Preparing for Your Visit

The Birth of Impressionism: Masterpieces from the Musée d’Orsay teaching packet was designed to help teachers prepare students for their gallery visits and classroom follow-up. This packet contains a teacher’s guide, fifteen color art reproductions, and a scavenger hunt for self-guided tour groups.

Teacher’s Guide

This teacher’s guide begins with an introduction to The Birth of Impressionism. The subsequent sections include information about key artworks and artists that may be featured on docent-guided tours of the exhibitions. Designed for adaptation, “Investigate and Create” discussions and activities encourage students to look closely and creatively respond to the featured artworks. Each section is accompanied by color reproductions of the following images.

Color Art Reproductions

- Adolphe-William Bouguereau
  *Birth of Venus*, 1879

- Jules Adolphe Aimé Louis Breton
  *The Harvester*, 1877

- Gustave Doré
  *The Enigma*, 1871

- Henri Regnault
  *Juan Prim, October 8, 1868, 1869*

- Édouard Manet
  *Emile Zola*, 1868

- James Abbott McNeill Whistler
  *Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1: Portrait of the Painter’s Mother*, 1871

- Frédéric Bazille
  *Bazille’s Studio*, 1870

- Gustave Caillebotte
  *The Floor Scrapers*, 1875

- Edgar Degas
  *The Dance Foyer at the Opera on Rue Le Peletier*, 1872

- Eugène Louis Boudin
  *The Beach at Trouville*, 1865

- Claude Monet
  *Boats: The Regatta at Argenteuil*, ca. 1874

- Berthe Morisot
  *The Cradle*, 1872

- Camille Pissarro
  *Red Roofs, Village Corner, Winter Effect*, 1877

- Paul Cézanne
  *The Maincy Bridge*, ca. 1879

- Édouard Manet
  *The Escape of Rochefort*, ca. 1881

Scavenger Hunt

Available as a resource for self-guided tour groups, The Birth of Impressionism scavenger hunt encourages close investigation of select works throughout the galleries.

Curriculum Connections

The Birth of Impressionism docent-guided tours support the Tennessee Curriculum Standards by introducing ideas relevant to the visual arts, language arts, and social studies curricula. Specific standards are addressed at grade-appropriate levels. View connections for all grade levels (K–12) at www.fristcenter.org.
The Birth of Impressionism

In 1874, avant-garde artists, including Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Camille Pissarro mounted the first public exhibition by the group that would become known as the Impressionists. Painting scenes of everyday life—parks, avenues, cafes, and the countryside near Paris—the Impressionists employed brilliant hues and visible brushstrokes to capture the transient effects of light playing across their fields of vision.

This new approach to painting has been widely celebrated for its singular beauty and impact on the development of modern art. When presented alongside contemporaneous academic and Realist painting, as they are in this exhibition, works by the first Impressionists may also be understood as part of a broad spectrum of complex social, political, and cultural forces that transformed Paris in the 1860s and 1870s. The Birth of Impressionism includes paintings created in the decades immediately preceding and following the inaugural Impressionist exhibition. The organization of this exhibition invites viewers to explore the intersecting stylistic and thematic developments that influenced the Impressionists as they both witnessed and encouraged the dawn of the modern era.

The exhibition is divided into the following themes:

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- The Terrible Year: War and Civil War 1870–71 (page 5)
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- Degas and Caillebotte: Snapshots of Modern Life (pages 12-13)
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The Salon of Paris

For centuries, the annual juried Salon of Paris had been the most important exhibition in France, where the fame, fortune, and posterity of an artist were either established or diminished. A bastion of conservatism, the Salon favored themes and conventions that were of the utmost importance to such traditional institutions as Académie de peinture et sculpture (Academy of Painting and Sculpture). The highest honors went to paintings that conveyed morally instructive messages through images drawn from mythology, religion, classical literature, and history. These narratives linked the ideals and aspirations of modern society with precedents in ancient Greece and Rome, the Renaissance, and historical incidents that were considered beacons of rational and spiritual attainment worth emulating.

The most successful academic painters employed highly polished surfaces, classically balanced compositions, and muted tones to convey the intellectual clarity of these ancient ideals as a way of transcending the vagaries of everyday life. Frequently, significance was given to images of the nude, not as flesh and blood, but as an embodiment of such values as purity, self-sacrifice, and spiritual love.

Adolphe-William Bouguereau (French, 1825–1905)

Birth of Venus (Naissance de Vénus), 1879
Oil on canvas, 118 1/8 X 84 5/8 in.
Salon, Paris, 1879
© RMN (Musée d'Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

Selected for the Salon of 1879, this monumental picture epitomizes academic painting—a polished surface, controlled brushwork, classical subject matter, and a fascination with the idealized nude. The beautiful articulation of the body is achieved through careful study and preparatory drawings from human models and classical sculpture. This practice provided the very foundation of art sanctioned by the state-run Salon. The Impressionists rejected this academic discipline, preferring to capture the fleeting essence of their modern subjects.
Courbet, Millet, and the Rise of Realism

While many academicians used classical allusions to perpetuate traditional values, others sought to explore the natural world and human experience as it was lived in the present. Painters such as Jean-François Millet, Jules Breton, and Jules Bastien-Lepage represented the countryside and its rustic population with a combination of sentimentality and empathy. By contrast, Gustave Courbet, the greatest Realist of his time, depicted common, even vulgar aspects of life with honesty and directness. In the 1860s, the immediacy with which these artists portrayed their rustic surroundings began to influence painters such as Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, who would both become part of the first generation of Impressionists.

Jules Adolphe Aimé Louis Breton
(French, 1827–1906)
The Harvester (La glaneuse), 1877
Oil on canvas, 90 3/4 X 49 1/4 in.
Salon, Paris, 1877
© Musee des Beaux-Arts, Arras, France / Giraudon / The Bridgeman Art Library International

This painting relates to the subject of gleaning, a practice in which peasants were permitted to take leftover grain from the fields after a harvest. While they were often viewed as lowly scavengers, Breton gives this gleaner dignity and beauty, symbolizing the humanity of even the humblest classes. This painting was featured in Agnés Varda’s 2000 film Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse (The Gleaners and I), which portrays modern day gleaners who live by salvaging the discarded food and leftovers from restaurants, farms, and supermarkets.

Investigate: Compare and Contrast

Look closely and compare the central figure in Breton’s The Harvester to Bouguereau’s Birth of Venus. Despite her social status, the young woman in The Harvester is shown standing tall. Even though she has a tired expression on her face, she manages to effortlessly carry the grain. What might this pose suggest about her? Why do you think Breton would choose to convey a “commoner” in such a stance?

Now look back at Adolphe-William Bouguereau’s Birth of Venus. First compare the quality of the brushwork with that of The Harvester. Of the two artists, who was concerned with creating a smooth surface and who was interested in a rough, realistic texture? Next, look at the body of Venus in the center of the painting. She has a perfect, idealized form, which was the French standard in painting at the time. Think about why it might have upset some people to see the young woman in The Harvester when the trend at the time was painting women similar to the one in Birth of Venus.
The Terrible Year: War and Civil War 1870–1871

In July 1870, powerful forces of nationalism pushed Emperor Napoleon III into war with Prussia, a member of the German Confederacy. The war proved disastrous for the French, who suffered defeat at Sedan that September. The Germans then laid siege to Paris. The city endured bombardment, famine, and disease for four months until its fall in early 1871. Shortly after the end of the war, a group of leftists calling themselves the Commune of Paris rebelled against the new government that had been established at Versailles. Communards took control of the city, seeking to establish a “democratic and social republic.” During the “Bloody Week” in late May 1871, government troops brutally put down the insurrection; an estimated 20,000 Communards were executed, another 7,500 jailed or deported.

The events of “the terrible year,” as Victor Hugo called this period, occurred at a pivotal moment in the development of Impressionism, as many of the key members of the group were then reaching artistic maturity. Some, such as Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas, served in the army; others, such as Paul Cézanne and Claude Monet, took refuge in other regions or nations. On returning to their studios after the war, they became part of the broad political and social transformation that Paris experienced as it rebuilt and modernized.

Gustave Doré (French, 1832–1883)

The Enigma (L’énigme), 1871
Oil on canvas, 51 1/8 X 77 in.
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

Gustave Doré created documentary sketches and painted bleak allegories about the Franco-Prussian War and its aftermath. At once realistic and symbolic, The Enigma shows a battlefield littered with dead bodies on a hillside overlooking a besieged Paris. At center a winged woman representing France clutches at the figure of the Sphinx. In Greek mythology, this hybrid being—part woman and part lion—posed confounding riddles to travelers. If the answer was incorrect, the Sphinx was said to have strangled and devoured the victim. The question “why war?” seems here to be the enigma. Unsolved, it has resulted in the destruction of Paris.

Investigate and Create: Color and Mood

Look closely at the colors Doré chose for this painting. Think about the ways color can be used in an artwork to create a mood and perhaps even stir an emotional response. Why do you think the artist chose ranges of gray as the dominant colors in this painting? What feeling is created by the grays in the painting? How might your reaction to the artwork change if the colors were more lively and vivid?

Try it! Identify an important historical event, such as a battle, and paint the scene twice using a different color palette each time. For example, paint the first using realistic color and the second in grayscale or a monochromatic palette that suggests a particular mood. Once your paintings are complete, reflect on your artworks and describe how your color choices impact the mood of the artwork.
Naturalism in the Salon

In the Salon, historical, religious, or allegorical themes expressing moral values were generally accorded the highest status. Yet other subjects—portraits, landscapes, genre scenes, and still lifes—were often accepted, if only as of secondary value. A new focus on naturalism emerged as the Salon became more democratic after 1870, when previously selected artists were invited to help elect the next year’s jury, making the process open to newer trends. Everyday subjects depicted in realistic new styles attracted the attention of the art press, while appealing to a rising middle class audience with little taste for the antique.

Henri Regnault (French, 1843–1871)

*Juan Prim, October 8, 1868 (Juan Prim, 8 Octobre 1868)*, 1869
Oil on canvas, 124 x 101 5/8 in.
Salon, Paris, 1869
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

This dramatic portrait is one of the most important paintings completed during Henri Regnault’s tenure in Madrid during the liberal revolution of 1868. Although General Prim commissioned it, he was not satisfied with the picture and refused to accept it. Regardless, it was a great success at the 1869 Salon. Having received the Prix de Rome in 1866, Regnault was consequently exempt from military duty. However, he volunteered for service in the Franco-Prussian War and was killed at age 27.

Investigate and Create: Conveying Character

Look closely at Regnault’s portrait of Spanish General Juan Prim. What do you think Regnault intended to communicate about the general’s position in society? Note Prim’s clothing, where he is sitting, and where other characters are placed throughout the painting. List at least three visual clues that support your conclusions about Prim.

Try it! Identify a figure who is of great importance to you, and create a portrait of the person. Think about what you would like to communicate about the individual. Before you begin the portrait, make a list of visual clues that you will include in the artwork to help others learn about your sitter. For example, what would your sitter be wearing? How would he/she be posed? Will other people be included and if so, how would they interact with the main character?
Édouard Manet’s aspiration to be accepted by the Salon did not prevent him from being among the most innovative painters in nineteenth-century France. The creator of *Olympia* (1863) and *Luncheon on the Grass* (1863), Manet scandalized the art establishment with these works’ overt sexuality and subversion of conventions. Yet he believed that the recognition afforded by the Salon was critical to an artist’s career, and he never stopped submitting works, many of which were accepted. Despite this, much of his renown was a result of his exclusion from the 1863 Salon. Because of the many rejections that year, Emperor Napoleon III allowed an alternate exhibition, the Salon des Refusés, in which Manet, Henri Fantin-Latour, Camille Pissarro, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, and others showed works that foretold new directions in painting through the 1860s. Manet showed *Luncheon on the Grass*, which inspired a firestorm of criticism and popular derision, establishing the artist’s reputation as a provocateur.

While Manet was often accused of being against tradition, he was as much a student of painting’s history as he was an innovator. Like many painters of his time, he was influenced by such Spanish masters as Diego Velázquez, whose works were characterized by a stark realism, brooding tones, and mysterious, dark backgrounds. A consummate synthesizer, Manet also brought such influences as Venetian painting, seventeenth-century Dutch painting, and Japanese art to bear in his work.
Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883)

Émile Zola, 1868
Oil on canvas, 57 5/8 x 44 7/8 in.
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

This portrait was made in appreciation of Émile Zola, who wrote a series of articles in the newspaper L’Événement in defense of Manet after The Fifer had been rejected from the Salon. A summation of Manet’s interests, the work’s precise realism and compressed depth of field suggest the influence of photography. On the wall is a reproduction of Olympia (1863), a favorite work of Zola’s, which had caused a scandal at the 1865 Salon for its frank depiction of a prostitute. The 1860 Japanese print, from Utagawa Kuniaki II’s Wrestler series, indicates modern artists’ growing interest in the abstract harmonies and decorative flatness of Japanese art. The Spanish influence is shown in the print of Diego Velázquez’s Los Borrachos (The Drunkards) (1629), partly covered by Olympia. The open book in front of Zola is Charles LeBlanc’s History of Painters, indicating Manet’s desire for art historical recognition and Zola’s belief that Manet’s paintings belonged in the Louvre.

Investigate and Create: Paintings in a Painting

Look closely at Manet’s Émile Zola. Notice the works of art and literature that are included in the painting. What do these items reveal about Manet and Zola?

Try it! Pair up with a friend and create portraits of one another. Think about your individual styles and tastes as well as your favorite music, art, sports, etc. What objects will you include in the portrait of your friend? What objects would you like your friend to include in the portrait of you? When both artworks are complete, take turns looking at them; discuss what each portrait communicates about the sitter and the artist.
The Portrait Tableau

Édouard Manet’s realism, combined with his synthesis of Spanish, Italian, Japanese, and Dutch stylistic influences, underscored the dual impulses to follow nature—as encouraged by Gustave Courbet—and to pursue more purely aesthetic aims. As Manet did in his portrait of Émile Zola, artists of the 1860s turned to the portrait tableau as a way of accomplishing both. In this type of work, the figure is shown as primarily an element of a setting—typically a softly lit interior—that is unified through harmonious orchestrations of form, value, color, and space. The interest in obtaining a likeness is balanced by attention to the overall aesthetic effect—an example of the “art for art’s sake” concept embraced by James Abbott McNeill Whistler and many of his contemporaries in France and England.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (American, 1834–1903)
Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1: Portrait of the Painter’s Mother (Arrangement en gris et noir, no. 1), 1871.
Oil on canvas, 56 3/4 x 64 in.
Royal Academy, London, 1872
© RMN (Musée d'Orsay), Jean-Gilles Berizzi
An American painter who worked in Paris and London, Whistler was highly attuned to the new currents in art being formulated by Manet and his circle throughout the 1860s. As in Manet’s portrait of Émile Zola, Whistler’s Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1: Portrait of the Painter’s Mother (1871) combines a stark realism with the dark and close values of Spanish painting and the decorative properties of Japanese art, seen in the fragment of a kimono on the wall and the tatami mat on the floor.

Popularly known as Whistler’s Mother, the work has long been an icon of American culture, admired as a dignified representation of the artist’s mother. Yet Whistler’s title underscores his interest in going beyond portraiture to explore connections between the color harmonies and compositions of painting and the effects of music. Just as music has no intrinsic narrative or moral function, Whistler and others of the Aesthetic Movement believed in “art for art’s sake,” which could be appreciated for its beautiful arrangements of forms and colors, irrespective of subject.

Investigate and Create: More than a Portrait

Look closely at Whistler’s Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1. Though this is a painting of the artist’s mother, it is clear from the title that Whistler is interested in more than just creating a likeness of his sitter. In fact, the figure in this work is treated primarily as an element of the overall composition.

Try it! Examine Whistler’s Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1. Then, create a sketch of Whistler’s painting in which you reduce the central figure and objects to basic shapes. (See provided example.) Notice the harmonious arrangement of the shapes and colors. Next time you create a portrait, consider more than just capturing the likeness of your sitter. Try to also create harmony through your arrangement of shapes, forms, and colors.
Édouard Manet’s pioneering artistic achievements, coupled with his insistence on the importance of acceptance at the Salon, made him the natural pivot point between a conservative art establishment and the emerging avant-garde. Henri Fantin-Latour documented the young progressives’ admiration of Manet in *A Studio in the Batignolles* (1870), which shows Manet sitting at an easel surrounded by other artists and writers who also sought to create a new language for depicting modern subjects. These artists congregated in Paris’s Batignolles neighborhood just north of the Gare Saint-Lazare, either at the Café Guerbois or the studio of the painter Frédéric Bazille. Although it ended with the onset of the Franco-Prussian War, the Batignolles group formed the nucleus of Impressionism, with the notable exception of Bazille, who was killed in the war.

**Frédéric Bazille (French, 1841–1870)**

*Bazille’s Studio (L’atelier de Bazille), 1870*

Oil on canvas, 38 5/8 x 50 5/8 in.

© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

The towering figure of Bazille in the center of this canvas, which depicts visitors to the artist’s studio, was actually painted by Manet. Several pictures on the studio’s walls are recognizable as Bazille’s—particularly *The Toilet* (1870), which is displayed prominently behind the pink couch.

Reinforcing the dynamic and evolving relationship between the avant-garde and the Salon, these painted depictions of traditional subjects represent the younger generation, which would eventually supplant the entrenched academic hierarchy.

**Investigate and Create: The Artist’s Studio**

*Look closely at Bazille’s Studio* and notice how each figure is posed. Some are sitting and others are standing, but all of them are engaged. Manet is depicted next to the towering figure of Bazille, gesturing with his hand. What do you think the three men in the center are talking about? What are they viewing as they talk? Does there seem to be camaraderie or dispute between them, and how can you tell?

These activities were clearly important enough to prompt Bazille to depict them in a work of art. Why might these moments between colleagues be worth capturing? Consider the avant-garde’s relationship with the Salon at the time.

**Try it!** Create a scene in which all participants are engaged in an activity or activities that are important to you. What will the setting for these activities be? What will the artwork communicate about you and your friends? Consider your common likes, dislikes, and each individual’s relationship with the group.
Degas and Caillebotte: Snapshots of Modern Life

The styles of the Batignolles painters ranged from the tight realism of Henri Fantin-Latour to the looser, more light-saturated approach of Frédéric Bazille. This dichotomy continued into the 1870s with a contrast between the aesthetic realism of Edgar Degas and Gustave Caillebotte and the spontaneous *plein air* paintings of Claude Monet and Alfred Sisley. Degas and Caillebotte balanced an interest in light and color with a desire to portray everyday life through carefully planned compositions and finely controlled drawing. Each was inspired by the dynamic compositions and color harmonies of Japanese prints and by photography, with its potential for unconventional angles, creative cropping, and capacity to freeze the subject in mid-action. While he would participate in all but one of the eight Impressionist exhibitions, Degas did not consider himself an Impressionist, with the immediacy that word implied, saying “What I do is the result of reflection and of the study of the great masters; of inspiration, spontaneity, temperament, I know nothing.”

**Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)**

*The Floor Scrapers (Raboteurs de parquet)*, 1875
Oil on canvas, 40 1/8 x 57 5/8 in.
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

Caillebotte initially studied painting in the academic tradition with Léon Bonnat. After *The Floor Scrapers* was rejected by the Salon in 1875, Pierre-Auguste Renoir invited Caillebotte to join the Impressionist group, and the work was exhibited in 1876 at the second Impressionist exhibition. Likely inspired by laborers renovating his home, Caillebotte approached the proletarian subject in an academic fashion, completing numerous preparatory drawings. However, his focus on the working class and his accurate treatment of the anonymous figures’ bare torsos distinguish the artist as a true realist. The work was well received at the exhibition, although Émile Zola referred to it as a “painting that is so accurate that it makes it bourgeois.”

**Investigate: Composition Comparison**

Look closely at Caillebotte’s *The Floor Scrapers*. Describe the painting in terms of subject matter, composition, and color harmonies. Notice especially the angles, cropping, and the artist’s ability to capture his subjects in mid-action.

Compare Caillebotte’s painting to Jules Breton’s *The Harvester* on page four. Both artists were interested in portraying everyday life, and their paintings show people engaged in rigorous activity. However, consider the differences between the artists’ portrayal of their subjects. What seems to be of primary importance in each artist’s composition?
Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917)

The Dance Foyer at the Opera on Rue Le Peletier (Le Foyer de la Danse de l’Opera de la rue Le Peletier), 1872
Oil on canvas, 12 5/8 x 18 1/2 in.
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

One of Edgar Degas’ favored subjects was the ballerina at work, training, or rest. His many paintings, pastels, and sculptures on this theme capture not only formal performance, but also unguarded moments, in which the figures move their bodies in spontaneous gestures—stretching, twisting, bending over, and even slumping in exhaustion. This painting shows a variety of such postures: On the left, a student carefully follows the master’s instruction. Another ballerina stretches at the barre, while seated next to the master is an exhausted dancer, her dress draped unceremoniously on the chair back behind her.

Investigate and Create: Capturing Movement

Look closely at the variety of poses seen in Degas’ The Dance Foyer at the Opera on Rue Le Peletier. Professional ballerinas would pose for Degas in his studio, and the resulting drawings were often used to construct scenes such as this one. How many different positions can you identify and describe? What do you think it would feel like to hold some of these poses for long periods of time? Degas sometimes used photography to capture his models’ poses. Is there any evidence here that a camera was used?

Try it! Create a series of quick gesture drawings in which you and your classmates take turns posing and drawing one another. Pose for no more then one minute, focusing first on the basic proportions of the body in each pose. Then add more detail defining the shape of the body before your minute is up.

When your series is complete, reflect on the process of gesture drawing. For a greater challenge try observing and sketching people on the go, as they move naturally without posing for you.
Toward the Impressionist Landscape

As early as the 1830s, an interest in capturing the effects of light and atmosphere, as seen in the works of English painter John Constable, inspired French artists to carry their easels and paints with them into the region around the village of Barbizon to paint in the open air—*en plein air*. Members of the group also emulated seventeenth-century Dutch masters like Jacob van Ruisdael, in admiration of the tactile earthiness and ephemeral atmospheric effects of these predecessors’ works.

These traditions also influenced Eugène Boudin and Johan Jongkind as they created marine and beach scenes. They in turn would inspire the paintings of Claude Monet, who was only a teenager when he first met Boudin painting on a beach in Normandy. Boudin impressed upon Monet the importance of painting out of doors. A few years later, Monet and fellow students Alfred Sisley and Pierre-Auguste Renoir would take painting excursions to the Barbizon region, where they painted in direct response to variations in light and atmosphere. They gradually drew away from the earth tones of the Barbizon school to a greater sense of light-as-color, allowing visible brushstrokes to indicate spontaneity.

Eugène Louis Boudin (French, 1824–1898)
*The Beach at Trouville (La plage de Trouville)*
1865
Oil on paperboard, 10 3/8 x 16 in.
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

As the new railway system made travel throughout France easier and cheaper, resorts developed along the coasts. The most glamorous holiday spots were in Normandy, Trouville, and neighboring Deauville. Boudin would often take the train to these places, where he would paint seascapes and beach scenes *en plein air*. A direct precursor of the Impressionists, Boudin used quick, economical brushstrokes to capture the essential forms and outlines of figures interacting on the beach. In this work, one can see Boudin’s influence on the young Monet, who once wrote “If I became a painter, I owe it all to Boudin.”

Investigate and Create: Touch on Technique

Look closely at the brush technique that Boudin used to paint his figures. The figures may seem blurred and indistinct, yet we are able to distinguish one individual from the rest.

Think about what this scene would look like as a photograph. Imagine if you could take a picture of the exact same moment in time with a digital camera. How would the digital photograph and Boudin’s painting differ? Consider how the figures, the sand, and the sky would look. How would the time of day and weather conditions be revealed in a photograph versus a painting?

Try it! Create a painting study of an outdoor recreational activity. As you observe people moving about, try to capture their movements using quick brushstrokes. After you complete the sketch, take a photograph of the scene and compare the two. Which image do you prefer and why?
Classic Impressionism

Starting in 1874 and lasting until 1886, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley, Edgar Degas, and others staged eight group exhibitions independent of the official Salon. After the first of these, those who participated became labeled “Impressionists,” from a critic’s witticism regarding Monet’s famous painting of Le Havre harbor titled Impression: Sunrise (1873). Louis Leroy wrote about the work and its title: “Impression—I was certain of it. I was just telling myself that, since I was impressed, there had to be some impression in it … and what freedom, what ease of workmanship! Wallpaper in its embryonic state is more finished than that seascape.”

Despite the cutting tone, the name “Impressionism” found favor among many of the artists associated with the new movement. Delighting in the appearances of the physical world, the Impressionists sought to capture transitory atmospheric effects in rural, suburban, or urban settings, and occasionally in figure paintings and still lifes. To approximate their optical “impressions” of light playing across nature’s surfaces, the Impressionists employed assertive brushwork and intense colors. The combination of modern subject, brilliant lighting effects, and animated brushwork produced the shimmering canvases exhibited here.

Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926)

**Boats: The Regatta at Argenteuil** *(Les barques: Régates à Argenteuil)*, ca. 1874
Oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 39 3/8 in.
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

One of Monet’s many paintings of the river at Argenteuil, this view of a regatta is a sign of the increase in disposable income and leisure time among the rising middle class. Activities such as yachting were quite popular, and boating clubs organized races to attract tourists. The Impressionists made these novel activities subjects for their modern histories.

Investigate and Create: An Impressionist Sky

**Look closely** at Monet’s **Boats: The Regatta at Argenteuil**. Notice how he used short, rapid brushstrokes to capture fleeting effects of rolling water and changing times of day.

**Try it!** Look closely at the sky at different times of day—in the morning when you wake, on your bus ride or car ride home from school, and in the evening as the last light fades. Notice variations in the sky’s color and brightness from sunrise to sunset. For each stage of your observations, select sheets of construction paper and a few chalk pastels (or other drawing media) that correspond with the sky at that particular time of day. Then experiment with mark making. Try short, rapid strokes like the kind Monet used to create atmospheric conditions. After filling an entire sheet of paper with marks, repeat the process for each additional stage of your observations. Complete a series of atmospheric drawings and compare your impressions of the sky over the course of one or more days.

How would you generally characterize the sky and its light at different times a day? What type of colors and marks did you use to capture the sky’s variations—at sunrise versus sunset, for instance?
Classic Impressionism

The First Impressionist Exhibition

Following the model of the Salon des Refusés, the group of painters surrounding Édouard Manet (though not Manet himself, who preferred to try his chances with the Salon) decided to stage an exhibition of their paintings at the photographer Nadar’s studio in 1874. Without having a formal name, the group called itself the Societe Anonyme des artistes, peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc. (Societe Anonyme is the French term meaning “incorporated”). Of the many works in this inaugural exhibition, three are on view in The Birth of Impressionism—Berthe Morisot’s The Cradle (1872), Camille Pissarro’s Hoarfrost (1873), and Paul Cézanne’s The Hanged Man’s House (1873).

Berthe Morisot (French, 1841–1895)
The Cradle (Le berceau), 1872
Oil on canvas, 22 x 18 1/8 in.
First Impressionist Exhibition, Paris, 1874
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

The Cradle shows one of Berthe Morisot’s sisters, Edma, watching over her sleeping daughter, Blanche. It is the first image of motherhood—later one of her favorite subjects—to appear in the artist’s work. Morisot became the first woman to exhibit with the Impressionists when she showed The Cradle at the 1874 exhibition. The painting was scarcely noticed although important critics commented on its grace and elegance. After unsuccessful attempts to sell it, Morisot withdrew it from display and The Cradle stayed in the model’s family until it was bought by the Louvre in 1930.

Investigate: An Impressionist Portrait

Look closely at Morisot’s The Cradle. How do you feel when seeing the mother watch her sleeping baby? How did Morisot use elements of art (line, shape, color, etc.) to create a mood in the painting? Would the feeling of the painting change if the woman were not gazing at her child? What if the cradle did not have the drapery?

Look back at James Abbott McNeill Whistler’s portrait of his mother, Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1, on page nine, and compare it with Morisot’s The Cradle. What differences do you immediately recognize? Notice not only the colors, but also the texture of the brushwork, how the figures are posed, and where the figures are located. Which do you prefer and why?
A leading figure in the development of Impressionism, Camille Pissarro had become a friend and mentor to Paul Cézanne in the early 1860s. The two participated in the 1863 Salon des Refusés; later that decade they joined the heated discussions of the Batignolles painters as they mapped out new approaches to painting that would yield the radical results of the 1870s. The two rarely painted together, but were inspired by one another’s works, which were similar in subject matter, the use of patterns of regularly applied brushstrokes and close tonalities, and the frequent simplification of planes to define volume, weight, and space. Eventually, they would both depart from classic Impressionism—Pissarro to the pointillist technique of the younger artist, Georges Seurat, and Cézanne to an even more abstract approach.

Camille Pissarro (French, 1830–1903)
Red Roofs, Village Corner, Winter Effect (Les toits rouges, coin de village, effet d’hiver), 1877
Oil on canvas, 21 1/2 x 25 7/8 in.
Third Impressionist Exhibition, Paris, 1877
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

Paul Cézanne (French, 1839–1906)
The Maincy Bridge (Pont de Maincy), ca. 1879
Oil on canvas, 23 x 28 1/2 in.
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

The gap between Cézanne and the Impressionists continued to widen following his participation in the third Impressionist exhibition in 1873. Though hurt by the scathing reaction of critics, he continued to seek official approval by submitting his work to the annual Salons, where it was regularly rejected. In landscapes such as this one, Cézanne continued to strive for balance with rigidly defined geometric compositions. Short, choppy brushstrokes describe planes and volumes. This work exemplifies the artist’s stylistic dialogue with Pissarro, with whom he often worked at this time.

Investigate and Create: Step into the landscape

Look closely at Pissarro’s Red Roofs, Village Corner, Winter Effect and Cézanne’s The Maincy Bridge. These works reveal the artists’ departure from the Impressionists. In what ways are Pissarro’s and Cézanne’s styles similar to one another? In what ways do their styles differ from their contemporaries?

Take The Maincy Bridge, for example. Look carefully at the brushwork and notice how the marks describe geometric planes and volumes. How do the direction, weight, and length of the strokes change to represent particular aspects of the landscape? Describe differences in the marks that make up the bridge, water, trees, and leaves. Which elements of the landscape appear more “real” and which are more abstract?

Create a narrative. Imagine you could visit the places depicted in Pissarro’s and Cézanne’s paintings. What would you: See? Hear? Feel? Smell? Learn? Wonder?
Manet: Impressionism and Beyond

While Édouard Manet resisted invitations to exhibit with the Impressionists, he played a pivotal role in shaping their ideas and techniques. Early in the 1870s, Manet was in turn influenced by the Impressionists, especially Berthe Morisot, who encouraged him to paint out of doors and to lighten his palette. These innovations appear in the luminous On the Beach (1873), which is included in The Birth of Impressionism, and the modern history painting The Escape of Rochefort, discussed below.

By the early 1880s, when the pathway from tradition had been cleared, Manet, Paul Cézanne, Claude Monet, and others had begun to broaden the range of aesthetic possibilities available to artists. The psychological power of Manet's brushstroke, as seen in his portraits of Nina de Callias, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Georges Clemenceau, anticipates the desire of later Expressionists to use roughly applied paint to signify the inner self. For his part, Cézanne’s interest in geometric volume and form paved the way for Cubism, while Monet’s dazzling orchestrations of intensely colored brushstrokes became increasingly lyrical and abstract. While Impressionism was short lived, its liberating influence on subsequent art was profound.

Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883)
The Escape of Rochefort (L’évasion de Rochefort), ca. 1881
Oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 28 3/4 in.
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski

Henri Rochefort founded the controversial political journal La Lanterne and was actively opposed to the imperial regime of Emperor Napoléon III. This led to his involvement in the Paris Commune, for which he was sent to the French prison colony at the South Pacific island of New Caledonia. Manet depicts Rochefort’s daring escape in a tiny dinghy, rowing with fellow fugitives toward a ship on the horizon. Painted in an Impressionist style, but six years after the actual event, the work transforms the reality of the recent past into modern history.

Investigate and Create: Narrative in Art

In The Escape of Rochefort, Manet depicts the daring escape of Rochefort, a French politician, from a French prison colony in New Caledonia. Manet’s painting is similar to a scene from a movie.

Look closely at the painting and create your own narrative about the work. As you begin your story, consider why Rochefort and the others are escaping from a prison. Why are they taking a boat? Who is in the second boat in the far distance? Do you think they are following Rochefort’s boat? Next, describe how the elements around them may affect their journey. Finally, think about where they are heading. Will they make it to their location safely or will they be caught and taken back to prison?

Present your story to the class and see how many variations of the story you and your classmates come up with.
THE BIRTH of IMPRESSIONISM: MASTERPIECES from the MUSÉE D’ORSAY


Musée d’Orsay

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Adolphe-William Bouguereau (French, 1825–1905)
Birth of Venus (Naissance de Vénus), 1879
Oil on canvas, 118 1/8 X 84 5/8 in.
Salon, Paris, 1879
© RMN (Musée d'Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski
Jules Adolphe Aimé Louis Breton
(French, 1827–1906)
The Harvester (La glaneuse), 1877
Oil on canvas, 90 3/4 X 49 1/4 in.
Salon, Paris, 1877
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Henri Regnault (French, 1843–1871)

Juan Prim, October 8, 1868 (Juan Prim, 8 Octobre 1868), 1869
Oil on canvas, 124 x 101 5/8 in.
Salon, Paris, 1869
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski
Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883)
*Émile Zola*, 1868
Oil on canvas, 57 5/8 x 44 7/8 in.
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Berthe Morisot (French, 1841–1895)
The Cradle (Le berceau), 1872
Oil on canvas, 22 x 18 1/8 in.
First Impressionist Exhibition, Paris, 1874
© RMN (Musée d'Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski
Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883)
*The Escape of Rochefort (L’évasion de Rochefort)*, ca. 1881
Oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 28 3/4 in.
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Gustave Doré (French, 1832–1883)
The Enigma (l’enigme), 1871
Oil on canvas, 51 1/8 X 77 in.
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James Abbott McNeill Whistler (American, 1834–1903)

*Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1: Portrait of the Painter’s Mother (Arrangement en gris et noir, no. 1), 1871.*

Oil on canvas, 56 3/4 x 64 in.

Royal Academy, London, 1872

© RMN (Musée d'Orsay), Jean-Gilles Berizzi
Frédéric Bazille (French, 1841–1870)

Bazille's Studio (L’atelier de Bazille), 1870

Oil on canvas, 38 5/8 x 50 5/8 in.

© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski
Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)
*The Floor Scrapers (Raboteurs de parquet)*, 1875
Oil on canvas, 40 1/8 x 57 5/8 in.
© RMN (Musée d’Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski
Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917)
The Dance Foyer at the Opera on Rue Le Peletier (Le Foyer de la Danse de l'Opéra de la rue Le Peletier), 1872
Oil on canvas, 12 5/8 x 18 1/2 in.
© RMN (Musée d'Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski
Eugène Louis Boudin (French, 1824–1898)
*The Beach at Trouville (La plage de Trouville)*, 1865
Oil on paperboard, 10 3/8 x 16 in.
© RMN (Musée d'Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski
Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926)

Boats: The Regatta at Argenteuil (Les barques: Régaltes à Argenteuil), ca. 1874
Oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 39 3/8 in.

© RMN (Musée d'Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski
Camille Pissarro (French, 1830–1903)

*Red Roofs, Village Corner, Winter Effect (Les toits rouges, coin de village, effet d'hiver)*, 1877

Oil on canvas, 21 1/2 x 25 7/8 in.

Third Impressionist Exhibition, Paris, 1877

© RMN (Musée d'Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski
Paul Cézanne (French, 1839–1906)
The Maincy Bridge (Pont de Maincy), ca. 1879
Oil on canvas, 23 x 28 1/2 in.
© RMN (Musée d'Orsay), Hervé Lewandowski
The clues in this guide will lead you to specific paintings throughout the galleries. To begin your scavenger hunt, first find the gallery indicated on the map to the right; then use the provided clues to locate the designated artwork. Look closely at the artwork and carefully consider the questions that are posed. You never know what you might discover when you take a closer look!

1. Find Jules Breton’s painting of a hardworking young woman in a field of grain. Despite her social status, the young woman is shown standing tall. Even though she has a tired expression on her face, she manages to effortlessly carry the grain.
   - What might this pose suggest about her?
   - Why do you think Breton would choose to convey a “commoner” in such a stance?

2. In this gallery, look for the painting called *The Enigma* (L’énigme).
   - Why do you think the artist chose ranges of gray as the dominant colors in this painting?
   - What feeling is created by the grays in the painting?
   - How might your reaction to the artwork change if the colors were more lively and vivid?
Edgar Degas was a master at capturing figures in motion. Find the artist’s painting that shows dancers in rehearsal and look closely at the variety of positions in which they are posed. Professional ballerinas would pose for Degas in his studio, and the resulting drawings were often used to construct scenes such as this one.

• How many different positions can you identify and describe?
• What do you think it would feel like to hold some of these poses for long periods of time?
• Degas sometimes used photography to capture his models’ poses. Is there any evidence here that a camera was used?

The Spanish General Juan Prim commissioned artist Henri Regnault to paint his portrait. Look closely at Prim’s portrait in this gallery.

• What do you think Regnault intended to communicate about the general’s position in society? Identify at least three visual clues that support your conclusions.

Look closely at Édouard Manet’s portrait of Émile Zola. Notice the works of art and literature that are included in the scene.

• What do these items tell you about Manet and Zola?
• If an artist were to create your portrait, what objects would you like to have included in the painting? Think about your individual style as well as your favorite music, art, sports, etc.

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• What do you think it would feel like to hold some of these poses for long periods of time?
• Degas sometimes used photography to capture his models’ poses. Is there any evidence here that a camera was used?
Eugène Louis Boudin often traveled to popular vacation spots where he would paint beach scenes en plein air (in the open air). Look for Boudin’s painting that shows a large gathering of people on the beach. Notice how he used quick marks to capture the basic forms and outlines of figures.

- How does his technique compare with brushwork you’ve seen in paintings so far?

Boudin was an important influence on Monet and other Impressionists. Travel to the next gallery to see this for yourself.

Claude Monet once wrote “If I become a painter, I owe it all to Boudin.” Find one of Monet’s painting of sailboats on water. Notice the way Monet used rapid brushstrokes to capture the fleeting effects of rolling water and changing times of day.

- How does his brushwork compare to the surface you observed in the painting by Boudin?
- What time of day do you think it was when Monet painted these boats? Why do you think that?
- How might Monet have changed his color palette if he were painting at other times during the day?

In the next gallery, find Paul Cezanne’s The Maincy Bridge (Pont de Maincy). This work reveals Cezanne’s departure from the Impressionists.

- In what ways does his style differ from his contemporaries?
- Look closely at his brushwork and notice how the marks describe geometric planes and volumes. How do the direction, weight, and length of the strokes change to represent particular aspects of the landscape? Describe differences in the marks that make up the bridge, water, trees, and leaves.
- Which elements of the landscape appear more “real” and which are more abstract?
Visit the Martin ArtQuest Gallery to learn more about Impressionism through hands-on artmaking activities.

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