



Farm to Table

Art, Food, and Identity in the Age of Impressionism

and

Tennessee *Harvest* 1870s–1920s

January 31–May 4, 2025

Frist Art Museum

Contents

Curriculum Connections	2
Exhibition Introductions: <i>Farm to Table</i> and <i>Tennessee Harvest</i>	5
On the Farm	7
To the Market	22
Food Still Lifes	24
At the Table	26

Cover: Claude Monet. *La Meule (The Haystack)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 28 7/8 x 36 1/2 in.
Private collection

Curriculum Connections

Tennessee Academic Standards

Fine Arts Standards: Media and Visual Arts

RESPOND: Perceive and analyze artistic work.; Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.; Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

CONNECT: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to artistic endeavors.; Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context.

Science Standards

Kindergarten

K.PS1: Matter and Its Interactions: 1) Plan and conduct an investigation to describe and classify different kinds of materials including wood, plastic, metal, cloth, and paper by their observable properties (color, texture, hardness, and flexibility) and whether they are natural or human-made.

K.LS1: From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes: 1) Use information from observations to identify differences between plants and animals (locomotion, obtainment of food, and take in air/gasses).

K.ESS2: Earth's Systems: 1) Analyze and interpret weather data (precipitation, wind, temperature, cloud cover) to describe weather patterns that occur over time (hourly, daily) using simple graphs, pictorial weather symbols, and tools (thermometer, rain gauge).; 2) Develop and use models to predict weather and identify patterns in spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

19 K.ESS3: Earth and Human Activity: 1) Use a model to represent the relationship between the basic needs (shelter, food, water) of different plants and animals (including humans) and the places they live.

Grade 1

1.PS4: Waves and Their Application in Technologies for Information Transfer: 1) Use a model to describe how light is required to make objects visible. Summarize how illumination could be from an external light source or by an object giving off its own light.; 2) Determine the effect of placing objects made with different materials (transparent, translucent, opaque, and reflective) in the path of a beam of light.

1.LS2: Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics: 1) Conduct an experiment to show how plants depend on air, water, minerals from soil, and light to grow and thrive.; 3) Recognize how plants depend on their surroundings and other living things to meet their needs in the places they live.

Grade 2

2.LS1: From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes: 2) Obtain and communicate information to classify animals (vertebrates-mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, invertebrates-insects) based on their physical characteristics.

2.LS2: Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics: 1) Develop and use models to compare how animals depend on their surroundings and other living things to meet their needs in the places they live.; 2) Predict what happens to animals when the environment changes (temperature, cutting down trees, wildfires, pollution, salinity, drought, land preservation).

2.ESS1: Earth's Place in the Universe: 1) Recognize that some of Earth's natural processes are cyclical, while others have a beginning and an end. Some events happen quickly, while others occur slowly over time.

2.ETS2: Links Among Engineering, Technology, Science, and Society: 2) Predict and explain how human life and the natural world would be different without current technologies.

Grade 3

3.LS4: Biological Change: Unity and Diversity: 1) Explain the cause and effect relationship between a naturally changing environment and an organism's ability to survive.; 3) Explain how changes to an environment's biodiversity influence human resources.

3.ESS2: Earth's Systems: 1) Explain the cycle of water on Earth. 2) Associate major cloud types (cumulus, cumulonimbus, cirrus, stratus, nimbostratus) with weather conditions.; 4) Incorporate weather data to describe major climates (polar, temperate, tropical) in different regions of the world.

Grade 4

4.ESS1: Earth's Place in the Universe: 2) Use a model to explain how the orbit of the Earth and sun cause observable patterns: a. day and night; b. changes in length and direction of shadows over a day.

4.ESS3: Earth and Human Activity: 2) Create an argument, using evidence from research, that human activity (farming, mining, building) can affect the land and ocean in positive and/or negative ways.

Social Studies Standards

Grades K-12: Social Studies Practices

SSP.01: Gather information from a variety of sources, including: printed materials (e.g., literary texts, newspapers, political cartoons, autobiographies, speeches, letters, personal journals), graphic representations (e.g., maps, timelines, charts, artwork), artifacts, and media and technology sources.

SSP.06 Develop a geographic awareness by: Using the geographic perspective to determine relationships, patterns, and diffusion across space at multiple scales (e.g., local, national, global).; Determining the use of diverse types of maps based on their origin, structure, context, and validity; Analyzing locations, conditions, and connections of places and using maps to investigate spatial relationships; Analyzing interaction between humans and the physical environment; Examining how geographic regions and perceptions of regions are fluid across time and space.

Kindergarten

K.02: Compare and contrast family traditions and customs, including: food, clothing, homes, and games.

Grade 1

1.25: Compare ways people lived in the past to how they live today, including: forms of communication, modes of transportation, and types of clothing.

Grade 6

6.04 Identify and explain the importance of the following key characteristics of civilizations: culture, stable food supply, government, technology, religion, writing, and social structure.

Grades 9-12

S.07 Describe components of culture (e.g., nonmaterial culture, norms and values, material culture, subcultures).

S.08 Explain how the various components of culture form a whole culture.

S.10 Compare and contrast various cultures of the world.

S.13 Describe how the social structure of a culture affects social interaction.

S.29 Identify common patterns of social inequality (i.e., privilege, poverty, power, race, ethnicity, class, gender).

W.19 Define imperialism, and analyze reasons for 19th century imperialism, including: competition between empires, cultural justifications, and the search for natural resources and new markets in response to rapid industrialization.

Farm to Table: Art, Food, and Identity in the Age of Impressionism

This exhibition explores intersections of art, gastronomy, and national identity in late nineteenth-century France. With its reputation for refinement, fortitude, and ingenuity, France's stature as the world's culinary capital was a point of national pride. But it also veiled—and at times amplified—fractures in French society arising from the privation of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 and the subsequent period of political instability, colonialist expansion, and increased opposition to class inequities. *Farm to Table* showcases the work of artists such as Rosa Bonheur, Gustave Courbet, Paul Gauguin, Claude Monet, and Camille Pissarro, who captured the nation's unique relationship with food, from production to preparation and consumption.

Spanning the age of Impressionism, the exhibition's nearly sixty works depict luxurious meals and humble fare, bountiful harvests and agrarian crises. Scenes of markets and gardens, farmers, chefs, and restaurants attest to evolving norms of gender and class and the tenuous relationship between Paris and the provinces. Throughout the exhibition, visitors will see how food's impact on individuals, families, and communities informed the changing social identities of a people who had long been told that what they ate—and how they ate it—defined who they were.

Farm to Table is presented in conjunction with Tennessee Harvest: 1870s-1920s

This exhibition reveals connections between artworks featured in *Farm to Table* and paintings made in Tennessee between the 1870s and 1920s. In this period, there were few art schools or museums in Tennessee. Artists frequently traveled abroad to study at professional academies and see examples of old master and academic art as well as newer trends such as Impressionism. Many returned home to establish studios, teach classes, and form artist leagues, becoming leading cultural figures in their communities.

Focusing on rural experiences and food, works in this exhibition reflect the ideology of Agrarianism, which held that, as literary critic M. Thomas Inge wrote, "the life of the farmer is harmonious, orderly, and whole, and it counteracts the tendencies toward abstraction, fragmentation, and alienation that have come with modern urban experience." Inge was writing about a 1920s group of Vanderbilt University faculty called the Fugitives, later renamed the Agrarians. These men argued that the South's agricultural history could serve as a model for resisting the industrialization and urbanization occurring throughout the region at the time, which they considered dehumanizing. However, they did not acknowledge the dehumanizing impact of slavery and sharecropping in sustaining the region's agrarian economy.

While the works in this exhibition largely predate the formation of the Nashville Fugitives, they align with the group's concern that modernity was alienating people from the natural world. In making these artworks, artists like Lloyd Branson, George W. Chambers, and Willie Betty Newman emulated nineteenth-century European artists who depicted peasants with admiration for their strength, perseverance, and rootedness in the soil. In Europe and the United States, the ideology of Agrarianism contained a measure of nostalgia for times past, remembered or imagined. But for the artists in both exhibitions, the focus on farm labor is more than a sentimental expression. It celebrates a timeless foundation of human culture, fulfilling needs both physical and spiritual.

The paintings also warrant study for subjects they omit—Black farmers, markets, and cooks. To present a more complete view, the exhibition includes photographs showing the broader realities of food production across the state.

On the Farm

Works in this section portray both the realities and idealization of farming and husbandry, from the fields of rural France and the kitchen gardens of the country's urban centers to the lands of France's colonial empire. Many of these works draw attention to the distinctive qualities of the French *terroir*—the soil, which was believed to lend an intrinsic and ineffable “Frenchness” to the nation's gastronomy. Auguste Renoir's scene of banana trees in the French colony of Algeria, however, poses another question: If France's colonies were thought of as extensions of the nation, what place do the products of their soil have within French cuisine?



Rosa Bonheur. *Landscape with Cattle*, late 19th century. Oil on canvas; 33 1/4 x 48 1/4 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Dr. Edward Krumbhaar and Hermann Krumbhaar, 1921

Rolling green hills nourish the cows in Rosa Bonheur's *Landscape with Cattle*, which was likely executed around the painter's home near the forest of Fontainebleau southeast of Paris. Here, Bonheur offers a type of animal portraiture that imbues the cows in the foreground with a sense of character. The standing cow to the right, her udders swollen, looks ready to provide the raw materials that are foundational to France's rich dairy culture.

Discussion Questions

- What feelings does this scene evoke?
- What do the cows' movement or posture tell you about their environment or mood?
- Do you think these cows have a good quality of life? What details in the painting provide clues about their environment and the surrounding ecosystem?

Resources

- University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, *Cloud Types and Image Gallery*: <https://scied.ucar.edu/learning-zone/clouds/cloud-types>
- University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, *The Art of Clouds' Classroom Activities*: <https://scied.ucar.edu/activity/art-clouds>
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *NWS Cloud Chart*: <https://www.noaa.gov/jetstream/clouds/nws-cloud-chart>
- NASA Science, Space Place, *Make a Cloud Mobile*: <https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/cloud-mobile/en/>

Activity: Exploring Clouds Through Art

1. Review Different Types of Clouds and Share Images of these Cloud Types

- **Cumulus Clouds:** Low-lying, fluffy clouds that look like cotton balls with light gray bottoms. They usually indicate fair weather.
- **Cumulonimbus Clouds:** Puffy clouds with very dark bases. They often forecast heavy precipitation, thunderstorms, or extreme weather like tornadoes and hurricanes.
- **Stratus Clouds:** White, low-lying, flat clouds that stretch horizontally. They can also appear as fog and indicate overcast skies or steady, light rain.
- **Nimbostratus Clouds:** Dark gray, thick clouds that block out the sun. They often produce long-lasting precipitation.
- **Cirrus Clouds:** High in the sky, thin, and feathery. These clouds generally indicate fair weather or an incoming warm front.

2. Observe Rosa Bonheur's *Landscape with Cattle*

Show an image of this artwork and ask students to identify the types of clouds they see in the painting.

3. Analyze the Scene

Once students identify the cloud type, discuss:

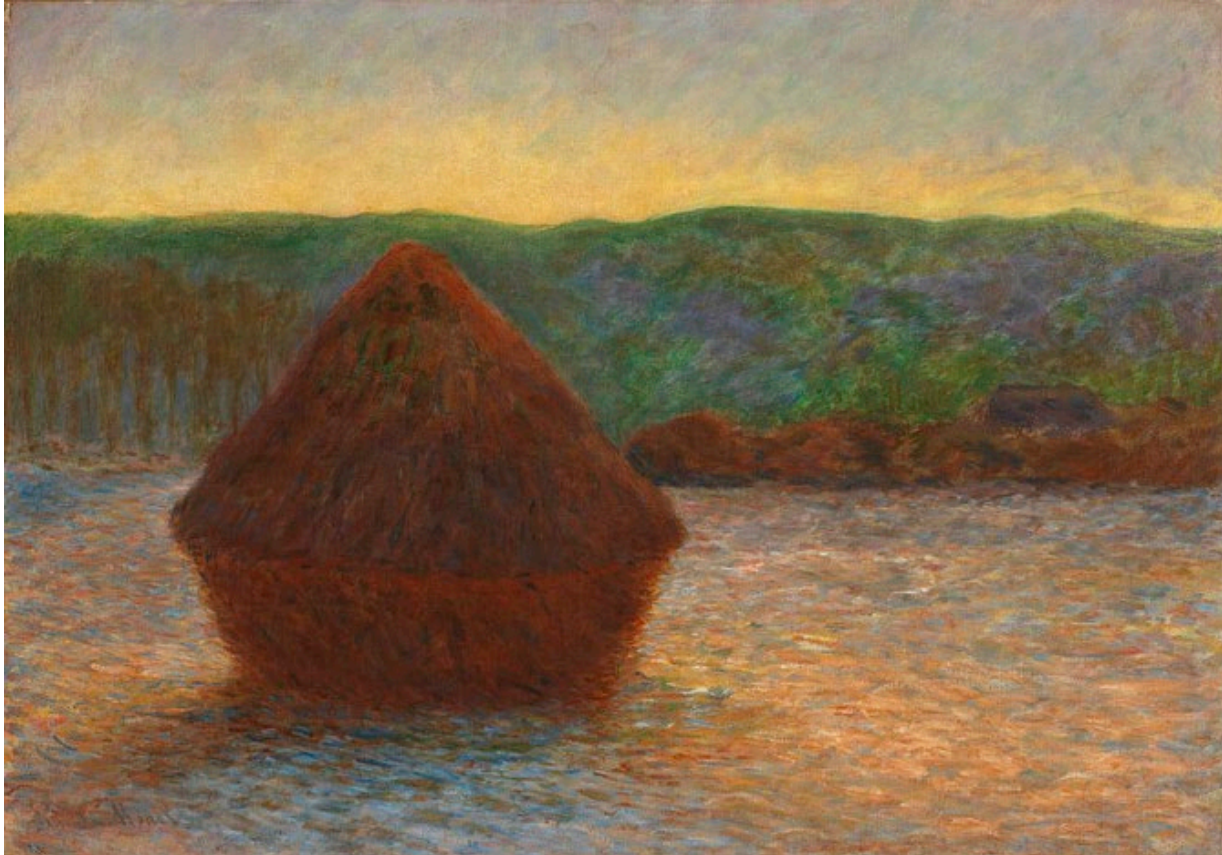
- How does the weather in this scene affect the story or mood of the painting?
- How does the painting make you feel?
- How might the story or mood change if other types of clouds were featured?

4. Create Farm Scenes Inspired by Clouds

Have each student draw from a jar to receive a specific cloud type. Students can then draw or paint a farm scene featuring their assigned cloud type.

5. Share and Reflect

Pair students to share their artwork and describe the scene. Encourage them to discuss how the clouds and weather conditions influence the story and mood of their creations.



Claude Monet. *La Meule (The Haystack)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 28 7/8 x 36 1/2 in. Private collection

In the early 1890s, Claude Monet executed a series of more than twenty paintings of stacks of wheat, depicting these seemingly architectural forms at various times of day and under different weather conditions. Here, a single haystack rises high in an otherwise unpopulated landscape, its form echoing the mountains in the distance. These stacks were the first subject of Monet's series paintings, which would later include poplars and Rouen Cathedral—both equally related to French fortitude and longevity. Monet's selection of the stacks of wheat emphasizes the fundamental importance of food and farming to French identity.

Discussion Questions

- What do you notice about the shadows in Claude Monet's haystack painting? Based on what you know about the Earth's rotation and how sunlight moves across the sky, how might this scene change depending on the time of day?
- The haystack is depicted surrounded by mountains, linking the two forms visually. What might Monet be trying to convey by making this comparison? How does this parallel add to your interpretation of the painting?
- As mentioned above, Monet often painted series on the same subject. Why do you think Monet chose to depict a single subject in so many different ways? What do you think he was trying to communicate about the passage of time, perspective, or nature's cycles?

Resources

- Art Institute of Chicago, *Monet's Haystacks Reconsidered* by Richard R. Brettell:
https://publications.artic.edu/sites/default/files/file_assets/AIC1984_Museum_Studies_Brettell_Monets_Haystacks_Reconsidered.pdf

Activity: Monet's Haystacks

This activity is inspired by the Frist Art Museum's Art Trunk Lesson Plan. For additional ideas and exhibition resources, visit FristArtMuseum.org/Resources.

Materials:

- Flashlight
 - Colored transparencies
 - Thick paper for watercolor, tempera, or colored pencils
 - Tempera paint
 - Watercolor paint
 - Colored pencils
 - Variety of materials for haystack model:
 - Wikistix
 - Raffia
 - Colored paper
 - Twine
 - Tissue paper
 - Cardboard base
 - Backdrop
 - Tools:
 - Scissors
 - Glue sticks and/or tape
 - Pencils
 - Paint brushes
1. Discuss as a group:
- Have you ever been to a farm? What did you see there?
 - What time of day and season do you think is shown in Claude Monet's *The Haystack*? What do you see that makes you think that?
 - What do you notice about the color of the haystack in Monet's *The Haystack*?
 - Monet created about thirty paintings of haystacks at different times of day and in different seasons. Why do you think he did this?

Claude Monet said, "For me a landscape hardly exists at all as a landscape, because its appearance is constantly changing; but it lives by virtue of its surroundings, the air and the light which vary continually."

Monet observed real haystacks in a field near his home in Giverny, France. We will create a model of a haystack at a particular time of day and create impressionist paintings of our scene.

2. Ask students: How would you construct a haystack scene? What season and time of day do you want to represent? What colors would you use? Where would the light source be located?

3. Discuss how the sun seems to move through the sky throughout the day. Using the flashlight, explore shadows by aiming a light source at an object from different directions.

4. Talk about the way artists use different warm or cool colors to create atmosphere and set the mood of a painting. Repeat the experiment in step 3 with colored transparency over the flashlight.

5. Using the material of your choice, construct a haystack on a cardboard base reflecting the atmospheric colors of a chosen time of day. Determine your light source. Is your scene set in the evening or morning? Where is the sun? Where will your shadows be?

Modification: Building the haystack model and environment can be done individually or in small groups.

6. Using collage, create a background scene for your haystack model on a piece of paper. Affix the background scene to the cardboard base of your haystack model.

7. After beginning outdoors, Monet reworked each painting in his studio to create the color harmonies that unify each canvas.

Observing your haystack model, create a landscape painting based on your scene. Use watercolors, tempera, or colored pencils to complete your landscape. Begin by outlining your big shapes with a pencil, considering the haystack in relation to other elements of your scene. While painting, consider how you're creating atmosphere with shadows and colors.



Robert Lindsay Mason. *Tennessee Harvest*, 1910–30. Oil paint on board; 11 x 15 in. Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

By the end of the nineteenth century, Tennessee artists were increasingly embracing European styles ranging from Academic Realism to Impressionism. In Robert Lindsay Mason's *Tennessee Harvest*, we see Claude Monet's iconic haystacks transplanted to an East Tennessee field. As a leading member of Knoxville's growing art community, Mason had works appear in major East Tennessee exhibitions in the early twentieth century. He advocated through writing and art for a future of the region that was rooted in appreciation for its exceptional natural beauty and preservation of its cultural traditions in the face of rapid urbanization and industrialization. Like other artists of the time, he depicted the land and its people in tributes to a fading way of life.

Activity: Colorful Expressions: Mood and Story in Landscapes

1. Compare and Contrast

Look closely at *Tennessee Harvest* by Robert Lindsay Mason and *La Meule (The Haystack)* by Claude Monet. What do these paintings have in common? How are they different? Think about their shapes, textures, colors. What feelings or mood do you associate with each painting?

2. Warm and Cool Colors

Robert Lindsay Mason and Claude Monet used different types of colors to depict the haystacks and the light and sky that surround them. Artists use color to show time of day, weather, or seasons, which influences the mood of their artworks and tells a story!

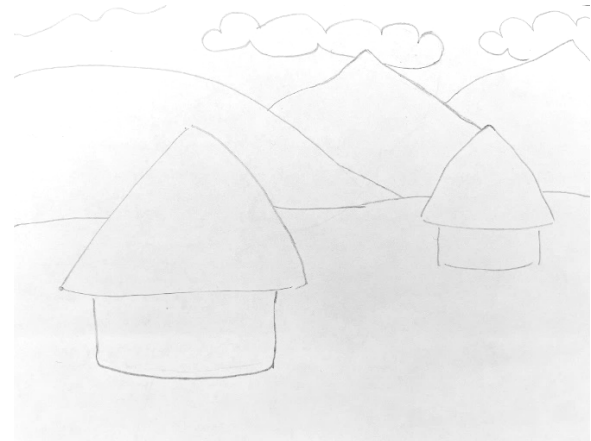
Warm colors like red, yellow, and orange can remind us of the sun and of a feeling of warmth and happiness. Cool colors like blue, green, and purple might remind us of a cool breeze or inspire feelings of calm, reflectiveness, or even sadness.

3. Find Your Inspiration

After discussing the haystack paintings, go outside and find your own landscape to inspire you! Maybe it's a tree, flower, field, or something else that catches your eye. If you don't have easy access to an outdoor space, you can also use a work of art as your inspiration.

4. Sketch Your Landscape

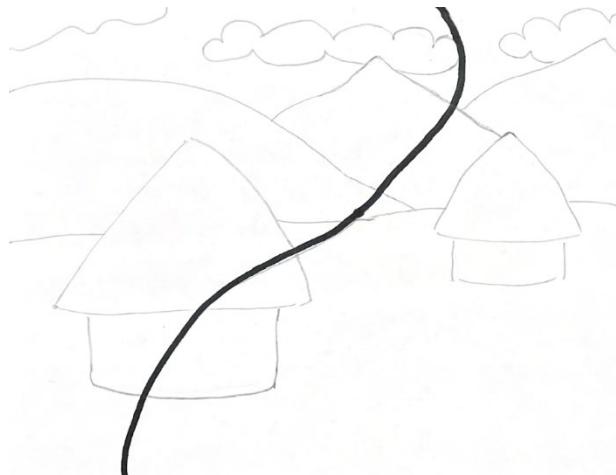
Using a pencil and paper, sketch the scene you chose. Focus on shapes and then add a few details. Don't worry about it being perfect or capturing every detail.



5. Add a Twist with Color

After sketching a scene, draw a line all the way across your landscape with pencil and then outline it with a black marker.

On one side of the line, use mostly cool colors (blues, greens, and purples) to bring your scene to life. On the other side, use mostly warm colors (yellows, oranges, and reds). When you're done, you can add more definition to all your lines with a black marker.



7. Reflect on Your Artwork

Look at both sides of your colorful landscape. Use a piece of paper or your hand to cover up each half at a time. How does the mood change when you look at the warm side compared to the cool side? What stories do your colors tell?

Resources

Frist Art Museum, Lessons on Warm vs. Cool Colors:

- Color Temperature: fristartmuseum.org/resource/color-temperature/
- Mood in Art: fristartmuseum.org/resource/mood-in-art/



Julien Dupré. *Haying Scene*, 1884. Oil on canvas; 48 5/8 x 59 1/2 in. Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Justina G. Catlin in memory of her husband, Daniel Catlin

Dupré's painting focuses on a woman absorbed in the demanding task of turning hay, made from grasses to which the stems of crops like oats, barley, and wheat would have been added. In this work, the artist shows that the arduous labor of haying was performed by men and women alike. Like the other workers in the scene, this woman is an essential link in the interaction of humanity, nature, and animals that facilitate the haying process. After the job was completed, the dry hay would have been stacked and stored or used as bedding and in feed for livestock, which supplied meat, butter, and milk—staples in most French households.

Discussion Questions

- In both *Haying Scene* by Julien Dupré and *In the Tennessee Mountains* by George W. Chambers, we see farm workers using hand tools. As technology advances and farming becomes more mechanized, how do you think this changes the farming industry? How might it affect the environment?
- Personally, how might it feel different to work on the land using simple tools compared to using complex machines?
- What do you think this farm worker's day might be like based on this image? What clues in the artwork help you imagine this person's story?

- What might this artwork say about women's roles in farming labor in France in the nineteenth century? How does this compare to what people in the past or today might assume or believe about women's skills and contributions?
- Compare and contrast Julien Dupré's *Haying Scene* with George W. Chambers' *In the Tennessee Mountains*, also featured in this educator guide.



George W. Chambers. *In the Tennessee Mountains*, 1887. Oil on canvas; 47 x 63 x 2 in. Courtesy of Tennessee State Museum

George W. Chambers studied with Barbizon School artist Julien Dupré at the Académie Julian, where he became enamored with his mentor's depictions of peasants and agriculture such as Dupré's *Haying Scene*, also highlighted in this educator guide. This connection was not lost on a New York critic who praised the subject of *In the Tennessee Mountains* as a "characteristically American type" in "refreshing" contrast to the ubiquitous French peasant, which, he believed, "unless painted by a master, [was] getting to be a nuisance." Chambers arrived in Nashville around 1886 to teach and paint at the Watkins Institute, today a part of Belmont University. In this work, likely completed near Monteagle, Chambers depicts a woman with her cultivated cabbages, her posture tired but proud. Homespun log structures, a glowing sunset, and the woman's advanced age create an image of nostalgia for Tennessee's agricultural heritage and cultural traditions, which were thought to be fading from the landscape and memory.

Discussion Questions

- What time of day do you think it is in this scene? How do the glowing sky and the yellow tones shape the mood in the painting and contribute to a story?

- How might this farmer’s life compare to the life of someone living in Tennessee today? How is it similar or different from the life of a modern-day farmer? What details in the painting support your ideas?
- In 1885, when George Chambers painted *In the Tennessee Mountains*, rural farming traditions in Tennessee were changing. What traditions or practices have been passed down to you from earlier generations? How have these traditions evolved over time?

Resources

- Tennessee Department of Agriculture, *Educational Resources*:
<https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/topic/educational.html>
- Tennessee Virtual Archive, *19th Century Agricultural Resources* (a selection of items depicting the lives of farmers and the development of agriculture in Tennessee in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries):
<https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/customizations/global/pages/collections/agriculture/agriculture.html>

Activity: Exploring Cultural Heritage Through Art

1. Observe

As a group, discuss George W. Chambers’ *In the Tennessee Mountains*. Ask the group: What’s going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?

2. Reflect on Values

Ask the students: What values does the artist seem to express about Tennessee agricultural traditions? Give students a few minutes to quietly observe and jot down a few thoughts before inviting them to share.

After students have shared, feel free to share other values you may notice that have yet to be discussed, such as: “I think the artist may have wanted to show the legacy of a lifetime of hard work, the beauty of a simple life, the importance of a relationship with nature, the pride one feels growing food, etc.”

3. Connect to Personal Experiences

Explain that cultural practices often reflect a community’s values, as can be seen in the scene Chambers depicts. Tell students they’ll be starting a lesson where they’ll think about the influence of cultural traditions in their own lives or communities.

4. Interview an Adult

Instruct students on how to conduct an interview with an adult in their life (e.g., a parent, grandparent, neighbor, or family friend).

Provide interview questions, such as:

- Can you describe some cultural practices or traditions that are important to you?
- Why do you appreciate these traditions?
- What values or lessons do you think they reflect?
- How have these traditions influenced your life or your community?

5. Create Art Inspired by Cultural Heritage

Based on their interview, students will create a work of art that illustrates the cultural practice and its significance and value to their interviewee.

Encourage them to think creatively about how to visually communicate values, emotions, and stories (e.g., through colors, symbols, or characters).

6. Share and Discuss

After students create their artworks, host a gallery walk where students can discuss the stories behind their art.



Camille Pissarro. *The Gardener—Old Peasant with Cabbage*, 1883–95. Oil on canvas; 32 x 25 1/2 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, 1994.59.6

In *The Gardener*, an older man clutches a cabbage, either taken from the wall of cabbages behind him or about to be added to the stacked vegetables. Our attention is focused both on the man's silent action and the picture's roughly painted surface, creating a contrast between the timelessness of his work and the modernity of the paint handling. This was a deeply personal painting for Pissarro, who was once labeled by critics as a specialist of cabbage paintings. His repeated depictions of the humble vegetable, a common fixture in the diets of the poor, evoke his empathy for the working class.

Discussion Questions

- How does the subject's demeanor, posture, or connection to the cabbage reflect Camille Pissarro's empathy for working-class people and farmers?

- How does the composition and the visual simplicity of the scene—one man holding a cabbage and surrounded by more cabbages—affect the emotional tone of the painting?
- What do you notice about the brushstrokes in this painting? How does this style of painting contribute to the sense of movement, energy, and meaning in the work?

To the Market

The process of harvesting, transporting, and selling food from farms and the sea to buyers at markets comprises the economic heart of culinary exchange. Markets brought individuals from across social, economic, geographic, and culinary strata together amid piles of fruits and vegetables, fish, dairy, and meat. For many artists, the market offered an opportunity to show everyday experience in varied vignettes. These could be romanticized genre scenes but could also probe anxieties around class norms and fears about health and hygiene. While markets were found across the country, Les Halles—Paris’s central markets—were the most significant in the French consciousness. Constructed in the 1860s in a central Paris neighborhood long associated with vice, Les Halles were the most overt symbol of the capital’s position as the center of the French culinary universe. With its regular patterns of vertical supports and arched portals, Les Halles’ interior space provided a sense of order amid the teeming energy at the vendor tables, reinforcing the markets’ role as a stabilizing force in the culinary and social ecosystem.



Victor Gabriel Gilbert. *Le Carreau des Halles*, 1880. Oil on panel; 21 1/8 x 29 in. Musée d'art moderne André Malraux, Le Havre

In this scene, Victor Gabriel Gilbert depicts the smalltime vegetable sellers who set up stands on the Carreau, the walkways beside the market pavilions. The painting overflows with human interaction and vegetal splendor. A girl sells lemons; two dogs play; and women and men chat amid the lettuces, radishes, carrots, and leeks that burst from the tables. In the foreground, a large female farmer in a patched dress centers the composition with a timeless

stoicism. Yet Gilbert also highlighted the activity of the modern city, suggesting the Carreau as a site of intersection between the urban and rural.

Discussion Questions

- Markets are gathering places. Who are all the different people in this scene? What details does Victor Gabriel Gilbert include to identify who is working versus who is shopping?
- One goal of Impressionist painters was to paint what is real and directly observed rather than create idealized works. What is realistic about this painting? What imperfections, or realities, does the scene include?

Activity: Observe and Imagine—A Market Adventure

1. Dive into the Scene

Take a few minutes to really soak it all in! Look closely at the scene in front of you. Who's there? What are they doing? Notice the hustle and bustle of the market—the people, the action, the energy. Take your time to zoom in on a few figures. What grabs your attention?

2. Pick Your Person

Choose one person in the scene to focus on. Ask yourself:

- What do their facial expression and body language tell you about them?
- What's their role in this scene and what actions are they taking?
- Notice their outfit. Does it look practical and job-related, stylish, or a little of both?
- What time of day is it? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Look beyond the market. What's happening in the setting around them?
- Imagine how their five senses are activated. What are they seeing? What smells fill the air? What sounds might they hear? What tastes or textures could they experience at the market?

3. Step Into Their Shoes

Now it's time to transform into your chosen character! Imagine you've just come home from this market scene. What kind of day did you have? Write a diary entry as if you are this person:

- What was it like getting ready for the market?
- What adventures (or misadventures!) happened while you were there?
- What's next for you after this busy day?

Food Still Lifes

Still lifes of food often contain hidden social messages. Gustave Courbet's simple 1872 depiction of fruit, for example, seems to be politically neutral. But painted around the time he was jailed for activities on behalf of the Paris Commune—a radical movement that fought social and governmental corruption—the work's rendering of fruit was associated with the humble qualities of the working class. In other paintings, cuts of meat act as stand-ins for the body, serving as allusions to both revolutionary violence and medical research. Plates of luxurious pastries reflected not only the impact of the colonial sugar trade but also the ingenuity of French food scientists and the aesthetics of presentation.



Victoria Dubourg Fantin-Latour. *Still Life with Brioche*, ca. 1890. Oil on canvas; 13 1/8 x 17 in. Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis; Museum purchase with funds provided by the estate of Cecil Williams Marshall, and by transfer, Mr. and Mrs. Morrie A. Moss, 2019.6

As seen in the still life paintings in both *Farm to Table* and *Tennessee Harvest*, food can represent what a community values and believes and what life is like in its part of the world. In *Still Life with Brioche*, Victoria Dubourg showcases her skill in capturing different textures. Victoria Dubourg centers a brioche on an extraordinary tablescape set against a simple background. The pastry's duality—it is at once delicate and hardy—takes center stage. Curved and browned sections of crust are pierced by softer, lighter passages as Dubourg conveys

the treat's crisp shell as well as its rich and flaky, buttery core. Surrounded by decorative objects and other products of France's *terroir* (soil), the brioche appears as a centerpiece that emphasizes the splendor of the French culinary tradition.

Discussion Questions:

- How does Victoria Dubourg's attention to details and centering of the brioche reflect the way food, and pastry specifically, is valued in French culture?
- How does *Still Life with Brioche* elevate the ordinary act of eating to something that can be appreciated as art? How might still life paintings shift the way we think about the food on our own tables?
- Still life paintings can serve as historical records, reflecting agricultural practices, culinary traditions, wealth and status, and values. What culinary traditions does Victoria Dubourg highlight in *Still Life with Brioche*? What elements of the tablescape suggest wealth and status? What values are conveyed?

Activity: Creating a Community Tablescape

1. Preparation

Ask each student to bring in or create a 3D sculpture of a food item, tableware, or other dinner table-related object that represents their local community or a cultural tradition that is significant to them.

2. Building the Tablescape

Once all sculptures are completed, have students draw numbers to determine the order in which they will add their items to create a still life tablescape. Before they place the items, remind them they are creating a living still life together. Encourage them to be thoughtful about artful composition—how placing one object near another may impact the meaning of the overall still life.

3. Reflection

After the table is set, facilitate a discussion by asking students what symbolic associations they have with the objects others contributed. Encourage students to share the meaning of their chosen object and explain how it represents something about their community and its' values.

Discuss how the items work together to create a collective story, much like a still life painting can tell a story about society and history.

At the Table

Questions of family, community, citizenship, and spectacle came to the fore as artists in the age of Impressionism focused on the dining experience. They took on subjects ranging from dates at fashionable Parisian restaurants to the diverse practices of quiet family meals across the empire, to the meager fare of the poor and those impacted by wartime food shortages. In doing so, they examined not only the culture of consumption across the economic spectrum, but also customs, manners, and mores associated with dining together, both in public and private settings.



James Tissot. *The Artists' Wives*, 1885. Oil on canvas; 57 1/2 x 40 in. Chrysler Museum of Art, Gift of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr., and The Grandy Fund, Landmark Communications Fund, and "An Affair to Remember" 1982

James Tissot captured the ritual gathering of artists and their wives to break bread the day before the opening of the annual Paris Salon, a major art exhibition. Set on the terrace of Ledoyen, a restaurant that remains a Parisian institution, Tissot's bustling scene includes portraits of well-known artists like the sculptor Auguste Rodin, whose bearded, bespectacled face appears near the center. The focus is on conviviality and merriment in a state-sponsored banquet on the eve of the year's most important exhibition.

Discussion Questions

- The annual Paris Salon was an exhibition that made artists famous. What details does the artist include to show the prestige of this exclusive club of artists and their wives?
- Artists sometimes create art that depicts what a nation or culture considers important. What values or aspects of French identity appear in James Tissot's *The Artists' Wives*? Which works in this exhibition depict similar values or aspects of French identity? Are there artworks that depict different values in French culture?
- The figure in the red feathered hat at the center appears to look directly at the viewer. Imagine you're a guest approaching this luncheon. How might you feel stepping into this gathering?

Resources

Metropolitan Museum of Art, *The Salon and the Royal Academy in the Nineteenth Century*:
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/sara/hd_sara.htm



Eugène Alexis Girardet. *Le Repas du Soir*, ca. 1885–90. Oil on wood; 12 3/4 x 16 in. Galerie Ary Jan

In this scene, Girardet depicts two older men reaching into a communal dish while a boy drinks from a large bowl between them. The painting emphasizes North African architecture and the subjects' practice of eating with their hands while seated on the ground, imagery that may have reinforced French perceptions of Algerian culture as being premodern, a rationale that connects to French imperialism in the region. This work of art provides another example of the many unique ways people gather around food depending on the types of foods they can grow in their region and the varying cultural culinary traditions.

Discussion Questions

- This painting was created by a French artist and depicts Algerian people. It was painted in a time after France's conquest of Algeria. How does knowing historical context shape your interpretation of this artwork?
- Sharing a meal is a universal way for people to connect. Are there ways this scene reminds you of, or differs from, how you gather with family or friends to eat?
- What details in this work of art spark your curiosity, and why?
- How does Eugène Alexis Girardet use light in this artwork to guide your attention or create a specific mood?

Resources

- Britannica Kids, *Introduction to Algeria*:
<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Algeria/272806>
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, *Middle East and North Africa: Algeria*:
<https://guides.library.illinois.edu/c.php?g=348170&p=2346558>
- University of Tennessee Knoxville, *African History: Algeria*:
<https://libguides.utk.edu/c.php?g=212843&p=1951244>
- National Humanities Center, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920* by David Prochaska: <https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/fellows-book/making-algeria-french-colonialism-in-bone-1870-1920/>

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