



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2001 Volume II: Art as Evidence: The Interpretation of Objects

Documentarians of an Era: A Study of the Paintings of Thomas Eakins and Gustave Caillebotte

Guide for Curriculum Unit 01.02.09
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Different modes of communication make possible the sharing of information, ideas, and feelings that can help us to understand what it is that makes us human. Cultures clash and blend in many differing aspects, particularly in the arts, allowing us to make assumptions about real and profound connections. This unit will explore just such artistic “blends” through an analysis of the works of the American painter, Thomas Eakins, and from France, Gustave Caillebotte and Edgar Degas.

Looking at two key works of Eakins, *The Champion Single Sculls* and *John Biglin in a Single Scull*, two of Caillebotte, *The Floor-Scrapers* and *House Painters*, and one by Degas, *The Ballet Rehearsal*, we examine the interrelationships of these paintings vis à vis their themes, their style and their culture, with attention to what makes their art “real.”

In addition, we will look at the poetry of Walt Whitman, with an eye for the comparison of paintings with other art forms, namely the written word, and how Whitman’s poetry, too, documents his era and complements the visual art of Thomas Eakins.

It will be important to know from whence these great painters come, and how they were both affected by, and influenced, their respective environments. Thus, we will take a journey to both Philadelphia and Paris in the later nineteenth century, comparing the similarities of these two cities and how they figured into the visual art of their native sons.

(Recommended for Art, French Art, and French, grades 9-12.)

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