

Discovering the Arts

Impressionism and Beyond

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9–12

Curriculum Focus: Fine Arts

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

In the late-19th and early-20th centuries, the Impressionists redefined art with their images of fleeting light and color. Meet the major figures of the movement, whose work continues to inspire artists to think beyond the limits of realism.

Lesson Summary

The class creates an Impressionist exhibition to compare and contrast major artists of the movement. Students discuss the techniques and subjects of this movement and develop a mini-exhibit about one Impressionist. Each member of the group selects a painting and writes a brief description before students assemble their exhibits. The lesson concludes after comparing the Impressionists' works to those of post-Impressionists such as van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne, and Seurat.

Onscreen Questions

- Why was Impressionist art rejected by the art critics of the time?
- How was Impressionism different from the art movements before it?
- How did van Gogh's paintings reflect his life?
- What artists did van Gogh try to emulate?

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Understand important facts about Impressionism, including artistic styles and techniques.
- Describe the style and technique of one Impressionist painting.
- Compare and contrast the works of different Impressionists.
- Compare and contrast the styles of Impressionists and Post-Impressionists.

Materials

- *Discovering the Arts: Impressionism and Beyond* video
- Computer with Internet access
- Color printer

Procedures

1. After watching the video, remind students that Impressionism was an artistic movement that began in Paris in the 1860s. Ask students to think about the paintings featured in the video and describe the typical style of these works. What did students notice about the palette and the brushstrokes? How was light important to the Impressionists? Would students describe these works as realistic? Why or why not?
2. Talk about the subject matter. Were the paintings typically illustrating aristocracy? What was the typical setting of these paintings, inside or outdoors? How were these paintings like photographs? How were they like still images within a movie?
3. Remind the class that although there were basic similarities among the Impressionists, there were also important differences. Tell the class that they're going to create a classroom Impressionist exhibition to compare and contrast some of the major artists of the movement. Divide the class into small groups and explain that each group is going to create a mini-exhibit about one Impressionist. Assign or let each group choose one of the following artists:
 - Mary Cassatt
 - Edgar Degas
 - Edouard Manet
 - Claude Monet
 - Berthe Morisot
 - Camille Pissarro
 - Pierre-Auguste Renoir
 - Alfred Sisley
4. Have groups work together to explore the works of their assigned artist. Within each group, have each student select and make a color printout of one painting considered a good representation of Impressionism. Many works for each painter are at the following sites:
 - Impressionism
<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/theme/impressionisme.html>
 - Impressionism
<http://www.abcgallery.com/movemind.html#Impressionism>
5. Have each student create a label for a selected work, including the artist name, title, date, and a description, which should address the following:

- Describe the subject: What does the artist show in this picture? What details or symbols give clues to its meaning? Where is the scene supposed to take place?
 - Describe the technique: How would you describe the artist's use of color and light? How would you describe the brushstroke?
 - Why would this be considered an Impressionist work?
 - How is it different from the work of other Impressionists? What makes this work unique to this particular artist?
6. Have groups post their images and descriptions together in a designated spot around the room. Give students an opportunity to walk around the classroom, viewing and reading about works by other Impressionists. Then come together and have a class discussion comparing and contrasting these artists. How are they alike? What makes each artist unique?
7. To conclude the lesson, show students works by the following artists: Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Cezanne, Paul Gauguin, and Georges Seurat. Explain that these artists are often considered Postimpressionists. The following site links to several works from these artists:
- Postimpressionism (see also Georges Seurat under "Pointillism")
<http://www.abcgallery.com/movemind.html#Post-Impressionism>
8. Ask students to examine these works and compare them to those in their Impressionist exhibition. What similarities do they see? How might the Impressionists have inspired them? How are they different? How did the artists break away from the Impressionists? (Many of these artists continued to show real-life subject matter, using bright colors and visible brushstrokes. And like the Impressionists, these artists were not interested in showing a realistic view of the world with fine details. However, the Postimpressionists moved even farther away from realism, often showing subjects in more abstract, geometric forms, sometimes in unnaturally bright or unexpected colors.)

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students demonstrated a strong understanding of Impressionism, including artistic styles and techniques; developed a clear, thoughtful description of the subject matter and technique of one Impressionist painting, answering all the questions; provided at least one similarity and one difference among the Impressionists; provided at least one similarity and one difference between Impressionists and Postimpressionists.
- **2 points:** Students demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of Impressionism, including artistic styles and techniques; developed a clear, complete description of the subject matter and technique of one Impressionist painting, answering most of the questions; provided at least one similarity or one difference among the Impressionists; provided at least one similarity or one difference between Impressionists and Postimpressionists.
- **1 point:** Students demonstrated a poor understanding of Impressionism, including artistic styles and techniques; developed an incomplete or unclear description of the subject matter

and technique of one Impressionist painting, answering few of the questions; had difficulty identifying any similarities or differences among the Impressionists; had difficulty identifying any similarities or differences between Impressionists and Postimpressionists.

Vocabulary

absinthe

Definition: An addictive, intoxicating drink made from wormwood; a cross between hard liquor and heroin

Context: Degas' most famous painting of café life is "Absinthe Drinker," depicting a woman stupefied by a narcotic drink sitting next to an alcoholic.

allegorical

Definition: Showing something with symbols that represent something about human life

Context: Adolphe Bouguereau quickly sold this 19th-century adaptation of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus." The angels and cupids make the woman allegorical, or noble.

Impressionism

Definition: An artistic movement or style of painting in which brushstrokes of bright colors are used to show the effects of reflected light

Context: Impressionism means painting nature in bright colors, such as painting the light that falls on a pleasant object.

perspective

Definition: The appearance of objects in a painting or drawing that shows their distance from the observer

Context: The architectural details and perspective had been minutely worked out before he painted the scene.

Salon

Definition: An official art exhibition in Paris sanctioned by a government-approved jury; beginning in the 18th century, the exhibition was public and held in the Louvre.

Context: For the artist who wanted to make a living in France in the 1860s, there was one gallery where his paintings simply had to hang, the Salon in Paris.

Academic Standards

National Arts Education Associations

The National Arts Education Associations have developed national guidelines for what students should know and be able to do in the arts. To view the standards online, go to artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards.cfm.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
 - Using knowledge of structures and functions
 - Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
 - Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
 - Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. The Rise of Impressionism (22 min.)

Rejected by critics, impressionist art was a radical new way of capturing moments in time. Examine the major impressionist artists and their art.

II. Becoming Van Gogh (27 min.)

Vincent Van Gogh broke the impressionist mold. Take a deeper look into the mind of this talented and troubled artist.

Curriculum Units

1. Creating the Impressionist Movement

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever liked something even though it did not fit with the prevailing trend or fashion?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Was the first impressionist exhibition a success?

A: Yes and no. While the first impressionist gallery was a financial loss and a critical failure, it brought together a group of artists who were painting in that style.

2. Morisot, Renoir, and Monet

Pre-viewing question

Q: How would you describe the impressionist style?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did Monet portray people in his paintings?

A: Monet was never interested in portraits. As a result, people in his paintings are depicted with clumps of color. Although he studied classical painting, Monet was least interested in human anatomy. No human stress or emotion ever appears in his paintings.

3. The Artistic Styles of Degas and Manet

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you think life would be like without cameras and photographs?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did Degas approach his work?

A: Degas did not like spontaneity in art. He defined the architectural details and perspective of his paintings before he began painting. He drew numerous sketches of his subjects before painting them on canvas.

4. Degas' Dancers and Manet's Barmaid

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you like or dislike about the impressionist style?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Describe Edouard Manet's final painting.

A: *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* was Manet's final painting. Painted a year before he died, it was his own epitaph as well as an epitaph for impressionism. In the painting, a mirror reflects the friends that Manet is leaving. The barmaid's eyes appear to be looking at the viewer, but on the right, the mirror reflects



her looking beyond the viewer. In front of the barmaid are pink and white roses. They symbolize the idea of "purity forever."

5. Becoming an Artist: Vincent Van Gogh's Early Years

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about Vincent Van Gogh?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did Van Gogh become an artist?

A: Van Gogh was expected to become a middle-class minister like his father. However, his view of religion was fiercer and darker than that of his father. As a result, he was dismissed from divinity school. Van Gogh gave up organized religion to pursue a career as a professional artist.

6. Van Gogh Experiments with Impressionism

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever tried to copy or emulate someone's style?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why was Van Gogh unsuccessful at painting in the impressionist style?

A: While living in Paris, Van Gogh attempted to become an impressionist. However, he was unable to paint colors conventionally. He attempted to use delicate colors but could not mute the intensity with which he painted the world around him. His impressionist landscapes were indistinguishable and ordinary.

7. Van Gogh in the South of France

Pre-viewing question

Q: What are some things you have learned from your friends?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did Van Gogh leave Paris?

A: Van Gogh left Paris to establish a studio in the south of France. He also left Paris because he was addicted to absinthe. Van Gogh's brother Theo encouraged him to move out and live on his own.

8. The Madness Returns: Van Gogh's Final Works

Pre-viewing question

Q: How do you think depression and mental illness affect an artist's work?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why is it ironic that Van Gogh is known as "the mad painter"?

A: It is ironic that Van Gogh is known as "the mad painter" because he did not produce works of merit during his periods of depression and illness. He was only able to paint during periods of sanity.

