accomplished this partly by painting settings in and around her own home, using members of her own family and her French neighbors as her models. Cassatt never married and had no children of her own.)

Show the students the poster of Spring: Margot Standing in a Garden and ask them what is the subject of this painting?

- A little girl, perhaps around age five.
- Her name was Margot Lux and she lived near Cassatt's country home that she had purchased *north* of Paris in 1893.
- The artist painted Margot more than two dozen times.
- Cassatt preferred to use the same amateur models over and over again so that they became accustomed to posing and would not appear self-conscious.

Cassatt shared the Impressionists' fascination with painting what they saw and capturing the informal, spontaneous quality of contemporary life. Let's look at some of the ways Cassatt has made this painting so fresh and natural.

How is the child posing? Does she seem stiff and formal or relaxed and comfortable? Why?

- She seems very relaxed and informal.
- Her dress is slipping off her shoulder and her hands gather up its hem in an un-self-conscious, childlike manner.

Where is Margot looking?

- Away from the viewer.
- She gazes away to our right and appears absorbed in her own thoughts. Her gaze gives a dreamy feeling to the painting.

On what level are we, the viewer, in this picture? At eye level, above eye level (bird's eye view), or below eye level (worm's eye view)?

- We are at eye level which means that adults would have had to bend down to achieve this view. It brings us on the same level as the little girl and adds to the painting's feeling of intimacy.

Where do you think Mary Cassatt placed her easel to paint this picture? Was she up close or far away?

- The easel must have been placed up close because the child occupies a large area of the foreground.

Do we see all of Margot's body or only a part?

- Only a part. This is a three-quarters view. The figure is cropped off at the knees by the edge of the canvas.
- This type of cropped or cut off view was very typical of Impressionist paintings and probably reflects the influence of Japanese prints that used the same technique.

What is the setting of this picture?

- Outdoors, in a garden.

Do you think the background is painted as clearly as the foreground in this painting?

- It is easier to see the contour lines in the figure of Margot than it is to see lines in the background which is painted with looser brushstrokes.
- Like Degas, Cassatt paid more attention to drawing than some of the other Impressionists.

What two colors create a strong contrast here? Hint: where do you see two complementary colors placed next to one another?

- The red of the sleeves of the girl's dress contrasts strongly with its complement, the green of the grass and trees. (Review complementary colors with your students if necessary. Remind them that when two complementary colors are placed side-by-side, the colors seem at their brightest)
- The Impressionists frequently used complementary colors to create strong, high-toned color in their pictures.

Why do you think the artist titled this painting and how is it similar in mood to Manet's painting we just looked at?

- Both are set in the warmer weather. Both show children.
- Both are paintings of youthful innocence.
- In spring and summer everything is new, and fresh and young, like children. It is a hopeful time of year.

To review, let's list how the artist has made Margot the center of attention in this picture?

- She is the largest object. She is in the foreground. She is in the center.
- The white of her dress catches our attention in contrast to the darker colors around it.
- The red of her sleeves contrasts strongly with the green grass. Her whole body is bathed in sunlight as is the surrounding landscape.

What type of painting is it when the person is most important?

- A portrait

What do you think is the most important part of a portrait and why?

- Usually the face because it reveals emotions and character most directly.

What did the artist do to make Margot's face stand out?

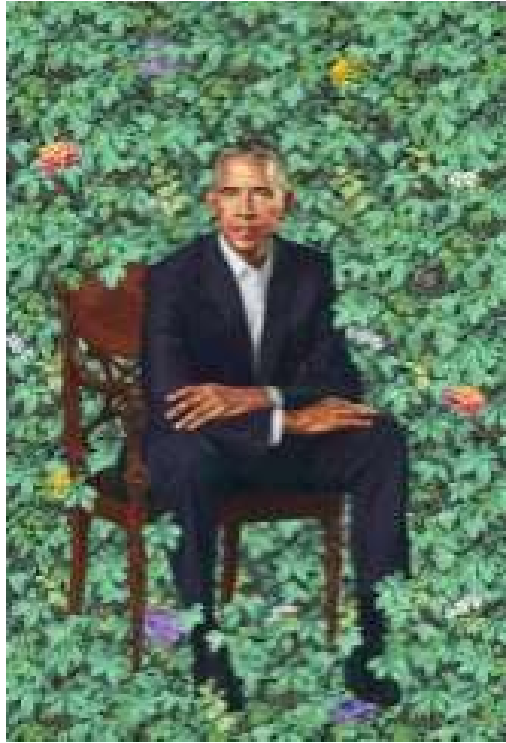
- She used a large black poke bonnet with a pink rose to create a frame around her face.
- The color black is very dramatic and sets off the paleness of her face.

Where do you find echoes of the color of the rose in the rest of this picture?

- The shades of pink in the rose are midway between the brighter red of her dress and the paler pink of her skin. It helps to tie the picture together and softens the harsh black of the hat.

Optional Modern Discussion

The Official Portrait of Barack Obama, painted in 2018 by Kehinde Wiley



Background Information (for teachers)

Los Angeles native and New York based visual artist, Kehinde Wiley has situated himself within art history's portrait painting tradition. Wiley uses his medium to convey the heroic, powerful, majestic and sublime in his representation of urban, diverse men found throughout the world.

Wiley's figures disturb and interrupt tropes of portrait painting, often blurring the boundaries between traditional and contemporary modes of representation and the critical portrayal of masculinity and physicality.

Initially, Wiley's portraits were based on photographs taken of young men found on the streets of Harlem. As his practice grew, his eye led him toward an international view, including models found in urban landscapes throughout the world.

Wiley's figurative paintings and sculptures "quote historical sources and position young black men within the field of power." His heroic paintings evoke a modern style instilling a unique and contemporary manner, awakening complex issues that many would prefer remain mute.

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

Unveil the Kehinde Wiley portrait of Obama. Discuss the uproar it caused when it was unveiled at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. in 2018. The portrait features the

seated president posed against (and almost floating on top of) a seemingly living backdrop of foliage and flowers.

Is the pose formal or informal, conventional or unconventional?

- The pose itself is conventional, but informal. Obama is not at a desk with his papers like previous presidents. He is perched on the edge of his chair, seemingly detached from the background, floating.

Why do you think Obama chose Kehinde Wiley to represent him?

- Kehinde Wiley is one of the most pop-culture-friendly of art-market stars, known for combining bombastic scale, art-historical reference, and social relevance, originally by casting young men off the streets of Harlem and styling them as European royalty.

What is the symbolism of the foliage and flowers in the background?

- Chrysanthemums represent Obama's decades-long relationship with the city of Chicago (it is the official flower of Chicago).
- The African blue lilies is native to South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Mozambique, and is a symbol of Obama's paternal heritage
- The white flowers are jasmine, representing Obama's birthplace and childhood in Hawaii.

Compare and contrast the Manet and Cassatt portrait with the Obama portrait?

- Informal poses; floral elements with symbolism; bright colors.
- Impressionist "texture" is painterly, whereas Obama portrait hearkens back to more formal painting styles of the Old Masters.

Second Class: Landscape

Today we are going to look at two paintings by the French artists, Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, who were two of the leading members of the Impressionist movement.

Before we launch into a discussion on the artworks, a brief background on the Impressionist movement. The Impressionists were bored with the rules and standard of the French Academy. Instead of historic subjects, romantic views, and idealized portraits, they tried to paint exactly what they saw, directly from nature. They wanted to capture the moment, including the reflections of light on the surface of objects. They sought to paint visual sensations -- what the eye sees at a glance -- not what the brain knows or what style or conventions dictate.

In order to capture the changing effects of light on a subject, where do you suppose Monet and Pissarro usually did their painting, in the studio or outside?

Outside!

Unlike earlier artists who sketched outside but then returned to the studio to paint the finished product, Monet, Pissarro, and other Impressionists painted their entire canvases out-of-doors. This type of painting done directly from nature is called **plein-air** (open air) painting.

Since Monet and Pissarro were most interested in capturing natural light, what type of painting do you think appealed to him the most, i.e., portrait, landscape, still life, or narrative painting?

Landscape

Two inventions in the second half of the 19th century made it easier for artists to paint finished oil paintings out-of-doors. Can anyone guess what they might have been?

The portable easel and new oil paints in tubes.

Now let's focus on the two paintings by Monet and Pissarro.

Poplars, painted by Claude Monet, in 1891, oil on canvas.



Background Information (for teacher)

Claude Monet was born in Paris on November 14, 1840. His father was a wholesale grocer. Financial problems forced the family to move to LeHavre in the north of France when Monet was five. Monet was always fascinated by the sea and the light reflecting off of it. As a teenager, Monet was a successful caricaturist. His parents encouraged his precocious talent. Monet struck up a friendship with another painter in LeHavre, Boudin, who would become his first teacher. Boudin taught Monet to paint what he saw and influenced him to paint in the open-air as a way to retain the freshness of a sketch in a finished work. This idea was to become one of the hallmarks of Impressionist painting.

Monet went to Paris in 1859 but studied at the Academie Suisse rather than at the more traditional Ecole des Beaux-Arts. A year later he was drafted into the French army and served in Algeria. He was fascinated with the quality of light in North Africa and spent more and more time thinking about how to capture the effects of natural light on objects. In 1862 Monet was back in Paris and entered the studio of Gleyre where he met other artists like Renoir, Sisley and Bazille. They became his friends and joined Monet in painting out-of-doors. In 1865 Monet had two seascapes accepted by the Salon, but for the most part his works were considered too rough, too sketchy and unfinished to be sellable. Monet often went hungry, lacked money for art supplies, and even contemplated suicide at one point.

In 1870 Monet went to London where he was introduced to the dealer, Durand Ruel, who bought some of his pictures. Upon his return to Paris a year later, Monet began painting the landscape at Argenteuil along the Seine River. In 1874 he was one of the main organizers of the first Impressionist Exhibit and showed pictures in four of the seven subsequent group exhibitions.

Monet was always experimenting. In 1877 he made the first of his series paintings, of the railroad station at Saint Lazare. By the 1890s Monet was concentrating on making numerous versions of the same scene, for example, of haystacks, poplars, Rouen cathedral, etc, in order to record the changing effects of light and color according to the seasons, weather and time of day. His days of poverty were over.

Collectors began to buy his canvases especially in America, and in 1890 he had enough money to purchase a country home in Giverny twenty miles from Paris. Monet lavished his attention on the gardens there, diverting a stream to make a pond, building a Japanese bridge, and creating a colorful garden filled with a wide variety of plant material. Monet painted many pictures of his garden including the famous canvases of water lilies.

In later years, the artist was troubled by poor vision. A cataract operation restored some sight but eventually he was almost completely blind. Monet continued to paint as he could and his later works are noted for their greater abstraction. Cezanne said of his fellow artist's unsurpassed ability to record visual sensations, "Monet is only an eye, but my God what an eye!"

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

What is Monet depicting in this painting?

- Trees along a riverbank. This painting is entitled Poplars after the type of tree it contains.

Can you see any reflections?

- The trees are reflected in the water at the bottom of the canvas.

Where do you think the artist was when he painted this scene?

- In a boat on the river. Monet had a special broad-bottomed boat built with grooves to hold his canvases and easel.

Tell the students that you have an interesting story about how this picture came to be:

- In the summer and fall of 1891 Monet became fascinated with painting a row of trees along the Epte river near his house in Giverny. He heard, however, that the trees were going to be cut down by the village for lumber. To prevent this, Monet struck a deal with a local wood merchant whereby he would purchase the trees at auction but promise to let them remain until Monet was finished painting them.

Monet wanted to paint a series of pictures of these trees at different times of day and under different weather conditions. Monet believed that because light is always changing, to capture it truly, an artist must work quickly. He said that it took only seven minutes before the light left a certain leaf and moved on to the next. He would store a number of partially worked on canvases in the slots in his boat, and take out the one that matched the light conditions and time of day that existed at the moment. Monet exhibited fifteen pictures of poplars in 1892. Some critics praised them for their naturalism while others hailed their abstract, decorative qualities.

What is abstract about this painting, or to put it another way, how has Monet simplified these trees so that they no longer look like trees?

- They look like 4 vertical lines crossed by the horizontal of the river bank. He is emphasizing the trees verticality.
- These lines create an abstract pattern or design that is decorative rather than realistic.

Why does the scene appear blurry?

- Certain light conditions such as very strong sunlight make it hard for us to see the clear outlines of forms. The picture's blurriness emphasizes the bright sunlight.

Are there any people in this scene?

- No. From the 1880s on, Monet painted few human in his art.

Let's look carefully now at color, one of the most important elements of art for the Impressionists. List all the colors Monet has used to paint the foliage along the river bank.

- Green, blue, purple, red, yellow, pink.

Do you see any earth tones, i.e., browns or black?

- No. Monet uses yellow to indicate bright light and blue or violet for the shadows. The Impressionists for the most part did not use black to paint shadows. Instead, they discovered that shadows contain the reflected colors of the objects around them.

How did Monet apply his paint, in long, smooth strokes or in short dabs of paint?

- In short dabs of paint. Colors mixed on a palette are somewhat muddy, so Monet placed the pure colors side by side on the canvas and let the eye blend them. This created a livelier effect.

Do you think Monet's paintings are meant to be viewed up close or at a distance?

- Monet's objects are more recognizable at a distance because when the viewer is up too close, all he or she sees is the distinct dabs and splashes of color and not how they blend together to form specific objects.

The Boulevard Montmartre on a Winter Morning, painted by Camille Pissarro, in 1891, oil on canvas.



Show the poster of *The Boulevard Montmartre on a Winter Morning* without revealing its name.

Where are we in this scene?

- A city street.

Can you guess what city this might be? Hint: in what city were the Impressionist exhibitions held?

- Paris!

Do you know what a boulevard is?

- An avenue or wide street.

This painting is entitled *The Boulevard Montmartre on a Winter Morning* and was painted by the French artist Camille Pissarro. Pissarro was an Impressionist painter and a good friend of Monet's. He also befriended and helped many other artists who were just starting out in their careers such as Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne and Mary Cassatt. Around 1896 Pissarro became interested in painting cityscapes. His fascination with city life may have been because he had grown up in the Virgin Islands and had not come to Paris until he was older.

Do you remember the name for a painting that shows a view of a city?

- A cityscape

What is our point of view in this painting? Are we on the street?

- No, we are above.

Actually the view is from Pissarro's room at the Grand Hotel de Russie. Pissarro painted twelve paintings of this particular view. How might each of them differ?

- They might differ according to the weather, time of day or season.

Do you remember another artist we have studied who painted the same scene under changing conditions of weather and light?

- Monet. Pissarro had admired Monet's series paintings of haystacks and poplars when he viewed them in 1891 and 1892 and may have gotten the idea for his series of the Boulevard Montmartre from them. Pissarro began working on these paintings in early 1897. They all differ somewhat in their details and point of view.

What season is it in our painting?

- Winter. Did you notice the leafless trees?

What is the weather?

- It's snowy! The road is whitish with snow.

What time of day is it?

- Morning. We know this from the title of the painting.

*This type of weather, season and time of day makes for what overall **color tones**?*

- Whitish grey for the snow and the wintery sky as well as the browns and blacks of the buildings, carriages and bare branches of the trees.

Can you find where the artist has signed his name and the date '97?

- In the lower left hand corner.

If you didn't know the date of this painting, what evidence from the painting itself would help you date it?

- There are no cars, but horse-drawn carriages instead. (Point them out)
- There are gaslights rather than electric lights. (Can the students find them?)

Where can you find repeated lines and shapes which create a pattern?

- The smoke stacks and windows of the buildings form tiny rectangles.
- The trees, gas lamps and people are strong verticals.
- The carriages appear as repeated squares.

Do all these repeated lines and shapes create a base of movement?

- Yes. The blurring of the figures and carriages also indicate speed.

Have the children stand against the wall opposite from the painting and slowly walk towards it until they are only a small distance from the painting. What happens as they walk closer and closer?

- The objects become harder and harder to see as you get closer to the painting. Up very close, the objects appear as just strokes of paint.

Most Impressionist paintings were meant to be seen from a distance. Do you think this painting was painted slowly or quickly?

- Quickly with not much detail. It suggests a blurry, staccato rhythm. Pissarro has captured the hustle and bustle of a busy city street on a wintery day.

Let's look now at how Pissarro has created a sense of depth in this painting. What are some of the ways he convinces us that some objects in this picture are meant to be further away than others?

- Things meant to be farther away are painted less distinctly and fainter.
- Objects meant to be in the foreground are larger and placed at the bottom of the canvas.
- Objects meant to be in the background are painted smaller and are placed at the top of the canvas.

This way of creating distance in a painting is called aerial perspective. Another way to change a flat piece of canvas into a window on the world is to use linear perspective. Ask your students if they have ever noticed how when you look down a long road or railroad tracks, the edges of them seem to come together in the far distance. These edges of the road form perspective lines. Perspective is the appearance of objects in respect to their relative distance and positions of other objects. How objects relate to one another in size and scale.

Can anyone find some lines in Pissarro's painting that seem to come together as they get further away from the foreground? (Have a student point these out with his or her finger.)

The curbs of the road and the rooftops of the buildings all seem to come together in the background at a point known as the vanishing point. (Have another student identify the vanishing point.)

Perspective play a very big role in Pissarro's artwork, as seen by the trees and people getting smaller and smaller as they recede into the back of the artwork.

What is the perspective of you, the observer, of this artwork?

- The observer is welcomed into the artwork, evidenced by the wide street at the base of the artwork. It's almost as if the observer can walk right into the canvas.

Optional Modern Discussion

Nightview, by Berenice Abbott, in 1932, photograph.



Background Information (for teacher)

Berenice Abbott was an American woman photographer, who lived from July 17, 1898 to December 9, 1991. She is best known for taking photographs between the 2 World Wars around the 1930s, and capturing the architecture, urban design and livelihood of the cityscape in NYC. She was born in Ohio and attended Ohio State University for only 2 semesters but instead decided to leave and study in Paris. While in Paris she met Man ray, a famous photographer, who hired Abbott as a darkroom assistant in 1923. Abbott immediately developed a love of photography and is quoted as saying "I took to photography like a duck to water. I never wanted to do anything else." Man Ray recognized Abbotts skills in photography and let her use his darkroom for her own works. While in Paris, her subjects were people in the artistic and literary worlds, like Jean Cocteau and James Joyce. To be photographed by Abbott or Man Ray was considered a big accomplishment in Parisian society at that time.

In 1929 Abbott traveled to New York City and saw the city's photographic potential. She decided to move to NY from Paris, and she began taking photographs of the cityscape, using

a new camera that produced 8" x 10" images. This was a big advancement for photography at this time, and Abbott was using it to document many now- destroyed buildings and neighborhoods of New York. In 1935 Abbott was hired by the Federal Art Project (FAP) as a supervisor for the "Changing New York" project. For the next 4 years Abbott took over 305 images of New York City, documenting the diverse people of the city, the places they live, work and play, and their daily activities. These images prove invaluable in showing what city life was like during this time.

Abbott eventually had to leave New York City due to health problems. She moved to Maine where she lived until her death in 1991.

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

What do you see in this image?

- A cityscape
- Many buildings at night time with their lights on, and streets lit up by cars.

What city do you think this is?

- New York City?

What are some clues that this is New York, and from the 1930's?

- It is in black and white, not a lot of cars on the streets, the streets look empty and not many people on the street.

Even though the subject matter is very different from the earlier discussed paintings, what is similar between this photograph and the other two pieces of art?

- They are both taken outside
- None of the images are formal settings. One is an aerial view of the city, the other is of trees along a river and there is another of a city, but done as a painting and from another period.

Third Class: Narrative

Dance Class, painted in 1874, by Edgar Degas, oil on canvas



Background Information (for teacher)

Edgar Degas (19 July 1834 – 27 September 1917) was a French artist famous for his paintings, sculptures, prints, and drawings. He is especially identified with the subject of dance; more than half of his works depict dancers. Regarded as one of the founders of Impressionism, he rejected the term, preferring to be called a realist. He was a superb draftsman, and particularly masterly in depicting movement, as can be seen in his rendition of dancers, racecourse subjects and female nudes. His portraits are notable for their psychological complexity and for their portrayal of human isolation.

Degas was born in Paris, France, into a moderately wealthy family. He was the oldest of five children of Célestine Musson De Gas, a Creole from New Orleans, Louisiana, and Augustin De Gas, a banker.

Degas began to paint early in life. By the time he graduated from the Lycée with a baccalauréat in literature in 1853, at age 18, he had turned a room in his home into an artist's studio. Upon graduating, he registered as a copyist in The Louvre Museum, but his father expected him to go to law school. Degas duly enrolled at the Faculty of Law of the University of Paris in November 1853, but applied little effort to his studies. In 1855 he met Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, whom Degas revered and whose advice he never forgot: "Draw

lines, young man, and still more lines, both from life and from memory, and you will become a good artist." In April of that year Degas was admitted to the École des Beaux-Arts.

At the beginning of his career, Degas wanted to be a history painter, a calling for which he was well prepared by his rigorous academic training and close study of classical art. In his early thirties, he changed course, and by bringing the traditional methods of a history painter to bear on contemporary subject matter, he became a classical painter of modern life.

Upon the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, Degas enlisted in the National Guard, where his defense of Paris left him little time for painting. During rifle training his eyesight was found to be defective, and for the rest of his life his eye problems were a constant worry to him.

After the war, Degas began in 1872 an extended stay in New Orleans, Louisiana, where his brother René and a number of other relatives lived. Degas produced a number of works, many depicting family members. One of Degas's New Orleans works, *A Cotton Office in New Orleans*, garnered favorable attention back in France, and was his only work purchased by a museum (the *Pau*) during his lifetime.

Degas returned to Paris in 1873 and his father died the following year, whereupon Degas learned that his brother René had amassed enormous business debts. To preserve his family's reputation, Degas sold his house and an art collection he had inherited, and used the money to pay off his brother's debts. Dependent for the first time in his life on sales of his artwork for income, he produced much of his greatest work during the decade beginning in 1874. He joined a group of young artists who were organizing an independent exhibiting society. The group soon became known as the Impressionists. Between 1874 and 1886 they mounted eight art shows, known as the Impressionist Exhibitions. Degas took a leading role in organizing the exhibitions, and showed his work in all but one of them, despite his persistent conflicts with others in the group. The resulting rancor within the group contributed to its disbanding in 1886.

As the years passed, Degas became isolated, due in part to his belief that a painter could have no personal life. He never married and spent the last years of his life, nearly blind, restlessly wandering the streets of Paris before dying in September 1917.

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

What do you think fascinated Degas about dancers?

- Their moving bodies in space. He loved to paint movement. He painted racehorses earlier in his career.

Do you know what city this class takes place in?

- Paris. Supposedly at the old Paris Opera. However, we will later discuss that Degas probably did not observe this exact scene.

Has anyone ever taken a ballet lesson? Does anything in the painting look similar to a class that would be held today?

- The dancers are wearing toe shoes, the room has a mirror and a piano, there is a large floor area to dance

Is the class different at all?

- The dancers are wearing white stage costumes with bows, not leotards. They wear black ribbons around their neck. Degas shows them in costume because it makes for a prettier picture, they probably practiced in simpler clothes.

Who do you think the teacher is?

- The white-haired man leaning on a staff. He is a famous French dance and choreographer Jules Perrot.

How old do you think he is here?

- Around 64, he retired from the stage at 50.

How does Degas indicate that he is important in this scene?

- We can see his entire figure, there is empty space around him, our view of him is not blocked, the white of his sock and pocket handkerchief and the red of this shirt catch our eye.

Are most of the dancers paying attention to their teacher?

- No

Who is the teacher watching?

- The girl with the pink sash in the center who is executing a ballet step.

How many dancers are actually dancing in this picture?

- Only one.
- This painting may depict a dance examination, at time when the teacher individually comments on each dancer's progress.

How many people can you count?

- 25, 21 of whom are dancers. This was Degas' first try at painting a large canvas of dancers.

Who do you think are the women dressed in street clothes and standing on the bleachers at the upper right portion of the picture?

- Mothers of the dancers. Can you find all 4 of them?

This painting has many small details that describe the scene. Raise your hand if you can find...

A piano

A cello

Sheet music on a stand

A dancer leaning against the wall

A dancer adjusting another dancer's costume in the back.

A dancer wearing a locket.

A dancers sitting on the piano.

A dancer with her hands on her hips.

A dancer adjusting the should strap of her costume

A dancer adjusting her black choker necklace

A dancer adjusting the front of her costume

A mother in a red shawl

A seated dancer with her toes pointing at each other.

Does this painting seem realistic?

- Most students will say yes. However, it is unlikely that Degas witnessed this exact scene because it is unlikely that Jules Perrot was teaching ballet at the Opera in the 1870's. He had an argument with the management.
- Degas often invited dancers to his studio to sketch them and visited practice rooms at the Opera.

Let's look at how Degas used the Elements of Art in *The Dance Class*.

What is the source of light in this picture?

- The natural light is coming from the large window.
- There may have been gaslights but you don't see them.
- The light is bright but not harsh. Shadows are faint.
- The white of the costumes seem to sparkle with light in places.

What reflections do you see?

- The tall mirror on the wall reflects the backs of several dancers as well as the window on the right side of the room.

Notice how the brightness of the mirror directs our attention to the main dancer and the teacher.

Space: Which side of the painting is meant to be closest to the viewer?

- The left side. The dancers are proportionally larger and we can see more detail in their costume as if they are closer.

How would you divide this painting so that one half is crowded and the other half mostly empty?

- On the diagonal from lower left to upper right.

At what angle is the viewer looking at this picture? What is our point of view?

- From the left side, at a diagonal.

Notice how the perpendicular lines of the ceiling meet in the corner to create a sense of 3 dimensional space.

Although Degas exhibited with the Impressionists, he was a generation older than Monet and Renoir and did not share their fascination with light and color. He made many sketches to prepare before he painted and he finished his paintings in the studio not outdoors. He worked more slowly. Like the Impressionists though, Degas' principal interest was to depict scenes in modern life.

What are the main colors used?

- Brown, light green, and gray as well as black and white.

Are a wide range of colors used?

- No only a few

Are they bright colors?

- No, they are soft and muted.

Where do you see hints of bright colors?

- Find the places with a touch of red...flower, several sashes, the shawl of spectator, dance teacher's shirt.
- The red moves our eyes around the entire scene.
- There are also touches of light blue, and pink

What types of lines can we see?

- Many verticals (walls, staff, music stand, sides of window, picture frame, dancer in the foreground.)
- Diagonals: the cornices, the top of the mirror, the diagonal line from the dancer with the red flower across to the dancer adjusting her choker on the bleachers
- Degas planned the composition carefully. It is crowded but not disorganized.

What overall shape do many of the dancers' bodies make?

- A triangle

Study for a Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte, painted in 1884, by Georges Seurat, oil on canvas



Background Information (for teacher)

Georges-Pierre Seurat (2 December 1859 – 29 March 1891) was a French post-Impressionist painter and draftsman. He is noted for his innovative use of drawing media and for devising the painting techniques known as chromoluminarism and pointillism. He preferred the term Divisionism—the principle of separating color into small touches placed side-by-side and meant to blend in the eye of the viewer. Seurat's artistic personality was compounded of qualities which are usually supposed to be opposed and incompatible: on the one hand, his extreme and delicate sensibility; on the other, a passion for logical abstraction and an almost mathematical precision of mind.

Georges Seurat first studied art at the École Municipale de Sculpture et Dessin, near his family's home in the boulevard Magenta, which was run by the sculptor Justin Lequien. In 1878 he moved on to the École des Beaux-Arts where he followed a conventional academic training, drawing from casts of antique sculpture and copying drawings by old masters. Seurat's studies resulted in a well-considered and fertile theory of contrasts: a theory to which all his work was thereafter subjected. His formal artistic education came to an end in November 1879, when he left the École des Beaux-Arts for a year of military service. Following his year at the Brest Military Academy, he worked at mastering the art of monochrome drawing. His first exhibited work, shown at the Salon, of 1883, was a Conté crayon drawing of Aman-Jean, an artist friend with whom he shared a studio. Seurat spent 1883 working on his first major painting—a large canvas titled *Bathers at Asnières*, a monumental work showing young men relaxing by the Seine in a working-class suburb of Paris. Although influenced in its use of color and light tone by Impressionism, the painting with its smooth, simplified textures and carefully outlined, rather sculptural figures, shows the continuing impact of his neoclassical training; Seurat also departed from the Impressionist ideal by preparing for the work with a number of drawings and oil sketches before starting on the canvas in his studio.

In the summer of 1884, Seurat began work on *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, which took him two years to complete.

The painting shows members of each of the social classes participating in various park activities. The tiny juxtaposed dots of multi-colored paint allow the viewer's eye to blend colors optically, rather than having the colors physically blended on the canvas. It took Seurat two years to complete this 10-foot-wide (3.0 m) painting, much of which he spent in the park sketching in preparation for the work (there are about 60 studies). It is now in the permanent collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Seurat concealed his relationship with Madeleine Knobloch (or Madeleine Knoblock, 1868–1903), an artist's model whom he portrayed in his painting *Jeune femme se poudrant*. She gave birth to a son, who was named Pierre-Georges, 16 February 1890. Seurat died in his parents' home on 29 March 1891 at the age of 31. The cause of his death is uncertain, and has been variously attributed to a form of meningitis, pneumonia, infectious angina, and diphtheria. His son died two weeks later from the same disease. His last ambitious work, *The Circus*, was left unfinished at the time of his death.

At the time of Seurat's death, Madeleine was pregnant with a second child who died during or shortly after birth.

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

Where does this painting take place?

- At a park on the Island of La Grande Jatte

Have you been to a park on a Sunday afternoon? How does this scene compare to what you might see at a park today?

- There are families and people engaged in many forms of leisure activity. They have rowboats, fishing rods, flowers, pets, kites, etc.

How does this scene differ from what you might see at a park today?

- The style of dress is much more formal, not to mention a different style. Instead of sunscreen, people are using umbrellas to protect their skin from the sun. Someone has brought a pet monkey, and nobody is looking at a phone!

How many people can you count in this picture? How many animals?

Who appears to be the most important figures on the scene?

- The couple in the foreground, depicted largest. They appear to have walked into the scene and are observing it in much the same way the viewer is taking in the scene.

How can we tell that this painting takes place during the afternoon?

- The title of the work, obviously. But also the carefully calculated length of the shadows.

What seems to be the source of light in this painting?

- The afternoon sun on the other side of the river.

Does this painting seem realistic?

- The intent of the style of painting was to have the colors in the painting blend in the viewer's eye instead of on the canvas. It is a very calculated and precise application.

What are the main colors used?

- Green, blue and brown, and reds/pinks/purples

Are they bright colors?

- No, they are soft and muted.

How is the use of color organized?

- There is a distinction between the natural elements of the painting- the grass, trees, water and sky, and the clothes and accessories that people have brought into the park. The green pulls our eye further back into the park and into the painting.

What types of lines can we see?

- Most of the lines we see are vertical lines, of the people and natural elements of the park (trees). There are also diagonal lines for the shoreline and the shadows.

Optional Modern Discussion

Museo del Prado 1, Madrid, photographed in 2005 by Thomas Struth



Background Information (for teacher)

Thomas Struth was born in 1954 in Geldern, (Lower Rhine) Germany. Since the late 1970's, Thomas Struth has been internationally recognized for his photographs of cities, landscapes, portraits and architectural interiors. Struth's work considers how photography can at once engage and challenge the history of the medium and its traditional genres, as well as its role in contemporary art, and its function within a highly mediated, broader cultural context. Trained first in painting, he first took up photography in 1974 while a student at the Düsseldorf Academy.

He used a central point perspective that seems anonymous, as if the pictures arose from the camera's capacity to make clear, detailed records of the world. "I'm interested in photographs that have no personal signature," he declared in 1978. Absent of anecdote and incident, each street unfolds in its unique way, the difference between them - in structure, history, texture, and mood - becomes evident.

Struth's practice is essentially an investigative process of trying to comprehend and portray the connections and relationships that condition our experience of viewing the world.

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

Why is it appropriate to study photography in a course on impressionism?

- Impressionists wanted to portray scenes in a natural light, the way that an eye would behold a scene. Photographs capture through a lens the light that we would perceive with our natural eyes as well.

How is the narrative of the photograph similar to narratives in the paintings we studied by Degas and Seurat?

- We are observing a scene with many subjects. The spectators at the museum are like the dancers or the park-goers, and they are engaged in a scene and not interacting with the viewer of the photograph.
- We see a painting within a painting, and we can see the relationship that the children have with the artwork that they are studying. If someone took a picture of our classroom studying this photograph, what kind of scene would be depicted?

Fourth Class: Still Life

Vase of Roses, painted in 1890, by Vincent van Gogh, oil on canvas



Background Information (for teachers)

Vincent van Gogh was a Dutch painter who is among the most famous and influential figures in the history of Western art. In just over a decade he created about 2100 artworks including around 860 oil paintings, most of them in the last two years of his life. His paintings are characterized by bold colors and dramatic, impulsive and expressive brushwork that contributed to the foundations of modern art. He suffered years of mental illness, depression and poverty and died at 37 years old.

Born into an upper-middle-class family, Van Gogh was interested in art as a child and was serious, quiet and thoughtful. As a young man he worked as an art dealer, often travelling, but became depressed. He turned to religion, and spent time as a Protestant missionary in southern Belgium. He returned to art and took up painting in 1881, having moved back home with his parents. His younger brother Theo supported him financially, and the two kept up a long correspondence by letter. His early works, mostly still lifes and depictions of peasant laborers, contain few signs of the vivid color that distinguished his later work. In 1886, he moved to Paris, and his work developed a new approach to still lifes and local landscapes. His paintings grew brighter in color as he developed a style that became fully realized during his stay in Arles in the south of France in 1888.

Van Gogh suffered from psychotic episodes and delusions and he worried about his mental stability. He spent time in psychiatric hospitals, including a period at Saint-Rémy, where he painted the painting we will study today.

Van Gogh was unsuccessful during his lifetime, and was considered a madman and a failure. He became famous after his death, and exists in the public imagination as the quintessential misunderstood artist. He attained widespread critical, commercial and popular success over the ensuing decades, and is remembered as an important but tragic painter, whose troubled personality typifies the romantic ideal of the tortured artist.

Van Gogh painted Vase of Roses in early May, 1890 just a few months before he died. Our painting is part of a group of paintings that the artist completed at the mental asylum in Saint-Remy. We will study one that is now located at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. These works represent van Gogh at the height of his artistic powers. As the artist himself remarked, "those last days at St. Remy I still worked as in a frenzy. Great bunches of flowers, violet irises, big bouquets of roses." In a letter to his brother Theo on May 13, 1890, he described how at that moment in time he felt able to paint untroubled by mental illness. "I tell you, I feel my head is absolutely calm for my work, and the brush strokes come to me and follow each other logically." Sadly, this period of mental tranquility did not last.

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

Show students van Gogh's Vase of Roses and tell them that this painting is considered to be one of the most celebrated paintings by Vincent van Gogh.

Students find it easier to identify van Gogh's pictures by his distinctive style of painting more than almost any other artist. Ask them if they recognize this artist's work.

What does van Gogh show in this still life?

- A vase of flowers.

Can you identify these flowers?

- They are roses.

The name of this painting is Vase of Roses. It was done in 1890 and is one of eleven large paintings that van Gogh did in a hospital in France between the end of April and May 16 at the very end of his life. This is a superhuman effort! Of these eleven paintings, four were still lifes of flowers, two of irises and two of roses.

How many roses does van Gogh depict?

- Over 40 flowers

What covers the most space in this picture?

- The roses!
- They extend almost to the very top of the canvas and to both sides. They are presented on an extremely large scale.

What feeling does this great mass of flowers create?

- One of energy, abundance, movement, vibration

What two colors interest van Gogh most here and where do you find them?

- Green and pink.
- There are several shades of green: the light yellow-green of the background, the forest green of the vase, and the deeper green of the leaves.
- There are also several shades of pinkish-white: the roses and the tabletop. The roses were once pinker but the pigment faded. They were never very pink, however, because the artist actually referred to them as white once in a letter.

What other colors has van Gogh used?

- Red, blue, yellow and purple, as well as black and white.

Do you think the colors in this painting clash or harmonize?

- They harmonize. Because only two colors predominate, they create a soft, subdued, peaceful effect.

Into what two shapes has van Gogh divided the background?

- Two unequal rectangles

Is the space in this painting shallow or deep?

- Very shallow. There is little sense of depth.

What prevents the roses from appearing to topple over? Hint: what balances the roses in the vase?

- Van Gogh has painted fallen leaves and bloom on the table.
- They also don't appear top-heavy because the blooms cover almost the entire center space of the picture.

What shape do the roses in the vase form?

- Almost a perfect circle.

Where else do you find circular shapes and curved lines repeated?

- In the individual flowers and in the outline of the vase.
- All these curved lines create a rhythmic quality that make the roses seem as if they are still growing in nature.

How has van Gogh painted the leaves to make them appear even sharper?

- He has outlined them.

Where else do you see outlines?

- Around the edge of the vase and in some of the roses to highlight their petals.

Do you think this painting was done quickly or slowly?

- Very quickly yet with confidence.

Is it wrong to imagine the artist painting like a madman?

- He painted with great energy and intensity, but he was not able to paint at all when he suffered one of his attacks of mental illness. Here he seems calm and sure of himself.

How many brush strokes did he use to paint the flowers and leaves on the table? Count them.

- Eight strokes make up the leaves on the left and nineteen constitute the bloom and leaves on the right.

Do you think the bouquet of real roses that van Gogh arranged in order to paint this painting looked like the finished picture? Why or why not? (Let your students discuss the role of the artist's imagination and vision for a while. Make sure to point out to them some of the ways that the painted version was different from the real bouquet by asking supplemental questions.)

What is missing from the stems of the roses?

- Thorns!
- (If you are doing the still life recreation with fabric flowers, it would be helpful to bring in a live rose in order to point out how the rose petals are arranged and what the leaves and thorns look like.)

In a bouquet this size, would all the stems be able to reach the vase in order to get water? Which probably wouldn't?

- The flowers in the top left corner seem too far away from the vase for their stems to reach the water. If this were true, they would die in a day or two.

Discussing this still life helps re-enforce the point that van Gogh's painting is not a totally realistic description of a bouquet of flowers, but rather emphasizes artistic concerns and his interpretation such as the balance of colors and shapes and lines.

Still Life with Apples, painted in 1890, by Paul Cézanne, oil on canvas



Background Information (for teachers)

Paul Cézanne was a French artist and Post-Impressionist painter whose work laid the foundations for modern 20th century art. Even though he was repeatedly rejected by the Paris Salon and his paintings were not appreciated during much of his lifetime, in his final years and particularly after his death, younger artists, among them Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, discovered and drew from his work. Cézanne's often repetitive exploratory brushstrokes are highly characteristic and clearly recognizable. He used planes of color and small brushstrokes that build up to form complex fields. The paintings reveal Cézanne's intense study and attention to detail of his subjects.

Paul Cézanne was born in 1839 in Aix-en-Provence, France to a devout Catholic family. His father was the co-founder of a banking firm that prospered throughout the artist's life, affording him financial security that was unavailable to most other artists. A large inheritance from his father allowed him to devote himself completely to his art.

Going against the wishes of his father, Cézanne left Aix for Paris in 1861 to study and fully pursue art. Eventually, his father accepted Cézanne as an artist and supported his choice of career.

Cézanne's paintings did not receive much success in his lifetime. They were shown in the first exhibition of the Salon des Refusés in 1863, which displayed works not accepted by the jury of the official Paris Salon. The Salon rejected Cézanne's submissions every year from 1864 to 1869. He continued to submit works even though they were always rejected.

Today we will examine “Still Life with Apples” 1890. This painting is exhibited at the Hermitage Museum in Russia.

Cézanne painted many paintings of apples. Apples were often at the center of Cézanne's attention for a number of reasons. Not only are they beautiful in color, but in comparison with other fruit they are more varied. The artist was attracted to the simplicity and completeness of their form. There was also a practical reason important to him: apples do not spoil quickly. His attention to detail took a lot of time and he needed a subject that would last. He had to take this quality into consideration.

At some level the motivating factor for the use of the apples was the meaning hidden in them. The apple is a symbol of Venus and an attribute of Eve, religious ideas that go back to his childhood and his religious family. These ideas from his childhood found expression in a number of his works.

In the present painting, along with the apples and lemon, an unusual object is shown: a small metal flowerpot or can with a wilted plant. This pot was probably introduced so the artist could examine another form, the cylinder. As well as another color, grey, to highlight the pure bright tones of the apples and lemons.

Optics and shapes fascinated Cézanne. He tried to distill naturally occurring forms to their geometric essentials: the cone, the cube, the sphere. He used layers of color to build up surfaces, and outlined his forms for emphasis. His deep study of geometry in painting led to his becoming a master of perspective.

“The eye must grasp, bring things together,” Cézanne said, “The brain will give it shape.” In a still life, where the artist also creates the world he paints, each object, each placement, each viewpoint represents a decision. Cézanne painted and repainted the objects pictured here many times. Every different arrangement was a new exploration of forms and their relationships. Cézanne worked slowly and deliberately. Over the course of days, he would move his easel, painting different objects—or even the same one—from different points of view.

“Painting from nature is not copying the object,” Paul Cézanne wrote, “it is realizing one’s sensations.” *Still Life with Apples* reflects this view and the artist’s steady fascination with color, light, pictorial space, and how we see what we see.

In *Still Life with Apples* and his many other paintings, Cézanne concentrated on the visual and physical qualities of the paint and canvas and worked to capture the full complexity of how our eyes take in the sights before us. This is apparent, for example, in the edges of a number of the apples, which appear to be undefined, almost shifting.

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

Like van Gogh, Cézanne is also considered to have a very distinctive style of painting. Show them Cézanne’s *Still Life with Apples* and ask them if they recognize this artist’s work.

What does Cézanne show in this Still Life?

- Apples and a lemon. There is a tiny metal flowerpot.

What colors do you see in the apples?

- Red, orange, yellow, green, brown

Do you think the artist used real apples and lemons when he painted this Still Life in 1890?

- Yes

Why do you think the artist painted apples so many times in so many of his paintings?

- They were readily available in France
- They lasted a long time before rotting
- They contained a variety of beautiful colors
- He was interested in their round shape

Are the apples perfect circles?

- Some are, and some are not

How do the edges of the apples look?

- Some are blurred and some seem outlined by black to emphasize their shapes.

What is the color of the background in this painting?

- Muted beige and muted grey.

Does the calm background help bring to life the fruits and emphasize the brightness of their colors?

- Yes

Do you notice the artist's brushstrokes?

- Yes

Can you see that, although very realistic, this painting is extremely different from a photograph of apples?

- Yes

What makes this realistic painting so different from a photograph?

- The variation in color in the background
- The way some of the apples seem to blend into the background and some have very sharp outlines.

What do you think was most important to the artist in painting these apples

- The round shape of the apples
- The starkness of their color
- His own brushstrokes

Do you see this Still Life as a combination of reality and the artist's vision?

- Yes

Discussing this Still Life help re-enforce the point that Cézanne's painting, like Van Gogh's, is not a totally realistic description of a plate of apples, but also emphasizes the artist's own interpretation of the subject.

Optional Modern Discussion

Still Life with Apples, After Cézanne, created in 2004 by Vik Muniz, from Pictures of Magazines



Background Information (for teachers)

The artist Vik Muniz was born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1961. Vik Muniz meticulously recreates other artists' famous masterpieces out of a variety of unusual materials. He has used chocolate syrup to recreate famous paintings. Peanut butter and jelly were used to make his version of the Mona Lisa, perhaps the most famous painting in history. He then photographs his modern version of an old masterpiece, creating a totally new work of art, inspired by history but also completely new and modern.

His work has been exhibited in prestigious institutions worldwide including The Art Institute of Chicago, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, among many others.

Muniz is involved in social projects that use art-making as a force for change. In 2010 his work with a group of pickers of recyclable materials – was the subject of the Academy Award nominated documentary film *Waste Land*.

Muniz currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The work of art we will examine today is a photograph called *Still Life with Apples - after Cézanne* (from *Pictures of Magazines*) 2004.

This photograph is a modern interpretation of the painting by Cézanne that we just studied, except this work of art was created by the artist arranging thousands of tiny pieces of confetti, and round pieces of magazine paper.

Dialogue Suggestions (for classroom presentation)

Show students both works of art next one another.

Do these works of art look alike to you?

- Yes

What are the differences between the two works of art?

- One is a painting and one is a photograph
- Medium - one is an oil on canvas and the other is made of magazine cuttings and then photographed
- One was created in the late 1800's and the other was made just a few years ago
- Cézanne's painting was not fully appreciated when it was created. Muniz's photograph was immediately celebrated all over the world, exhibited and purchased for a lot of money.

What do you think Cézanne would think of Muniz's work of art that is so heavily influenced by his own painting all these years later?

Is Muniz copying Cézanne's work or is he paying homage to it and celebrating it?