

Grades 9 – 12

Art & History

Norton Simon Museum

Impressions of Nature

Time One to two weeks

Grades 9-12

California VAPA Content Standards

2.4 Review and refine observational drawing skills.

3.3 Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.

California History-Social Science Content Standards

10.3 Students analyze the effects of the Industrial Revolution in England, France, Germany, Japan, & the U.S.

California English Content Standards

Writing Applications

2.1 Write biographical or autobiographical narratives or short stories.

Indicators of Achievement

- Student completes a short story that uses sensory details and dialogue
- Student brings 2-3 Impressionist images to class with artist, title, year, & medium indicated
- Student completes a 1-2 page essay: "Interactions With Nature"
- Student completes an Impressionist-style drawing of a contemporary scene
- Student actively participates in class discussions

Materials

Overhead transparency of Louis-Eugène Boudin's *The Beach at Trouville* (included in packet), sketch paper, pencil, crayons or pastels

Vocabulary

en plein air, figure, horizon line, Impressionism, industrialization, landscape modernity, palette, urbanization.

Preparation/Background

In the 19th century, France experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization. Between 1830 and 1850, the population of Paris doubled and as the century unfolded a strong middle class developed. In 1853, under the reign of Napoleon III, an ambitious public projects program transformed the face of Paris from a largely medieval city into a modern metropolis with wide boulevards, spacious parks, newly-designed buildings, street lighting, and a water and sewer system. Regulated working hours afforded people leisure time to enjoy the pleasures of city life: picnicking in parks, sailing along the Seine River, and socializing in cafes, concert halls and theaters. Paris became a haven for its inhabitants as well as for tourists. Steam-driven trains and an expansive railway system, another facet of industrialization, encouraged travel beyond the city to places in the country and at the seashore.

Modernity fostered a new art. Impressionism, an artistic movement pioneered by Claude Monet and his friends (Edgar Degas, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Camille Pissarro among others) in the 1870s, was born from this changed world. Impressionist artists rejected traditional subjects like ancient history and mythology. Instead, they represented contemporary subjects observed in the world around them. They introduced a radical new style of painting, replacing carefully blended, smooth surfaces with heavy brush strokes of pure color. They painted landscapes, figures and objects in a blurry, seemingly rapid manner so that their artworks often appear sketchy and unfinished.

Nature became the focal point for Impressionist artists' exploration of optical sensations of light and color. Artists left the confines of the studio to paint directly from nature, *en plein air* (French for "outdoors"). The invention of small, portable paint tubes facilitated this practice. Modern, chemically derived paint pigments (such as chrome yellow, cobalt green and violet, and alizarin crimson) offered painters a broader palette which enhanced their ability to transcribe nature's great variety of color to the canvas.

Boudin was one of the first French artists to abandon the studio and paint in the open air. He spent his youth in Normandy, an area of Northern France along the English Channel that became a popular tourist destination in the 19th century. In *The Beach at Trouville*, painted in 1872, the artist observes fashionably-dressed women and men enjoying a day at the beach. While the figures at first appear to be casually arranged, in fact the composition is carefully constructed. The heads of the standing figures rest upon a horizon line where the sea and sky meet. The blue and yellow parasols they hold are similar in color to the sand and ocean, creating unity which connects the figures and landscape.

Boudin's primary interest was in capturing the changing patterns of color, light and atmosphere as observed in sky, clouds, and water. When Monet embarked upon landscape painting, he heeded his teacher Boudin's advice to paint directly from nature.

Activity

1. Begin with a discussion of Boudin's *The Beach at Trouville*, using the enclosed transparency. Questions to ask: Where do these people appear to be? What do you see that makes you say that? How do the people presented in this artwork differ from beachgoers today in appearance? Consider not just what they wear, but what they carry and the articles they bring with them. What about the style looks "Impressionist"?
2. Discuss how the artwork illustrates aspects of modernity: growth of the leisure class, inventions that allowed this type of activity, etc. Or, ask students to read "background" section and let them explain how it reflects changes in society brought about by France's Industrial Revolution.
3. Next, students write a short story about this scene with dialogue between two of the figures in this painting. They should use sensory details to describe the setting: smell, taste, sight, sound, and touch. In addition, they should reference aspects of French life that connect to the Industrial Revolution.

4. Homework: Students look at other Impressionist artists to gain more familiarity with the Impressionist style. Examples of artists to consider: Mary Cassatt, Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Pierre Auguste Renoir. Each student should bring 2-3 images to class that show people out in nature (printouts from the internet are fine). The artist's name, title of artwork, date created and medium should be included with the image.
5. Spread the images out on a table or on top of desks and have students view them as a group. What kinds of activities are the figures enjoying? How does one artist's style differ from another's? What various locations are depicted? How are these images different from or similar to the ways we interact with nature now?
6. Homework: essay: "Interactions With Nature". Students write a short essay (1-2 pages) on the ways that they enjoy nature. Do they camp? Walk in the park? Think nature is boring? Discuss their thoughts as a class after the paper is turned in.
7. Homework (or field trip if possible): Students should observe people interacting with nature in real life - with sketchbook in hand, visit one of the area's local parks. Use pastels or crayons to imitate the Impressionist style.

Assessment

Evaluate the quality of the student's contributions and participation in the activities including discussions, writing assignments, and drawing.

Extensions

This lesson could be expanded to include an analysis of how human interactions with nature are presented in visual culture, and the paradoxes that these images present. For example, many SUV advertisements depict people enjoying the great outdoors, yet gas-guzzling SUVs pollute the environment. Students could create collages from paper media sources (magazines, newspapers), compile sound recordings from radio advertisements, or take their own photos of outdoor media (such as billboards).

Contact and Field Trip Information

Guided tours are available free of charge to students in grades 5-12. These 75-minute tours are held in the mornings before the Museum opens to the public. For more information, call 626-884-6980, e-mail: tours@nortonsimon.org, or visit www.nortonsimon.org.