



Impressionism: Reflections of a Culture

Curriculum Unit 01.02.02
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Introduction

Impressionist paintings are not only reflections of light and weather, but of the culture of the time. "Impressionist paintings cannot be separated from the history of events..."(1) Cultural and political inferences can be made from what artists portray in their paintings as well as what they avoid and choose not to represent. The period of Impressionism began around 1870 and continued until approximately 1910. Through this curriculum unit, my students will approach Impressionist paintings with a method of analysis that will open them to French culture and history of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Students will use the method of object analysis developed by Professor Jules Prown of Yale University to study paintings from the Impressionist movement as well as the Pre-Impressionist and Post-Impressionist movements. We will examine paintings done by artists of these movements, looking for the less obvious and deeper meanings. We will then explore these meanings to see their relationship to French culture at that time.

This curriculum unit was created to complement the French curriculum in the New Haven Public High Schools. The study of a foreign language goes beyond language itself. It includes the study and appreciation of a country's culture and history. My aim in writing this unit to use with my students is to increase their awareness and appreciation of art and to make the study of history more interesting and meaningful. The content of this unit also lends itself to an art or history class. The interdisciplinary nature of the unit would work well in a team approach across disciplines. The content could also be revised to work with younger students in a junior high or middle school program. The unit meets the following National Standards for Foreign Language Learning:

Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

The artist I have chosen for an example of Pre-Impressionism is Gustave Courbet. Courbet helped found the Realist movement in art. He believed that art should represent people and events in a realistic and honest manner. Courbet's break with the classical style influenced the Impressionist movement. Students will view work by Claude Monet and Mary Cassatt as representative of Impressionism. Monet led the Impressionist movement by painting outdoor scenes and events as personal and spontaneous. His art shows his concern with the effects of light and atmosphere. Cassatt was an American painter who settled in France and joined the Impressionist movement. Her paintings used light, bright colors and often portrayed people engaged in ordinary daily activities. Post-Impressionism will be examined through the work of Vincent Van Gogh. Van Gogh discovered a world of light and color that was strong, rebellious and daring and went beyond the colors of the Impressionists. Paintings by these artists will be examined in the classroom via film, slides, overhead transparencies, photos and/or posters along with biographical information on each artist.

Through the analysis of paintings I hope to lead my students to note comparisons and contrasts, similarities and differences between the Realism of Courbet, the Impressionist style of Monet and Cassatt and the Post-Impressionist work produced by Van Gogh. Looking at *Le Grand Pont* by Courbet reveals an outdoor scene/landscape painting which is one of the fundamental types of painting to be pursued by the Impressionist artists who followed him. *Le Grand Pont* further reveals the play of sunlight in the filtering of light through the trees, the reflections on the leaves themselves as well as on the cliffs, the bridge and the water. In addition to Courbet's open-air painting, the Impressionists also focused on this effect of light. That Courbet influenced the Impressionists is further evidenced by this statement by Impressionist painter Henri Fantin-Latour, "As artists, we all proceed in the direction indicated by Courbet...a powerful artist has shown us the way." (2)

Students will discover the influence of Courbet's open-air painting and light effects in the work of Monet. Monet used these influences to paint modern life and to portray the new leisure time activities of the middle to upper middle classes. The Impressionist themes will become further evident to my students as they do an analysis of first *The Beach at Trouville* (an example of leisure activity) and *Gare Saint-Lazare* (an example of modern train travel) by Monet. While she also followed the ideas of Impressionism, Cassatt focused on family scenes. As students view her painting *Breakfast in Bed* they will note this as an impression of a particular fleeting moment in time and will note the light effects on the sheets, clothing, cup and saucer. Also evident in this and other works by Cassatt is the Impressionist concern with everyday events.

Van Gogh also painted outdoors and showed an interest in light effects. *His Corner in Voyer d'Argenson Park* is a work he created in the Impressionist style. His rapid brush strokes in *The Night Café* resemble those of the Impressionists although his exaggerated color use goes beyond that of Impressionism. Van Gogh attempted to turn away from the Impressionist style of capturing a fleeting moment as shown by Monet and Cassatt. His paintings show an effort to record an image with more conciseness to the point of strong dark outlines around objects.

A cultural and historical perspective will be presented following the art analysis and biographical study. In relation to the paintings reviewed, students will be encouraged to ask what was happening in France at the time this work of art was produced? What evidence of historical events do we see in the artist's work and conversely what lack of evidence of historical events is shown by the artist's work? Only by exploring the history and culture of France will students understand the underlying historical context in which Impressionist paintings were created. Students will examine events leading up to, and including, the Impressionist period (1870-1910) thus providing insight to the transition from the culture of Pre-Impressionism (Courbet), to Impressionism (Monet, Cassatt), and then to Post-Impressionism (Van Gogh).

With Courbet, students will find that his realistic portrayal of life mirrors his realistic perception of politics and his involvement with the revolutionary Paris Commune. Students will note that Monet's and Cassatt's absence of political overtones in their paintings mirror their non-involvement with revolutionary activities. Monet left France and went to England at the same time that Courbet's involvement increased. Cassatt also left France during this period, returning to America until peace was restored. Van Gogh's move to France occurred after the political climate had stabilized.

The lessons continue in a field trip to the Yale Art Gallery to see actual paintings by the artists and their contemporaries. During our visit, we will use the methods for in-depth reading of a work of art as presented by Professor Prown. As the culminating activity my students, as young aspiring Impressionists, will copy and paint, as they are able, an Impressionist painting. It is not expected, and students will be aware, that this is an exercise in artistic expression and they will be encouraged and complimented on their best efforts. The emphasis will be on an awareness of light effects and the attempt to copy them. My students will learn that Impressionist artists were trained according to the acceptable methods of the time. "In the 1860's the art world was a tightly structured microcosm of political life in the Second Empire."⁽³⁾ The government had strict policies regarding art training and which artists could participate in the Salon and exhibit their works. It was accepted that, as part of their training, young, aspiring artists spent hours painting and copying original works of art.

Artists' Biographical Summaries

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877)

In 1849 Courbet produced one of his most famous paintings, *The Stone-Breakers*. The following year he painted *Burial at Ornans*. Both of these paintings did not follow either the classical or romantic styles accepted by the Royal Academy. In these paintings, Courbet showed peasants in real life settings as opposed to rich people in romantic and glamorized settings. Courbet believed that painting was the representation of things real and existing. He stated "show me an angel and I will paint one". ⁽⁴⁾ Courbet wanted to show the customs, ideas and look of his time in his paintings. Courbet even boasted that his *Burial at Ornans* was the burial of romanticism. ⁽⁵⁾

Courbet became the leader of the realists and painted the very large work *The Painter's Studio, a Real Allegory, Summarizing a Seven-year Phase of My Artistic Life*. It was his intention that this painting be a manifesto of realism. He planned to show this painting at the Exposition Universelle (World's Fair) in Paris, 1855. The jury accepted several of his entries, but not *The Painter's Studio* or *Burial at Ornans*. When his paintings were rejected, Courbet decided to exhibit them in a building he constructed at his own expense and named The Pavilion of Realism.

Courbet also enjoyed painting landscapes as an accurate reflection of specific scenes from nature. Landscape painting of this type barely existed in France before this time, as the countryside in its natural state was not highly regarded. It was perceived as unorganized and impure. The landscape artist's job had been to organize nature into compositions of perfect proportion. Classical landscape painting was idealized. Courbet's series of seascapes with changing storm clouds influenced impressionist painters. Painters began painting in the woods, fields and along the water.

In March 1871, Courbet was elected to the town council and became a representative of Fine Arts in the revolutionary Paris Commune government. He abolished the school of the Academy and did away with Salon medals. His reforms did not last as the Commune was ended in May. Courbet was imprisoned for his involvement. Although it was never proved, he was suspected of involvement in the destruction of the Vendôme Column, a tribute to Napoleon. Courbet was ordered to pay the cost of its repair and re-erection. As this was not possible, he fled France and escaped to Switzerland where he died in 1877.

Claude Monet (1840-1926)

Monet married his first wife Camille, in June 1870. They spent that summer in Trouville where he produced a series of beach paintings including *On the Beach, Trouville*. Central to Monet was a commitment to paint directly from nature. This type of painting was known as plein-air or open-air painting. His paintings were scenes of leisure, an attractive life at this time enjoyed by tourists and the middle to upper-middle classes. Monet, his wife and son Jean moved to London when Napoleon III declared war on Prussia in 1870. While in London, Monet met the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. When the war ended Monet and his family returned to France and settled in Argenteuil, a small town on the Seine in the outskirts of Paris. Durand-Ruel returned to Paris in 1872 and began to successfully sell Monet's paintings.

In 1874 Monet and several of his friends decided to hold their own exhibition. At this exhibition, Monet showed nine works, including *Impression, Sunrise*. The title of this picture led a critic to call the artists "Impressionists". Monet's "impressions" embody the philosophy of nature as ever changing with a need for immediate observation and immediate recording of that particular impression in paint. The Impressionists continued to hold further exhibitions in the following years, but they were not very successful. In 1877, Monet painted a series of studies of Gare Saint-Lazare. This gave a new direction to his work, showing that Impressionist methods could be applied to urban subjects. Through the paintings of Gare Saint-Lazare Monet united the modern industrial forces of the time with his emphasis on painting light effects through his treatment of the steam and vapor evident in the station.

Monet moved to a house in Giverny in 1883. He wrote to Durand-Ruel that here he would "produce masterpieces because the countryside here pleases me very much". (6) Monet continued his study of the effects of light with series of paintings of the same subject in different light conditions. In 1891 he showed, with great success, fifteen of his *Haystacks* series at the Durand-Ruel Gallery. He then painted his series called *Poplars*. In 1892 Monet went to Rouen and did a series of paintings of the cathedral. His purpose was to show the play of light on the intricate stonework at different times of day. Monet used short, broken brushstrokes to capture his impressions. He tried to reduce all he visualized and painted into terms of pure light. He focused on developing the ability to see light and nothing else. In 1899 he painted a series of the footbridge over the pond and water lilies at his home in Giverny, indicating his continued interest in the reflections of light on water.

In 1911 Monet's second wife Alice, whom he had married in 1891, died leaving him distraught and withdrawn for many months. In 1914 his son Jean died and subsequently Monet rarely left Giverny. An old friend, Georges Clemenceau, became Prime Minister in 1918. He was able to persuade Monet to work on a series of very large water lily paintings. It was this project that dominated his work for the remainder of his life. Monet died at the age of 86, in December 1926, with Clemenceau at his side.

Mary Cassatt (1844-1926)

In 1860, Cassatt entered the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts where she studied for two years. In 1866

she decided to go to Paris to become a professional artist. Her mother accompanied her to be sure that she was properly settled in the apartment of a quiet family that rented out rooms. Cassatt obtained permission to copy paintings at the Louvre museum, attended a class by Charles Chaplin, and took lessons with Jean-Léon Gérôme, an artist who taught at the École de Beaux-Arts. She was unable to take classes herself at the École as it was closed to women.

At her parents' insistence, Cassatt returned to America when Napoleon III declared war on Prussia. She was anxious to return to Europe and was offered a commission from a bishop in Pittsburgh to copy two religious paintings in Italy. Cassatt enjoyed the opportunity to study paintings of the old masters. She began to be more spontaneous in her painting and to use brighter colors.

In 1875 one of Cassatt's paintings, *The Young Bride*, was rejected by the Salon, only to be accepted the following year after she had repainted it with a darker and more somber background. This prompted Cassatt to decide that she would no longer compromise her painting and would no longer sacrifice originality. She began to be more spontaneous in her painting and to use brighter colors. In 1877 Degas came to meet her at her studio. He was impressed with her work and invited her to exhibit with the Impressionists. Cassatt said later: "I accepted with joy, I hated conventional art. I began to live."⁽⁷⁾ Her introduction to Degas was the beginning of a major creative outburst of work. She felt independent and incorporated more of the Impressionists' ideas into her paintings. When the next Impressionist exhibition opened in 1879, Cassatt displayed eleven paintings. She and Degas continued their friendship for forty years.

Degas clashed with the other Impressionists as they prepared for their exhibit in 1882. When the seventh Impressionist exhibit was held neither Cassatt nor Degas was represented. In 1886 the Impressionists agreed to have their eighth exhibition. Few of the original Impressionists participated, but Cassatt contributed seven paintings. This turned out to be the last Impressionist exhibition. On her own, in 1889, she began to focus on the theme of mother and child. The happy children always seem secure and loved by their mothers. These paintings were very successful.

Mary Cassatt died in 1926 at the age of eighty-two. She lived long enough to see her art finally gain as high a standing in America as it had in France.

Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890)

Van Gogh suffered a depression in 1879 after which he left his religious pursuits and instead began to paint miners. At this point his brother Theo began to support him financially, a situation which lasted for the rest of Van Gogh's life. He took some formal art studies in Brussels, then went to France to visit Theo. Van Gogh met the painter Anton Mauve who introduced him to watercolors and occasionally tutored him. In 1882 he began to experiment with oil paints and in 1885, after the death of his father, Van Gogh produced *The Potato Eaters*. He also expanded his painting to include a greater variety of colors and became very interested in Japanese woodcuts.

He returned again to formal training in 1886 at the École des Beaux-Arts but rejected many of their principles and soon withdrew. Later in the year he went to the Antwerp Academy and was put in a beginner's class. Again, he withdrew. Through subsequent studies with F. A. Piestre Cormon in Paris he was introduced to Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, who was another student. Also in 1886 Theo introduced him to the work of the Impressionists which had an influence on Van Gogh's use of color. The artist Camille Pissarro also encouraged him to exchange his dark, gloomy colors for a brighter palette. He began a turbulent friendship with the artist Paul Gauguin and continued to work in Paris, frequenting cafés and experimenting with different styles.

Van Gogh moved to Arles in the south of France in 1888. He rented a house and began an extremely productive period including seaside landscapes, portraits and the Sunflower series. His paintings project his own sensations and emotions and become even more Expressionist in nature. Van Gogh's paintings show that "the Expressionist opens his heart and soul and releases his deepest feelings through images intended to embrace the observer..."(8) He invited Gauguin to visit him in Arles during which time they had a violent quarrel and Van Gogh attacked Gauguin. He then cut off part of his own left ear. This began a series of intermittent hospital stays leading to his placement into an asylum at Saint-Rémy until May 1889. While at the asylum, when his health permitted, Van Gogh continued to paint. It was during his time at Saint-Rémy that his work finally began to be recognized by the art community. The Salon des Indépendents exhibited his *Starry Night over the Rhone and Irises* .

In 1890 while under the care of Dr. Gachet, Van Gogh's health improved dramatically. He spent time with Theo and his wife and their baby. Although Vincent's health improved, his brother's worsened. Van Gogh appears to have regarded himself as a burden to Theo and his family and shot himself on July 27th. He died on July 29th, 1890 in his brother's arms.

Historical Perspective

As part of this unit a historical perspective is presented after my students have been introduced to and have begun their object analysis of the chosen paintings. Teachers using this unit may choose the extent to which they wish to present the following historical information. A history teacher may wish to go further into the historical background and may wish to introduce it before the paintings.

The beginning of the nineteenth century in France saw Napoleon Bonaparte crowned Napoleon I in 1804. Napoleon sought to preserve the essential gains of the French Revolution of 1789. Among his achievements were a clear legal code (The Code Napoléon) and a start to the beautification of Paris. Discontent over poor working conditions and lack of reform under subsequent rulers led to the Second Republic in 1848. Courbet, the Realist who preceded Impressionism, sympathized with the revolutionary forces devoted to ending the French monarchy. His art in this political climate reflected his commitment to the reality of everyday life and his rejection of idealism. He challenged both accepted art forms and institutional authority. The political revolution of 1848 thus coincided with a revolution in art as artists and the public were filled with new ideas.

Louis Napoleon, the nephew of Bonaparte became president but later declared himself Emperor Napoleon III. During his rule, he improved working conditions, supported the beginning of the industrial revolution, and created the beautifully reconstructed Paris that we know today. Economic prosperity and a broader consensus of support accompanied the strong government and political stability of the Regime. The Second Empire, under Louis Napoleon, had a carefully controlled nature which was reflected in The Royal Academy with its juried exhibitions. The new architecture, wide boulevards and parks of Paris created by Parisian Prefect Georges Haussmann provided an open environment for the outdoor paintings favored by the Impressionists. At the same time the Bourgeoisie, or middle class, "emerged as a major force in France" (9). Their culture brought a belief in the privileges of, and right to, leisure, consumption, spontaneity and individualism which was reflected in Impressionist paintings.

In 1870 Napoleon III declared war on Prussia. He was forced to abdicate that same year following the French

defeat at Sedan. The Third Republic was proclaimed as the war continued and Prussian forces besieged Paris. An armistice was signed by the French government that was viewed by many as humiliating and fueled political radicalization. The Third Republic's efforts to end the National Guard in Paris along with popular resistance to the incompetently managed government led to the declaration of a socialist Commune which endured from March 18-May 28, 1871. The Third Republic continued to have frequent domestic crises including an economic crisis in 1873. This disillusionment with the Third Republic provided the atmosphere for the bold, creative style of Van Gogh and the Expressionists. The political system became more stable, yet criticism grew as the middle class and conservatives sought to defend their positions. The Dreyfus affair (1894-1906) in particular led to a political shift from moderate to radical power which directed its energy against the Catholic Church.

Political and Artistic Time Line

(chart available in print form)

Object Analysis

The method of object analysis used by my students will be one developed by Professor Jules Prown of Yale University. By using Prown's method of object study, students will proceed step by step to better understand Impressionism and the French culture that produced Impressionism. This method of object analysis progresses through three stages: description, deduction and speculation. Description refers to what can be observed and includes substantial analysis, content and formal analysis. Deduction moves from the object to the perceived relationship between the object and the analyst and includes sensory engagement, intellectual engagement and emotional response. Speculation allows creative ideas to progress to theories and hypotheses and a program of research. With my help, students will learn to analyze paintings, specifically those by the painters studied in this unit and on display at the Yale Art Gallery. Following is a sample object analysis done of *On the Beach at Trouville* by Claude Monet.

Description

This medium sized painting measures approximately 24" x 20". Clouds mostly cover a blue sky above a blue green sea whose waves break onto a beige sandy beach. Three figures appear on the beach: two women and a child. Three flags extend from the tops of poles located in the water. Nine small figures are in the water. A two masted sailing ship appears on the horizon between the flagpoles to the left and center.

The largest figure, a woman, sits leaning backwards in a chair on the beach gazing slightly downward and just barely to the right of the viewer. She has long full black hair which falls down the back of her neck and over her left shoulder. She wears a black hat with a floral decoration on top. The hat ties underneath her chin with a thin black bow. The veil that covers her face ties with a large beige colored ribbon bow behind her head. Only her dark eyebrows, eyes and the top of her nose are visible through the veil. The figure's left arm bends with her left hand resting on her lap and holding what appears to be a grey pillow or open book. Her right arm bends with her elbow resting on the grey object. The raised right hand holds an umbrella with the fingers

extended, the handle of the umbrella resting on the palm of the hand. The shaft of the umbrella is yellow and black. The white umbrella has a deep blue lining. The figure wears a long sleeved, full-length dress, pale yellow with a darker yellow under-skirt. Ruffles adorn the dress at the neck, cuffs and hem of the overskirt. The color of the dress matches the color of the floral decoration on the hat.

The other female figure wears a dark navy or black hat with a turquoise blue ribbon on the back. She walks along the beach near the edge of the water and to the farright of the figure in the yellow dress. Her hair and facial features are not visible although her head tilts slightly downward towards the water's edge. She wears a midlength dress which stops at her calves. The violet red and dark blue upper portion of the long sleeved dress extends to below the waist where the skirt becomes white. Black vertical lines are visible on the waist of the dress and a black floral motif follows around the skirt just above the hem of the dress. The figure wears grey stockings, and black shoes. Her left arm is straight, angled backward, and extends behind her left hip. She wears a grey glove on her left hand. The right arm and hand are not visible. The left leg extends slightly behind her and the right leg is straight beneath the figure.

The child appears to the left of the female figure walking on the beach. The boy wears a black hat with a wide rim. His long sleeved dark navy jacket extends below his waist to his hips. The collar of a white shirt is visible at the neckline of the jacket. His short pale blue pants stop at the knee revealing grey stockings and red shoes. His short black hair shows beneath the back of his hat. His facial features are not visible but his head faces straight ahead at the waves where they break on the sand. His left arm bends with the forearm extended out in front of him at waist level. The child's right arm also bends with only his elbow visible on the right side of his back. His upper torso leans forward toward the water. The boy's left leg bends with his left foot elevated above the sand. The right leg bends only slightly with the right foot on the ground.

The smaller figures in the water wear brown and black clothing although specific articles of clothing are not discernable other than on the three figures who are clearly wearing hats. The sailing vessel has both beige colored sails raised. The sail to the right or stern of the ship is fully raised. The sail to the front or bow of the ship is raised a little more than halfway and the mast extends upward above the partially raised sail. The hull of the ship is brown, as are the masts. The ship faces towards the left with the deck even with the horizon. The largest flagpole stands just to left of the center of the painting and to the right of the largest figure's face. The pole is grey and the flag is dark blue. The flag is extended and is at a 45 degree angle from the pole. The second flagpole to the right is smaller and the third flagpole also to the right is still smaller. Both of these flagpoles are also grey with their flags being grey also. The blue green water near the horizon becomes green and yellow toward the shore. The white of the waves crashing on the beach leads to grey blue water on the sand. The sand is brown where it meets the water changing to light tan away from the water.

The horizontal lines consist of the horizon and the shaft of the umbrella. The three flagpoles make strong vertical lines, as do the two female figures. The rim of the umbrella opening also makes a vertical line. A very strong diagonal follows the angle of the three flags and the hat of one of the figures in the water to the hat and bent torso of the boy on the beach. Another strong diagonal follows the folds in the large figure's veil and continues across her lap. The vertical line of the largest flagpole intersects with the horizontal line of the umbrella shaft framing the largest figure's face. Geometric shapes consist of rectangles, triangles, circles and squares. The sky is a very large rectangle, smaller rectangles are seen in the flags. The two largest triangles are the water and the sand. The ribbon on the second lady's hat forms a triangle, as do the sails on the ship. Each segment of the umbrella forms a triangle. Circles are the eyes of the largest female figure and the heads of the other two figures. Circles also appear near the hem of the largest figure's overskirt. A large square is the frame formed by the flagpole and the umbrella post. There are curved lines at the edge of each section of

the umbrella, along the top edge of the seated figure's skirt and along the boy's back.

The brightest spots in the painting are the breaking waves and areas of the seated figure's skirt. The source of light appears to be directly overhead. There is a lot of yellow in the painting, seen in the floral hat decoration, the seated lady's dress, and the water. There is also a lot of blue which is visible in the sky, the water, the child's pants, and the lining of the umbrella. The fabric of the veil is gauze and is slightly rough. The top of the seated figure's dress and her overskirt are an organza type fabric and also a bit rough although the underskirt appears to be smooth, perhaps cotton.

Deduction

The woman sitting in the chair is the closest to the viewer. The viewer is approximately six feet from the woman's right side in line with her gaze. The child walks twenty to twenty-five feet to the back and right of the seated figure with the other female figure immediately to the right rear of the child. The seated figure's chair is eight to ten feet from the edge of the water. The child and the walking figure approach the water's edge at a short distance of perhaps three feet. The first flagpole is 100 feet from the viewer with the second flag and third flag approximately 100 feet apart receding into the distance. The people in the water are waist deep about twenty feet from the viewer, between the first and second flagpoles. The flagpoles seem to be placed to indicate the edge of the swimming area. The ship on the horizon is half a mile away and sailing toward the left. From the color of the sails and style of the ship, I deduce that it is a commercial sailing vessel.

The time of day is between three o'clock and four o'clock in the afternoon. The sun is to the upper left of the seated figure as indicated by the shadow of the umbrella on the woman's left shoulder and the lack of light on the front and left side of her face. In addition to the shadow of the lowered umbrella, the fact that it is lowered shows that the sun no longer beats on her head and she no longer needs the umbrella for protection. From the direction of the sun I can also deduce that the ship is sailing to the west. I would deduce that the time of year is summer as there are bathers in the water. This would also indicate that the temperature is warm, perhaps in the high 70's or 80's.

The wet sand indicates that the tide is going out. The width of the shallow receding water on the beach also confirms this deduction. The sand near the breaking waves is smooth and packed hard; the sand away from the water is loose and soft. Sounds would include the breaking of the waves, the sound of the figures walking in the sand and the voices of the bathers. One would also hear the water hitting against the poles, the splashing of the people in the water and the flapping of the flags in the wind. The extended flags, the full sails of the ship and the ribbons outstretched from the ladies' hats, evidence the wind. The saltwater smell is evident, even stronger now and mixed with other smells of low tide.

The seated figure is a relatively young woman, probably in her late twenties. The boy is about eight years old. The age of the standing woman is not discernable. I would deduce that there is a relationship between the boy and the standing woman as they are together walking toward the water. I would also deduce there is a relationship between the seated woman and the painter as indicated by her strong gaze in the direction of the viewer/painter.

The clothing of the figures indicates an earlier time period. The women are wearing long sleeved, long dresses in spite of the warm summer weather. They appear accepting of this style of clothing and do not appear uncomfortable or excessively warm. The hats, decorated with large bows and flowers, are also indicative of an earlier time. The seated figure wears a veil which may be to protect her face from the sand. The veil would also protect her from getting a suntan as a suntan was indicative of working class people. In spite of her veil,

it is possible to feel the strong, yet downward glance of the woman. This leads me to feel a connection with her and to feel that she is seriously contemplating something affecting her life. She is not unhappy, just pensive. She is comfortable in her chair, relaxed to the point that she has let the umbrella down to rest on her shoulder. She seems oblivious to the other figures and to the sights and sounds of the beach. She would be feeling the breeze which is blowing her hair against the left side of her face, the softness of the veil across her face, the chair against her back and the shaft of the umbrella on her right shoulder.

The young boy appears excited to be at the beach. He is anxious to arrive at the water's edge and runs toward the waves. I can deduce that he is making cries of excitement regarding the waves, wet sand or whatever else is catching his eye. He is not aware of all the sights and sound at the beach because he is so focused on arriving at the water's edge. The woman with him is close by, watching over him. She also is interested in the water but her main focus is the care of the boy. She however would be aware of the sights and sounds around her as she is not so intently focused as the boy or pensive as the seated woman.

As the viewer, I imagine that I am approaching the seated woman. I am simply walking along the beach and will soon pass by her on the right. She has been sitting there for some time and appears in no rush to be leaving. The boy was walking calmly a minute ago but has broken into a run as he has gotten closer to the water. He has only just begun to run or he would be further ahead of the woman with him. In just another minute he will be at the water's edge and will bend down and touch the water. My emotional response to the painting is one of both calm and excitement with the calm being stronger. I feel relaxed and content to be at the beach with the figures. I also feel warm as they do, but am aware of all the sights, sounds and smells.

Speculation

I would speculate that the seated woman is important to Monet, perhaps even his wife, as he has made an effort to frame her face with the shaft of the umbrella and the first flagpole. I also know that Monet and his wife were married in June of the year the painting was created. I know also that she spent that summer with him at the seaside town of Trouville. I would also speculate that the boy is their son who was three years old at the time his parents married. Monet has made an effort to draw attention to him with the diagonal line formed by the flags.

The clothing worn by the people leads me to speculate that these people are not accustomed to going to the beach. They must be incredibly hot in the sun with their long sleeved outfits. The happy, warm, relaxed feeling projected from the painting indicates that these people are perhaps on vacation. Whether or not it is an extended vacation, they are certainly enjoying a leisure time activity. The ability to have free time, to go on vacation was a relatively new way of life for the French middle class or bourgeoisie. I speculate that these people are a part of this bourgeoisie and are enjoying the ability to have time at the beach. Even though France and Prussia are at war, there are no indications of this in the painting, no political overtones. As I know that in the fall of this year (1870) Monet took his family out of France to England, I speculate that he has no interest in the political movements of this time.

Questions that could possibly be answered by further research are: what type of clothing was typically worn to the beach in this time period? Are these people on vacation and is that in fact Monet's wife and son? Was Trouville a popular resort area at the time? How did people get to Trouville and where did they stay?

Objectives

1. Students will have an understanding of Impressionism
2. Students will know the names of selected Impressionist artists and their paintings
3. Students will be able to use Prown's method of object analysis to see culture through art
4. Students will be familiar with the history of the latter half of 19th century France
5. Students will create their own Impressionist work of art

Sample Lesson Plans

I. Introduction to Paintings

Overview

Through this series of lessons students will become able to describe a painting using the description phase of object analysis. They will, with the teacher's help, repeat the process with one or more paintings from each of the periods to be examined: Pre-Impressionism, Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Especially in the beginning, students should be provided with questions which will guide them through their description. The questions begin in a simple manner in order to build confidence in their ability to describe art and also to review and build upon basic French vocabulary. Of course, the questions in subsequent lessons increase in difficulty, as does their knowledge and comfort with the process and vocabulary. Students will also learn about the respective painters who created the works presented. Of the paintings listed below, this sample lesson uses *On the Beach, Trouville*. The paintings used were selected for their ability to reflect culture, to clearly evidence the transition from before, to and after Impressionism and their presence in the Yale Art Gallery in New Haven. Those not at the Yale Art Gallery are *Gare Saint Lazare* by Monet and the two by Cassatt.

With this lesson series, as with the others to follow, teachers of more advanced French language classes may choose to supply necessary vocabulary and present all or part of each lesson in French. As a guide to the French teacher, the questions for the three stages of object analysis appear in both English and French.

Materials

Overhead transparencies of painting(s)

Le Grand Pont , Gustave Courbet

Hunter on Horseback Recovering the Trail , Gustave Courbet

On the Beach, Trouville , Claude Monet

Gare Saint-Lazare , Claude Monet

The Child's Bath , Mary Cassatt

Breakfast in Bed , Mary Cassatt

Corner in Voyer d'Argenson Park , Vincent Van Gogh

Night Café , Vincent Van Gogh

Overhead projector

Biographical information on each artist

Video: *The French Impressionists*

Objectives

1. Students will have an understanding of Impressionism
2. Students will know the names of selected Impressionist artists and their paintings
3. Students will be able to use Prown's method of object analysis to see culture through art

Procedure

1. Project overhead transparency of *On the Beach, Trouville* . State that the painting is by Claude Monet but do not give any further information about the painting or Monet. Any additional information given at this point could "cloud" the students' description and make it subjective. Explain to students that they will be doing an objective analysis of a painting: simply stating what can be observed in the painting itself.
2. Guide students through description using the following questions as prompts. The questions/responses may be done whole group, small group or individual and either oral or written.
 - A. Substantial Analysis
 1. What is the approximate size of the painting?
Combien mesure le tableau?
(Teacher will provide this information when not in front of the actual painting.)
 2. Is it an oil painting, watercolor, etc.?
Est-ce une peinture à l'huile ou à l'eau, etc.?
 - B. Content

1. What is the location that you see? Describe what you see in the scenery: beach, clouds, etc.

Où se passe la scène? Décrivez la scène: la plage, les nuages, etc.

2. How many people do you see?

Combien de personnes y a-t-il?

3. Describe each person, what are they doing? What are they wearing?

Décrivez les personnes: ce qu'elles font? Comment est-ce qu'elles sont habillées?

4. What else do you see in the picture?

Qu'est-ce que vous voyez d'autre dans le tableau?

C. Formal analysis

1. What horizontal lines do you see? Vertical? Diagonal?

Est-ce qu'il y a des lignes horizontales, verticales, diagonales?

2. What geometric shapes do you see? Triangles, rectangles, squares, circles?

Y a-t-il des formes géométriques? Triangles, rectangles, carrés, circles?

3. What curved lines do you see?

Y a-t-il des lignes courbées?

4. Where is the light source?

Où se trouve la source de la lumière?

5. What is/are the brightest spot/s?

Quels sont les points les plus lumineux?

6. What colors are used? Is there a dominant color? What is it?

Quelles sont les couleurs utilisées? Y a-t-il une couleur dominante? Laquelle?

7. What textures are evident?

Quelles sont les matières et leurs textures? (Comment est-ce qu'elles sont au touché?)

3. Distribute biographical information on Monet. Depending on the time available just the brief biographical overview provided earlier could be used or more in-depth readings may be gleaned from either the teacher or student reading lists. Read and discuss biographical information and also include additional information on Impressionism as an art form.

"Impressionist painting was noteworthy for its rejection of Romanticism and its whole-hearted plunge into contemporary life. The Impressionists turned...towards images of leisure and entertainment."(10)

"Impressionist painters attempted to portray the light and mood of a scene by using bright colors and small, rapid brushstrokes."(11)

"Impressionism...devoted to capturing effects of light out of doors..."(12)

4. Show video on the Impressionist painters: *The French Impressionists*. Discuss the Impressionist movement. Look for similarities and differences in the styles of the Impressionists presented in the video.

II. Reflections of a Culture

Overview

In this series of lessons students will move beyond an objective description to deduction and speculation. A study of this history of the time will provide insight and background.

Materials

Overhead transparencies of painting(s)
Overhead projector
Handouts on historical perspective and time line

Objectives

1. Students will be able to use Prown's method of object analysis to see culture through art
2. Students will be familiar with the history of the latter half of 19th century France

Procedure

1. Distribute handout on historical perspective and time line. Read and discuss with particular focus on time period covering Monet. Additional information can certainly be added specific to the time period of the painting presented.
2. Present overhead transparency of *On the Beach, Trouville*. Guide the student through the process of deduction using the following questions as prompts.
 - A. Sensory engagement
 1. If you were looking through a window at this scene, what is closest to you and at what distance? What then is the distance of the other objects/people?
Si vous regardez la scène à travers une fenêtre quel est l'objet le plus proche et à quelle distance? ¿ quelle distance se trouve d'autres objets, personnes?
 2. Imagine you also are in this painting at the beach. What do you hear, smell, and feel (in a tactile sense only, i.e.: wind)?
Imaginez que vous faites partie de la scène sur la plage: qu'est-ce que vous entendez, sentez, touchez?
 - B. Intellectual engagement
 1. What is the time of day, season of the year?

¿ quelle moment de la journée sommes-nous? Quelle est la saison?

2. What happened just before the moment you see?

Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé juste avant cette scène?

3. What do you think will happen next?

Que se passera-t-il juste après?

C. Emotional response

1. What are the individual people feeling and thinking?

¿ votre avis, quels sont les sentiments des gens sur scène? ¿ quoi pensent-ils?

2. What is your reaction to the painting?

Quelle est votre réaction à ce tableau?

3. How does it make you feel?

Quels sont vos sentiments quand vous regardez cette peinture?

3. Finish the process of object analysis by guiding students through the stage of speculation.

Inform students that this stage is subjective, that they are now free to explore their thoughts and questions about the painting. This is the stage that will allow them to discover the culture behind the painting.

1. What does a leisure beach scene say to you about the culture of the time?

Qu'invoque cette scène de repos à la plage sur la culture de cette période?

2. What do the pictured individuals think about their right to leisure time activities?

Que pensent les individus sur la scène de leur droit au repos/leurs passe-temps?

3. Do you perceive any political overtones in the painting? Why or why not?

Est-ce qu'il y a une tendance politique évidente dans cette peinture?

4. What does the clothing reveal about the perceptions of "fun in the sun" for these people?

Would they be comfortable viewing a contemporary beach scene?

Que révèlent les vêtements sur la perception de ces gens en ce qui concerne leur joie de vivre? Est-ce qu'ils seraient confortables devant une scène contemporaine à la plage?

5. What questions do you have that could be answered by further research?

Est-ce que vous avez des questions dont les réponses pourraient être trouvées en faisant plus de recherche?

4. When the last selected painting has been covered, follow with a review of all transparencies.

Ask students to compare and contrast art styles. Discuss with them the stylistic changes from Courbet to Monet and Cassatt to Van Gogh. Take this one step further and guide them to a comparison on stylistic changes to historical changes.

5. Conclude this lesson series with a field trip to the Yale Art Gallery. Arrange ahead of time with the gallery which paintings are to be shown to the students. They will convey this information to a docent who will work with the students during their visit. In addition to the paintings used in the above lessons, make a point to view *Port Donnant, Belle Isle*, by Claude Monet. This will be the painting students will copy in the next lesson series.

III. Impressionists in Training

Overview

In this final lesson series, students themselves will become impressionist painters. Just as the artists in this unit trained by copying the masters, so too will my students copy and paint a work by Monet. Painting the Impressionist Landscape, Lois Griffel, is invaluable reading for the teacher. If time allows her method should be followed step by step. This lesson is a shortened process relying on advance preparation and study by the teacher. The teacher should first practice the process of painting an impressionist landscape. Both funds and time will determine whether to use oils or pastels.

Materials

Painting the Impressionist Landscape, Lois Griffel
Overhead transparency of Port Donnant, Belle Isle
Overhead transparencies or prints of other paintings from this series by Monet
Pencils
Blank sheets of white paper
Palettes, one per student
Palette paper
Oil Paints
Palette knives, one per student
9" x 12" masonite boards, one per student
Pastels (If pastels are used in place of oil paints, the palettes, palette paper and palette knives are not needed.)
Photographs of an outdoor area by the school taken at different times of the day, in different atmospheric conditions.

Objectives

1. Students will create their own Impressionist work of art

Procedure

1. Present prints or overhead transparencies of several of the series of cliff scenes done by Monet at Belle Isle (Belle Ile). Stress the awareness of light, the changes from picture to picture with the time of day and atmospheric conditions. Explain that impressionists worked on multiple canvases as light effects/impressions changed during the day, often returning to the same spot at the same time to finish on another day. Show photographs that have been taken at a location by the school. Point out the changes in light conditions and the resultant effect on color.
2. Project transparency of *Port Donnant, Belle Isle* and have students practice outlining the visible shapes onto paper until they are comfortable with this step. Then have them lightly sketch these simple shapes of Monet's composition onto their board.
3. Choose the underlying color for each mass, fill in each large general shape with one color. Do not outline, do not be concerned about edges. Try not to mix colors at this point. Use as little white paint as possible and no black.
4. Apply a second layer of color strokes to define form. Use very soft varied edges. Do not use black to tint for shade. Look for color; consider the object's complementary color for shading.
5. The last set of color strokes will be used to finish the painting. Fill in colors leaving small areas of the first and second layerings to achieve the active play of colors. Check for subtle nuances, warm and cool colors.
6. As a separate project, students may use their acquired Impressionist techniques to either copy an additional Impressionist painting or do a plein-air/open-air painting of their own.

Notes

1. Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society* , p. 303
2. Pierre Courthion. *Impressionism* , p. 88
3. Jane Mayo Roos, *Early Impressionism and the French State* , p. 2
4. John Canaday, *Mainstreams of Modern Art* , p. 103
5. John Canaday, *Mainstreams of Modern Art* , p. 109
6. Anthony Mason, *Monet* , p. 20.
7. Susan E. Meyer, *Mary Cassatt* , p. 36
8. John Canaday, *Mainstreams of Modern Art* , p. 361
9. Paul Smith, *Impressionism: Beneath the Surface* , p. 83
10. Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society* , p. 33

11. Anthony Mason, *Monet* , p. 31.
12. John Canaday, *Mainstreams of Modern Art* , p. 185

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Barter, Judith A. *Mary Cassatt, Modern Woman* . New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1998. Comprehensive volumn on the life of Cassatt and her work. Includes time line, map of Paris. Ninety-one full color plates.

Bomford, David. *Art in the Making, Impressionism* . London: National Gallery, in association with Yale University Press, 1991. A study of Impressionism including chapters on painting in open air, techniques and color theory.

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1982, pp. 1-19. This article explains in detail Prown's method for object analysis.

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Student Reading List

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Malloy, Nancy. *European Art Since 1850* . New York: Cynthia Parzych Publishing, Inc. 1997. Traces the history of art styles and relates them to each other. Easy to read.

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