



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## Teaching Art to the Blind / A Study of Chairs

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by Joanne R. Pompano

Art is an important but often challenging subject for blind and visually impaired students. However, the absence or restriction of sight should not limit individuals in their study and appreciation of the arts. Instead students should be provided with a variety of experiences to make art interesting and meaningful. This curriculum will explore the many obstacles visually handicapped individuals encounter as they try to understand and enjoy art. It will provide information on how to ensure that these students have the same or similar opportunities as their sighted peers.

### The Curriculum

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Developed for students in middle and high school, this unit will assist visually impaired and blind students in their efforts to explore, analyze, and enjoy all types of art. In addition, this curriculum will assist teachers in modifying lessons and providing experiences that will allow students with limited or no vision to use their remaining senses to gain information about art. It may also be of benefit to art museums in aiding handicapped students in their effort to experience art through alternate means.

The unit will concentrate on the design and construction of chairs produced in the Colonial and Federal periods in America. It will explore the changes in the style of chairs manufactured during this era. In particular, it will help students explore the political, social, and economic factors that influence furniture design.

In addition, this curriculum will increase knowledge of the early American furniture including those pieces exhibited at the Yale University Art Gallery by providing a general understanding of the art in these museums. It will also help gain an in-depth understanding of furniture of the Colonial and Federal periods.

#### **This curriculum will:**

1. assist blind and visually impaired students in understanding and enjoying art and art museums
2. provide students and teachers with an introduction to The Yale Art Gallery

3. provide information and suggestions to teachers so they can help blind and visually impaired students enjoy art and art museums
4. provide an approach to art that includes more than the visual or physical components of a piece such as the cultural, historical, social and political aspects of the artwork
5. compare the styles and characteristics of chairs from the Colonial and Federal periods
6. Increase knowledge of chairs including locating and naming the parts of chairs and terms used to describe them.

## **Blind and Visually Impaired**

"Every seven minutes, someone In America will become blind or visually impaired." There are approximately 10 million visually handicapped people in the United States and approximately 2 million are school-age children. (1)

There are a number of different causes of visual impairments resulting in a wide variety of visual problems. Children can be born blind or become blind as a result of an accident, illness, or eye condition. Some individuals are totally blind while other may see light, shadows, and colors and yet have no useful vision. Depending on their conditions, others may see images that appear blurry, distorted, or incomplete while others are able to read large print but have difficulty traveling without assistance.

Many visually impaired children are mainstreamed into regular education classrooms and work along with their sighted peers with the assistance of adapted materials, such as Braille translations of text. It is the job of the teacher of the blind to assist both the student and classroom teacher in making this a full and rewarding experience. Students should not be excluded from a class or activity due to their visual impairment. However, some subjects, such as art, are more difficult than others to adapt or modify.

Individuals are classified as visually impaired or legally blind according to their visual acuity, that is, a person's ability to discriminate fine details. The legal definition of "visual impairment" refers to an individual with a visual acuity of 20 / 70 in the better eye with the best correction. The legal definition of legally blind refers to an individual with a visual acuity of 20 / 200 in the better eye with the best correction or a visual field of no more than 20 degrees. In both cases, vision cannot be fully corrected by prescription lenses, optical devices, surgery, or medical treatment.

## **Types of Visual Impairments**

Low vision can result from a variety of eye conditions, such as cataracts, macular degeneration, retinas pigmentosa, glaucoma, or diabetic retinopathy.

### **Cataracts**

Cataracts are cloudy areas in part or all of the lens of the eye. Normally, the lens is crystal clear and allows

light to pass through and focus on the retina. Cataracts prevent light from easily passing through the lens, and this causes loss of vision. Patients with cataracts experience decreased visual acuity and difficulty seeing in poorly lit environments due to decreased contrast sensitivity. Many people experience an increased sensitivity to light and glare. Print appears hazy and contrast is limited. Distance vision can be blurred especially outdoors. Colors appear faded or changed in hue. Visual functioning may be enhanced with the use of low vision devices such as microscopic and telescopic glasses, lenses that filter light, and magnifying glasses.

In classroom settings, students may be assisted by:

1. Use of bright primary colors with high contrast.
2. Reading materials that have high contrast, such as large black print on white or light yellow paper.
3. Use of black felt-tip pens and bold, enlarged print (a minimum of 18 point.)
4. Reduction of glare by avoiding direct sunlight.

### **Diabetic Retinopathy**

Diabetic Retinopathy is an eye condition that results from diabetes. This condition occurs when blood vessels stop nourishing the retina properly. In the early stages, blood vessels may leak fluid in the retina. In the later stages, serious vision loss is caused when new blood vessels grow and send blood to the center of the eye.

Diabetic retinopathy may result in the following:

1. Changes in variable vision or focus and changes in refraction.
2. Increased sensitivity to bright light and glare
3. Poor color vision
4. Overall blurred or hazy vision making printed text distorted
5. Clouding of the vitreous. Light normally passes from the lens through the vitreous to the retina.
6. Total blindness

In classroom settings, students may be assisted by:

1. Reduction of glare
2. Use of recorded books
3. Use of Braille when condition results in blindness

## **Glaucoma**

Glaucoma is an eye condition that involves an increase in pressure inside the eye due to a buildup of excess fluid. In the early stages peripheral vision becomes a problem. In later stages it destroys all peripheral vision and then the central vision, resulting in total blindness.

Independence, productivity and quality of life can be retained by using specialized devices and techniques. For instance, the use of special lenses can help individuals make the best use of remaining sight. Specialized techniques can be learned that enable people to manage home, work, and travel.

Treatment for glaucoma attempts to bring down the pressure in the eye to prevent damage to the optic nerve. Damage already done to the optic nerve by high pressure cannot be reversed. Early detection, ongoing treatment, and the use of specialized low vision device and services allows individuals to live productive lives. Special lenses allow the user to make the best use of available vision.

In classroom settings, students may be assisted by:

1. Use of bright primary colors with high contrast.
2. Reading materials that have high contrast, such as large black print on white or light yellow paper.
3. Use of black felt-tip pens and bold, enlarged print
4. Reduction of glare by avoiding direct sunlight.

## **Macular Degeneration**

The macular is the small area in the center of the retina that makes sharp visual detail possible. Macular degeneration results in blurred or distorted central vision. When central vision is impaired, individuals have difficulty recognizing faces and colors, reading, and doing near point work. There is a "blind spot" in the center of the field of view. Macular degeneration alone does not result in total blindness. There is no known treatment that prevents this disorder or that can restore the loss of vision.

Symptoms include blurry areas on printed text; a wavy or bent appearance to straight lines of text; and dark spaces blocking the center area of vision. Macular degeneration develops gradually and is not usually noticed during early stages because there is no pain associated with the disorder.

In classroom settings, students may be assisted by:

1. The use of magnifiers and high-intensity lamps for reading print or performing near-point tasks.
2. Telescopes for distance vision tasks such as reading a blackboard or reading a sign.
3. A closed-circuit television (CCTV), which magnifies and projects printed material onto a television screen to help in reading tasks.

## **The Visually Impaired Art Student**

Art is created and appreciated by all segments of society, including blind and visually impaired individuals. However, providing visually handicapped students with meaningful experiences in the arts is an enormous challenge. This curriculum will attempt to meet those challenges. By using strategies and adaptations developed for use with visually handicapped populations, teachers can include students in most activities, projects, and community experiences. In fact, an individual who is blind may have a unique perspective and approach that overcomes the limitations of sight. It is important to understand that art is not only a visual presence, but also has a tactile presence and smell attributes that may go unappreciated in audiences which are not visually impaired.

To derive maximum benefit from the art, visually impaired students should be presented with a multisensory approach to learning about art. A multisensory approach allows students to acquire information from other sources of sensory input to compensate for reduced vision. It should include tactile diagrams, audio narratives, interpretive sound-compositions, art appreciation and art learning activities and curriculum integration activities.

### **Teacher of the Blind**

A teacher of blind and visually impaired serves as consultant to classroom teachers and helps to select appropriate methods and materials. The teacher of the blind assists teachers by explaining the types of objects students are able to see and under what conditions. In addition, these specialists deal with instructional problems related to the teaching of specific lessons and concepts. Teachers of the blind also adapt materials and lessons; provide text in Braille and large print; and teach specialized skills such as the use of computer programs that produce voice output or Braille translations of text. Teachers of the blind also work directly with students when they teach Braille and specific skills needed by their students.

This curriculum will be taught in "Life Skills for the Blind," a course that helps visually handicapped students assimilate into the community. It will also be shared with classroom teachers such as art teachers, social studies teachers, and others that may use the curriculum with students in their classroom.

### **Individual Considerations**

Individual considerations are very important in teaching art to a student with a visual impairment. Teachers must understand that different approaches are necessary depending on such factors as partial or total loss of vision, age of onset of the impairment, and ability of student to use adaptive equipment such as magnifiers.

Other factors such field of vision, near and distance acuity, color vision, and ability to focus are also important considerations.

Teachers should use rich descriptive terminology that describes qualities and experiences and take into account the student's remaining senses. Thus they will have a real and and rich meaning for the child. For instance, teachers should use words which relate to the form, weight, texture, and touch of a piece of art.

For instance, students studying chairs should be given first hand experiences with basic geometric forms and their names as well as specific terms used to describe furniture so that students will have the basis for describing newly experienced objects.

## **Tactile Exploration**

Many things that sighted people know, blind people can only come to know by using their remaining senses and past experiences. In the absence, or limitation, of sight understanding of the world of art is often through tactile exploration.

The importance of interaction with objects cannot be minimized. The student should be allowed, when possible, to actively feel, handle, and when appropriate smell the object, in order to gain information about art objects and increase his repertoire of experiences. Individuals may require time and excessive examination to explore objects in order to form clear concepts of the piece under investigation.

Teachers can facilitate this experience by placing their hands over the student's to guide the child in exploring various aspects of the object. In this way the student can examine the entire object and analyze its component parts.

As the teacher utilizes the hand over hand technique, accompanying questions should be used to help clarify what is being examined. For instance, as a child examines the parts of a chair, the student should be asked to describe it. The child can explain whether it looks like anything else he has encountered or how it compares to other pieces examined. Teachers should avoid questions which result yes or no responses.

Students should be given practice in describing objects to help them to build a rich descriptive vocabulary needed to compare more complex objects. Teachers can assist with the use of analogies. Rather than avoiding words they can try to convey the concept in terms of what already is part of the experiences of the student.

## **Systematic Approach**

As with other lessons developed for the blind, a systemic approach is the best method for teaching. Students should follow a specific approach to learning about the physical aspects of a piece of art such as chairs. They should first be encouraged to explore and compare chairs they find in their everyday environment. They will learn the parts and terminology for chairs in general. Students will begin with getting a general overview of the chair. They will be asked to list the common parts of the chairs they encounter.

They will start at the top crest and rail. Next they will explore the back post, splat, seat, and legs. Students will note the details they find such as carvings. They will use this information in comparing the characteristics found in particular styles of chairs.

To aid students a tactile model may be produced of certain features of the chair, such as the splat. Several kits that allow teachers to produce tactile models may be helpful in this undertaking including a Tactile Graphics kit and a Swail Dot Inverter kit available through American Printing House for the Blind.

## **Aids for Adapting Lessons for the Blind**

There are a number of aids that can be utilized in a museum setting to assist students in viewing an art object more clearly.

### **Tactile Graphics Kit**

This kit allows the user to produce graphic displays of almost any kind. Tactile graphics may be used for maps, graphs, illustrations or simple pictures. Masters are constructed from heavy gauge aluminum foil and can be

reproduced on a vacuum-form machine. Tools in the kit allow for construction of points, lines, and patterns. Lines and patterns are embossed on paper or the heavy foil paper that comes with the kit.

### **Swail Dot Inverter**

This kit is designed for embossing of single dots and is used to construct simple charts, diagrams, maps, or illustrations.

Braille paper is placed on top of the pad for embossing. A stylus allows dots to be embossed when the user punctures the paper. Patterns can be placed on the device in order to trace them.

### **Braille, Large Print, Audio Translations**

There are numerous books and articles concerning furniture and chairs constructed during the Colonial and Federal periods in America. The teacher of the blind is able to obtain braille, large print, and audio translations of these materials through the Board of Education Services for the Blind, State Library for the Blind, and Recordings for the Blind. In addition, readers can be provided to record or read directly to students when it is necessary to get materials on short notice.

It may be necessary to acquire specialized tools such as braille rulers, tape recorders, magnifiers, telescopes, video or digital cameras, and tactile graphic kits. Such equipment is readily available through these same agencies.

### **Magnifiers**

Magnifiers enlarge the image and allow the user to see greater detail. Magnifiers come in different magnifications depending on the need of the student and the type of work to be performed. For instance 2x magnifiers may be helpful for a student who is visually impaired while an 8x might be used with a student who has a more severe impairment.

Optical aids for near and distance tasks may be placed in three basic mounting systems. These include hand held, stand, and spectacle mounted aids. Hand held would be most appropriate in a museum where a student is able to get close to an object they wish to view. Spectacle mounted aids are worn over eyeglasses and would aid in near and distance viewing. Stand magnifiers would be used in library research or for viewing written information provided in museums.

### **Telescopic Lenses**

Telescopic lenses are used for visual tasks which are a distance from the user's eyes. Many are aids that allow the user to adjust the strength of magnification. Telescopic lenses can be hand held or can be mounted onto eyeglasses with the help of a loop.

### **Binoculars / Zoom Lens on Camera**

Binoculars and zoom lenses on cameras are easily acquired. They also have an additional advantage in that they can provide a permanent copy of the object that can be enlarged and explored more closely at another time and setting.

## **Chairs As Art Objects and Historical Markers**

"...Chairs reveal more about the habits, the fashionable tastes, the manners, and the customs of people than any other household article." (2)

Chairs are essential pieces of furniture that are used daily in homes, workplaces and other establishments. They are used for both formal and informal activities including dining, entertaining, studying, business, leisure, and comfort.

Chairs are tools that are created in many diverse styles. They are usually practical and functional but can also be a form of art and decoration. They can be a symbol of authority and wealth. They can be an index of living standards reflecting life from the humblest to most fashionable of homes. More than any other piece of furniture, chairs can be a useful guide to stylistic changes. (3)

Chairs are one of the earliest types of furniture. The first chairs were constructed like stools with wooden backs that may have had carved decoration. By the second half of the 17th century chairs were often elaborately carved with scrolls. During the 18th century chair styles reflected designs published by leading designers such as Chippendale, Hepplewhite, and Sheraton whose pattern books were widely circulated to cabinet-makers in England and America. (4)

These common household items are ideal for teaching visually handicapped students about art. Chairs are familiar to even the youngest of children. They are easy to explore and are easily available. They can reveal information about the history, social, economics, and cultural issues of a period. In this curriculum the Colonial and Federal periods will be discussed. However, the same techniques can be used with furniture of any period of history.

## **Brief History of the American Revolution**

### **Life in the American Colonies during the 1700's**

In the 1700's the American colonies had a small upper class made up of wealthy merchants and planters. Farmers, shopkeepers, and craft workers made up a large middle class and tenant farmers and unskilled workers made up the poor class.

In the early years of the American colonies, settlers produced furniture that was basic and functional. Joiners or turners were the early furniture makers in the Colonies. They produced furniture that was necessary for basic comforts such as chairs, beds, and chests.

As the colonies prospered and expanded, there was a desire for finer furniture. At the same time, many craftsmen were emigrating from England to the colonies. Their skills helped to produce the first fine American furniture.

The craftsmen brought with them:

1. the skill and training acquired in England and Europe
2. styles, methods, and patterns particular regions in their homelands
3. pattern books imported from England that craftsman copied and improvised on



## **Economic Prosperity**

At the end of the seventeenth century and in the early part of the eighteenth century, the colonies were enjoying economic prosperity. The newly affluent colonists began to concentrate more on comfort and luxury. Thus there was a demand for finely crafted furniture to provide comfort in homes not only of the wealthy but the middle class.

American cabinetmakers were now using richer woods. Up until this time oak was the predominant wood. At this time, however, there was a preference for finer woods, such as walnut and maple.

The earlier traditions were changing. The prosperous Colonists and the American craftsmen were being influenced by new forms and fashions in English furniture design. Furniture designers began to use lighter, more graceful designs.

## **American and English Furniture Styles**

American furniture styles often followed the designs and styles of furniture designers in England. However, the styles did not appear in the Americas until some time after they were introduced in England. American furniture also was often simpler in both form and decoration. And although American furniture makers may have followed the styles imported from England they also included designs and features that were uniquely American. Scrolls of leaves, flower motifs and crescent shapes were carved with mallet and chisel for decoration. The carving was less finished and more primitive than the English originals.

## **General Features of 17th Century Chairs**

In general the 17th century furniture was durable and heavy in appearance. Oak was wood of choice. However, ash and maple were also used because they were easy to carve. Rounded shapes and split bausters turned on a lathe were important decorations.

## **William and Mary**

By the end of the seventeenth century American cabinetmakers adopted the William and Mary style that developed in England. The decorative techniques in furniture design of the Jacobean period were modified. The turning and carving were retained but, to avoid the heaviness of Jacobean style, the proportions were refined and curves and angles added.

Named after the English monarchs, the William and Mary style was slim with varied turnings giving the effect of lightness and refinement. Cabinets modeled after Oriental cabinets on stands were on elaborate and finely shaped frames. They were also decorated with rich painting and ornament. This use of varnishes, gilt, and polychrome paints to duplicate the appearance of Oriental lacquered decoration was known as Japanning.

## **18th Century Chairs**

In the early 18th-century the new styles of chairs that were introduced via expensive examples were soon imitated by local craftsmen. These local furniture makers might not have access to the latest pattern books so they produced versions that took the most prominent features of the new style from high style chairs and incorporated them into their designs.

## **QUEEN ANNE (1720-1750)**

The William and Mary forms were refined to meet new demands for elegant furniture. American Queen Anne furniture was named after Queen Anne, who ruled England from 1702 to 1714. Queen Anne furniture was produced in America from approximately 1720 -1750.

Queen Anne furniture is characterized by delicate lines, graceful S-curves and slender proportions carved in walnut woods. Mahogany, American cherry and maple were also used. Natural wood, richly figured and carved, was extremely fashionable.

Another distinctive feature of Queen Anne chairs is the use of solid back splats shaped like a vase or violin. The splat rises from the seat to the center of the curving top rail, where it ends in a carved shell.

### **Summary of Characteristics Queen Ann Period**

1. front legs have the cabriole shape
2. legs were sometimes ornamented with carved shells at the knee
3. back legs are plain and round
4. sides of the seat back follow a gentle S-curve
5. curve of the top continues from the central shell into the curve of the uprights
6. serpentine stretchers
7. horseshoe-shaped seats
8. rounded splats and supporting stiles
9. undulating crests, and aprons arched in cyma curves

## **The Rococo Period**

In the 1730's a new style, the rococo, became popular in England. The generous curves and majestic ornament of the baroque style were replaced by refined foliage and flowers that were often arranged asymmetrically and intermixed with ruffled shells. The results was an ambience of fragile delicacy.

## **Chippendale (1750)**

The Chippendale style is a variation of Queen Anne design. This ornate style is named for Thomas Chippendale, an English cabinetmaker who published volumes that contained both text and plates. His work, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director*, was first published in London in 1754.

Cabinetmakers in England and America, some of whom followed Thomas Chippendale's original designs faithfully, used his works as the source for the designs of furniture produced from approximately 1750 - 1775.

Chippendale chairs have certain common features:

1. generous proportions
2. top rails with the "cupid's bow" curvature and with the two ends curved upward
3. back splats with a great variety of elaborately interwoven patterns
4. the chairs have either straight legs front legs, reflecting elements in the Chinese style, or well-shaped cabriole legs ending in boldly carved claw and ball feet.

In the Queen Anne period back splats were plain while the back splats of the Chippendale were carved in an openwork design. Mahogany was the predominant wood used in the Chippendale period although cherry and maple were also used.

### **Neoclassic Period**

The years from about 1780 to 1820 are known as the Federal period. In these years following the end of the revolution, cabinetmaking was undergoing great changes in America. The new nation was growing in population and wealth. There was a greater demand for furniture. Cabinetmaking was developing as a business rather than a craft. Furniture making became increasingly specialized.

A new style of furniture design known as "neoclassical" was fashionable in America. The discovery of the ancient cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii in the mid-1700's created an enormous interest classical culture. The ornate Chippendale forms were replaced by the restrained forms of this Neoclassic period. The new emphasis was on straight lines, extreme delicacy of form and, and on the imitation of the furniture of the ancient world.

At the time, pattern books were important tools in both England and America. American furniture makers used these books to manufacture and design American furniture. The use of these books made American manufactured closely tied to English influences, perhaps even more so than at any previous time.

There were two important and influential designers, Hepplewhite and Sheraton in the Neoclassical period. Their designs overlapped considerably, with both designers placing a common emphasis upon graceful linear forms and elegant ornament of classical derivation.

London Cabinetmaker George Hepplewhite, published the Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide in 1786. This book helped to spread the neoclassical style.

Shield and heart-shaped chair backs are found in the Hepplewhite style. In addition, there was frequent use of the feather motif and the tapering straight leg.

The shield-back chair typical of Hepplewhite's style has the following features:

1. a slender chair with tapering square legs ending in spade feet.
2. back is carved in a graceful design of classical motifs such as urns, plumes, and drapery
3. decorated with inlays of contrasting woods which emphasize the graceful, sleek lines of the form
4. carved decoration is also found.

Another important English designer, Thomas Sheraton, published *The Cabinet-Maker's and Upholsterer's Drawing Book* in 1792. This became another source of patterns for fashionable London furniture used by American cabinetmakers. Sheraton chairs frequently feature a square back carved in a variety of ornamental motifs including drapery swags, urns, pointed arches, colonettes, fans, and rosettes.

## **A Study of Chairs**

### **Function**

The function of a chair is to support a human body in a sitting position. In order to accomplish this a chair should have:

1. a seat at a horizontal plane that is a predetermined height above the floor
2. a substructure to support the weight of the chair's occupant
3. a back to provide vertical support (5)

Function is simple and remains constant even when its style changes.

### **Style**

Style and function are not related. Style is the particular manner or technique by which an object is created or expressed. The style of the chair may vary according to the time and place it was produced. Style can help us understand the culture in which it was created because it reflects the values of the individual and society that produces the object.

### **Looking for Cultural Evidence**

Chairs created in a particular time or place provide cues to the cultural and society in which they were produced. Analyzing the style of a chair provides insight into the individual and society who created the piece of furniture. In addition, these investigations provides an increased understanding of ourselves through increased knowledge of the past.

When we try to understand the thoughts and actions of individuals in history we usually consider the written

works from the period. The study of art or furniture design provides us with a nonverbal statement of the individual who made the furniture, the person who purchased it, as well as the society in which it would be used. By considering this nonverbal evidence, we will be trying to understand a statement made by a person who lived and worked over two and a half centuries in the past.

Chairs reveal a great deal about the cultural values of a society. In fact, we describe a chair in human terms by using the human analogues such as feet, knees, legs, back, and seat to describe parts of a chair. This use of terms relating to the human anatomy may reflect in abstract terms the ways in which individuals in society perceive themselves.

Chairs are functional. Chairs need certain parts to make them useful as an apparatus to sit on. Any stylistic elements utilized express the values and attitudes of the times and of the people who created the chairs.

There are certain shared stylistic elements that are found in furniture produced in the same place and time. When we find a change in cultural values and attitudes we expect to find a change in style. Therefore, we can analyze the chairs from before the American revolution with those made after the revolution and expect to see the changes in the values and attitudes of those two very different periods expressed in the style of the furniture created.

The Chippendale-style side chair produced in pre-revolutionary America was heavy and solid. It has an irregular outline with knees and ears jutting out in different directions. It interacts with the space that surrounds and penetrates that space.

The side chair produced in post-revolutionary America is completely different from the previous rococo style including the heavily ornamented Chippendale chairs. The new Federal style was more geometric, lighter and more delicate and does not interact with the surrounding space. Details include fine inlay, reeding, cock beads, and refined turnings. Both veneering and painting are used for surface ornament. Chair backs are either square cornered or curved, and often feature elaborate pierced splats. Chairs are easier to move around. They also are more fragile and easier to damage. This suggests that the culture that produced them was willing to forego practical benefits of heavy, durable furniture for other values.

The Neoclassical period was not simply a change in appearance but a whole new approach to design that swept the country. The country was growing and becoming wealthy. The rooms in homes became specialized with different functions demanding a diversity of new chairs and other furniture forms.

## **Comparing Two Chairs**

This curriculum seeks to provide students with the tools to investigate and uncover the nonverbal cues that will assist them in understanding what the designers of chairs were trying to communicate during the period when America was changing from a colony to a free nation.

What were the people like? What do they have to say to the world about their newly gained independence? What did they wish to express about how they lived and what they expected from the society they were creating? What was worth keeping from the old world? What were the new ideas and values they wished to convey to the world?

Examining the chairs from these two very different periods will provide evidence about the individuals and the times in which they were created.

## Chair #1: A Philadelphia Side Chair 1755-1790 of the Chippendale Style

### Woods

The wood is mahogany.

### Top Rail

The center of the crest rail scrolls backward above a semi circular opening

Prominent grooved ears have scrolled ends

These large flaring end ears identify this as a chair made in Philadelphia

### Splat

The splat has a diamond shape interwoven with a figure eight at the the center and flanked by elongated S-scrolls at the edges

Suspended from the fringed lower loop of the figure eight is a tassel

The top edge is laced with a ruffled motif

### Seat

Square, slip seat frame upholstery is a rich, rose color

The lower edge of the front seat rail has a straight line flanked by a pair of serpentine curves

### Legs / Feet

Central and rear stretchers and two side stretchers provide support.

The cabriole front legs have leaf carved knee brackets

The knees terminate in claw and ball feet

Richly carved knees

Well modeled claw and ball feet.

## Chair # 2 Neoclassic Style

Shield-Back Side Chair - 1795 1800

Charleston, South Carolina

### Shield-Back

The most prominent feature of this side chair is the shield-shaped back. This narrow shield figure has an oblong rosette in the center of the back. The shield ends in a point drawing the eye to the seat. The crest is a

convex curve shaped like a camel hump or bell-shape.

The back is divided into four vertical sections by 3 slender, vertical ribs which support drapery swags. The drapery swags create two oblong figures looped on either side of the small rosette. Above the rosette is the delicate plume of feathers.

The inner designs of the splat are delicately carved and indented. Two curved vertical columns or posts on each side of the seat connect the chairback to the seat. The outer surface of the shield is indented and somewhat rounded, but without carving.

## Seat

The upholstered seat is trapezoidal with rounded corners. The seat is very broad. The sides of the seat are slightly curved while the front seat rail is slightly bowed in the center.

## Upholstery

A light plum-color fabric with a diamond design covers the seat. The fabric is richly colored. The small, interlocking diamond design on the upholstery is created with a lighter shade of the same color.

Different lighting conditions and visual angles brings out different shades and high lights in the cloth. The fabric extends over the seat rails.

Two rows of tacks attach the fabric to the frame. The rows run horizontally along the front seat rail. Two rows of tacks are also found on the side seat rail of both sides of the chair.

The tacks are brass with rounded heads. They are arranged in two parallel rows with forty-four tacks in each row. There is approximately two and a half inches between the two rows. Upholstery covers the area between the rows.

## Legs

The seat is supported by tapered legs braced by one central and two side stretchers. The four wooden legs are squared, plain and narrow. Both the front and rear legs taper to a smaller size as they reach the foot. The legs are approximately two inches wide on top narrowing down to approximately one inch at the bottom. There is no design on the legs or stretchers.

The stretchers are a block-shape approximately one inch thick. A single stretcher runs horizontal to the outer legs. This horizontal stretcher is recessed about six inches from the front of the chair. In addition, a single stretcher connects the front and back legs on both sides of the chair.

The front of the seat is wider than the the back. Due to this narrowing of the seat, the front legs are set at a wider angle than the back legs. The two side stretchers extend from front legs to back legs on a angle

## Wood

The wood is mahogany that is stained or varnished a rich rose color.

## **Lesson Plan 1**

Goal: To increase knowledge of the structure of chairs

Objectives:

A. Students will locate and name the parts of a chair including: seat, seatback, splat, legs, knees, top rail, seat rail, etc.

B. Students will examine various chairs that they find in their environment by:

1. measuring features such as length of legs, width of seat, height of back
2. locating and describing features and ornamentation
3. describing weight and materials used in construction

C. Students will use adapted materials and equipment to examine chairs in their environment and museum settings including: Braille rulers and tape measures, Braille notetakers, optical aids (magnifiers, telescopes, cameras, etc)

## **Lesson Plan 2**

Goal: To compare a Chippendale chair to a Neoclassic chair

Objectives:

1. Students will locate and describe various features of a Chippendale chair
2. Students will locate and describe various features of a Neoclassic chair
3. Students will discuss the difference and similarities of a Federalist and Colonial period chairs
4. Students will write a short essay on the political and social issues of the Colonial period in America compared to the Federal period in America
5. Students will debate how the features in each chair reflect the values of both the Colonial or Federalist periods in America

## **Lesson Plan 3**

Goal: To increase knowledge of furniture manufacturing in Pre-revolutionary and Post-revolutionary war in America

Objectives:

Students will create a magazine on American furniture design

Procedure

1st Student: An apprentice in Thomas Chippendale's workshop in London



2nd Student: An apprentice in a Connecticut workshop in Pre-war America

3rd Student: An apprentice in a Rhode Island workshop in Post-war America

Additional students: Reporters interviewing apprentices about the old and new trends in furniture design in their shops.

1. Students will use books and Internet to research their topics
2. Students will look up information on the social, economic, political news for their assigned period
3. Students will create a magazine

## notes

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1. "Blind and Low Vision Facts and Figures," American Printing House for the Blind, <http://www/aph.org>, (10 May 2001), p.1.
2. Halsey, R.T.H. & Tower, Elizabeth, *The Homes of Our Ancestors: New England's Furniture & Interiors Through Colonial & Early Republican Times*, Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1937, p. 123.
3. Fairbanks, Jonathan L., Bates, & Elizabeth Bidwell Bates, *American Furniture 1620 to the Present*, Richard Marek Publishers, New York, 1981, p.54.
4. "Furniture Design," <http://www/Britannica.com=chairs>
5. Prown, Jules David, "Style As Evidence," Vol.15, Number 3, Autumn 1980, The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum

## Student Reading List

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Downs, Joseph, *American Furniture Queen Anne and Chippendale Periods*, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1952

Fairbanks, Jonathan L., Bates, & Elizabeth Bidwell Bates, *American Furniture 1620 to the Present*, Richard Marek Publishers, New York, 1981.

Halsey, R.T.H. & Tower, Elizabeth, *The Homes of Our Ancestors: New England's Furniture & Interiors Through Colonial & Early Republican Times*, Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1937.

Kane, Patricia E., *300 Years of American Seating Furniture Chairs and Beds from the Mabel Brady Garvan and Other Collections at Yale University*, New York Graphic Society, Boston, 1976.

Kirk, John T., *American Chairs Queen Anne and Chippendale* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1972.

Montgomery, Charles F. and Kane, Patricia, E., (editors), *American Art 1750 - 1800 Toward Independence*, Yale University Art

Gallery, New Haven, CT, 1976.

## Teacher Reading List

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Downs, Joseph, *American Furniture Queen Anne and Chippendale Periods*, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1952 (This book provides excellent descriptions and photographs of the Queen Anne and Chippendale periods of American furniture making. )

Fairbanks, Jonathan L., Bates, & Elizabeth Bidwell Bates, *American Furniture 1620 to the Present*, Richard Marek Publishers, New York, 1981. (This well-written book provides an overview of American furniture with a concentration of seventeenth century pieces. It has a running text along with identification captions, which place furniture in its social and historical context.)

Halsey, R.T.H. & Tower, Elizabeth, *The Homes of Our Ancestors: New England's Furniture & Interiors Through Colonial & Early Republican Times*, Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1937. ( This book provides the details on how our American ancestors lived their daily lives. It includes interesting information about their homes, furniture, household goods, as well as social, historical and cultural information.)

Kane, Patricia E., *300 Years of American Seating Furniture Chairs and Beds from the Mabel Brady Garvan and Other Collections at Yale University*, New York Graphic Society, Boston, 1976. (This publication records Yale University's collection of American furniture. The three hundred years that it covers provides the reader with the development of industry of chair making in America. Photographs, illustrations and commentaries provide detailed information on each chair in the collection.)

Kirk, John T., *American Chairs Queen Anne and Chippendale* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1972. (This book looks at the art of chair making in America during the eighteenth century. The 180 illustrations help to reveal the identifying regional characteristics of the major chair making centers in America, including Philadelphia, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and the South.)

Kennedy, John M., *Drawing and the Blind: Pictures to Touch*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, 315p.

Montgomery, Charles F. and Kane, Patricia, E., (editors), *American Art 1750 - 1800 Toward Independence*, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT, 1976. (This book provides historical, cultural, and social information on American art in the mid-eighteenth century.)

*Art History Through Touch And Sound series A Multisensory Guide for the Blind and Visually Impaired*, 1998-99, Art Education for the Blind, Inc., New York.

"Accessible Art Program," *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, Mar/Apr95, Part 2 of 2, Vol. 89, Issue 2, p.1-6.

"Art and Recreation," *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, Jan/Feb 96, Part 2 of 2, Vol. 90, Issue 1, p.28,

"Art for Visually Impaired Person," *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, Sep93, Vol.87, Issue 7, p.2

Tactile Art Tours," *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, Sept/., Part 2 of 2, Vol. 89, Issue 5, p.2

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