

# TEACHER'S GUIDE



# THE IMPRESSIONISTS

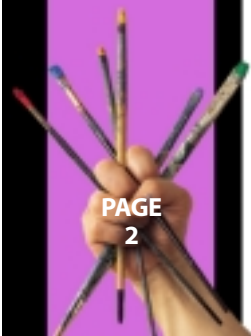
**Impressionism** emerged in late nineteenth-century France as a reaction to the constraints of traditional, or Academic, art. Impressionist painters like Claude Monet, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, Edgar Degas, and Berthe Morisot shared a commitment to depicting modern life and developed an array of artistic techniques that launched what was not just a new style of painting but a revolution in the world of art. The four-hour BIOGRAPHY® Special, *The Impressionists*, explores the lives and masterpieces of these five individuals who forever changed the way the world would view art.

**NOTE TO EDUCATORS:** *The Impressionists* is appropriate for students in high school and beyond. There is some nudity and vulgar language. Teachers are advised to preview the program before showing it in class.

**Curriculum Links:** *The Impressionists* is suitable for use in art, art history, and European history classes.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to place Impressionism in the context of the 19th-century art world and explain how the Impressionists' artwork differed from that which preceded it. Students also will be able to describe how the Impressionists' commitment to a new artistic style affected the painters' personal and professional lives.

**Standards:** *National Standards for Arts Education, Visual Arts*, as developed by the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations: Standards, 1, 3, 4, and 5, Level IV.



## CRITICAL VIEWING QUESTIONS: HOUR 1

CLAUDE MONET



- Describe or list some of the elements that characterize “history paintings.” In what ways did the Impressionists embrace or reject these elements?
- What did it mean, in terms of artistic style and subject matter, when the Impressionists said that they wanted to “catch a fleeting moment in time” in their work?
- What was the function of the Salon? How did it help to define popular or “accepted” art of the day?
- How did Claude Monet first gain recognition as an artist? Who or what encouraged him to branch out and try a different approach to his artwork?
- Why was Monet constantly plagued by financial difficulties? What kind of financial support did his father provide, and under what conditions did he offer his son this support?
- How did Renoir’s background differ from many other contemporary artists, including some of Renoir’s fellow Impressionist painters?
- What made Edouard Manet’s *Déjeuner sur l’Herbe* so controversial at the time that it was painted in the early 1860s?
- Describe Monet’s painting, *Woman in a Green Dress*, which was accepted by the Salon jury in 1866. What elements made it traditional enough to be shown at the Salon? What was new or radical about this painting?
- Explain some of the criticisms that master painter Charles Gleyre had of the paintings of Monet, Renoir, and others in their group. How did their work contradict Gleyre’s expectations?
- Why did Degas believe that it was so important to copy the works of master painters? What effect do you think his reverence for these masterworks had on Degas’ own painting?

## CRITICAL VIEWING QUESTIONS: HOUR 2

BERTHE MORISOT



- How was Monet affected, personally and financially, by his rejection of the standards of Academic art? What did he do to get by?
- What physical problems did Degas begin to experience in his mid-thirties? How did these problems affect his painting?
- Why was Berthe Morisot’s painting teacher so apprehensive about her artistic talents? What were some of the obstacles that she and her sister, Edmé, faced as painters?
- When Morisot visited her sister in 1869, her art changed dramatically. What techniques did she practice and what new elements did she incorporate into her painting?
- What techniques did Monet and Renoir employ in their painting trip to La Grenouillère to capture the impression of a fleeting moment in their work?
- Morisot said of her picture, *Portrait of the Artist’s Mother and Sister*, that she would “rather be at the bottom of a river than have that picture shown” at the Salon. Why was she so angry about and opposed to having this picture shown at the Salon?
- Why did Morisot have such difficulty finding out what was going on in the art world? How did she overcome these barriers?
- Which Impressionist artist did the Salon reject in 1870? Why? How did he respond to this setback?
- What developments in France in 1870 put Impressionism on hold? How did Degas, Renoir, Monet, and Pissarro respond?
- Why was Renoir almost killed by a firing squad in 1871? What does this event say about the extent of artistic freedom during this period of history?

## CRITICAL VIEWING QUESTIONS: HOUR 3

EDGAR DEGAS



1. What move did the Impressionists undertake in 1873 to create an artistic alternative to the Salon? Which artist declined their invitation to join this movement? Why?
2. The term “Impressionism” began to be applied to the paintings of this group of artists following their art exhibit in 1874. Where did this term originate?
3. How did the Impressionists’ 1874 art exhibit differ from the traditional Salon shows? How did critics react?
4. Following the Impressionists’ 1874 exhibition, Manet became more supportive of their work. What accounted for his change in attitude?
5. After she married, what steps did Morisot take to conceal her work as an artist? Why did she do this?
6. What happened in 1878 to dramatically change Degas’ financial status? How did this event change his life as a painter? What subjects did he focus on after this life change?
7. Why did Degas insist upon an “Anti-Salon” rule for the Impressionist exhibitions? What did he mean by “Anti-Salon”?
8. How did Renoir, in contrast to his other Impressionist contemporaries, manage to surmount his financial difficulties?
9. What role did the art dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, play in trying to hold the Impressionist artists together as a group?
10. Why did the Impressionists ultimately stop exhibiting together?

## CRITICAL VIEWING QUESTIONS: HOUR 4

CAMILLE PISSARRO

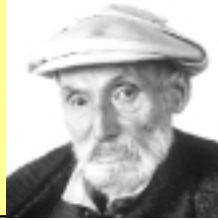


1. What role did art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel play in spreading Impressionist art to the United States? What was the American public’s response?
2. Why did Renoir and Pissarro begin moving away from Impressionist art in the mid-1880s?
3. Which artist had a major impact on Pissarro’s later works? What was this artist’s painting technique called? Was Pissarro initially successful in selling his works painted in this new style?
4. What occurrence prompted Renoir to shift his painting style back to Impressionism? Did he have more or less success selling his work after this switch?
5. Pissarro also switched back to Impressionism after trying other styles. How had his art changed as a result of his experimentation with other techniques?
6. What accounted, at least in part, for the Impressionists’ long-awaited financial success in the 1890s? Why did the public seem more willing to accept their art at this point?
7. What intrigued Monet about painting a series of canvases on the same subject? What was he trying to accomplish? Was he financially successful with these series?
8. What national event in the 1890s clouded Degas’ relationship with his fellow painter Pissarro? In what other ways was Pissarro’s life affected by this same event?
9. Later in life, Degas’ work became increasingly abstract. What about Degas’ health helped account for this shift?
10. What prompted Monet to embark on his huge canvases called the *Grandes Décorations*? What arrangement did Monet make with the French government for these paintings? Where were they hung after Monet’s death? How did the public respond to the paintings?



## EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

AUGUSTE RENOIR



### VISUAL ARTS

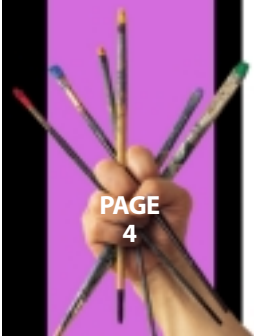
1. Choose an object and observe it under a variety of lights (sunlight, candlelight, flashlight, electric light) in order to find out how different kinds of lights affect the colors and shadows of objects. Create a series of sketches or other visual representations, which record what happens to the colors, shadows, and shapes of the object in these different lights.
2. Look carefully at an Impressionist painting of your choice. Examine the colors, brushstrokes, composition, and subject. Sketch and paint the scene that could have come before or after the one you see. How would the elements of the painting change?
3. Create your own Impressionist work that depicts a fleeting moment in contemporary life. Choose an ordinary, everyday scene, just as the Impressionists did. Write a brief explanation of why your work is Impressionist and which artists and paintings influenced you.

### LANGUAGE ARTS

1. Write a letter, diary entry, or newspaper article refuting the critics' responses to the 1874 Impressionist exhibition, from the perspective of one of the artists who exhibited his or her work. Make sure to research and study what the critics, including Louis Leroy, had to say about the exhibition.
2. Create an essay, poem, song, or performance piece using verbal equivalents to express the color, form, composition, and subject of an Impressionist painting of your choice.
3. Read a French novel written in the late 19th or early 20th century. You might consider a novel written by Emile Zola, Colette, Marcel Proust, or a book of poems by Charles Baudelaire. Choose ten Impressionist paintings that you would include in a reprinting of the novel. How do these paintings relate to the style of and themes in the novel you read?

### HISTORY

1. With a partner, research an aspect of 19th-century Parisian society that interests you. You might research a specific aspect of fashion, architecture, leisure, politics, class, literature, café life, work, or another appropriate topic. Choose a collection of Impressionist paintings to include in an exhibition about this topic, and write the introductory panel to the exhibit, explaining how the topic you researched influenced Impressionist painting and using the chosen Impressionist works to support your arguments.
2. What can you learn about the lives of women in 19th-century France from the works of Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt? View a collection of their paintings online to help you find answers to this question. How does each female artist offer her own perspective on the status of women?
3. The technological advancements of the Industrial Revolution brought tremendous economic and social changes to France. Choose one of these technological advancements and do further research to determine its impact on the French economy and society. Create an exhibit that illustrates and explains this advancement and its significance. Your exhibit should include a short textual analysis of the new technology, an excerpt from a primary source that supports your thesis, and visual representations, including a copy of an Impressionist painting that illustrates the significance of this technological advancement.



## SCIENCES

1. Research the mid-19th century chemist Eugène Chevreul's law of "simultaneous contrast," which suggests that colors appear most intense when juxtaposed with their complements: green next to red, for example, yellow next to violet, or orange next to blue. Using specific examples from the Impressionist paintings you have seen, prepare an oral and visual presentation explaining how the Impressionists achieved powerful optical effects by placing complementary colors next to each other.
2. Create a diagram, model, or other visual demonstration that presents the structure of the human eye, shows how light is received on the retina, and explains how the eye perceives color.
3. Give scientific names to the colors in an Impressionist painting of your choice, thinking about what chemicals might make up the paint. Following are a few examples of chemical compounds—many of which were discovered in the 19th century—used as pigments in paints favored by Impressionists:  $\text{ZnO}$ ;  $\text{HgS}$ ;  $\text{PbCrO}_4$ ;  $\text{CoO}\cdot\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ;  $\text{Cu}(\text{CH}_3\text{COO})_2\cdot 3\text{Cu}(\text{AsO}_2)_2$ . What pigments do these compounds make?\*

## RESOURCES

EDOUARD MANET



## WEB SITES

[www.impressionism.org](http://www.impressionism.org) – Impressionism: Paintings Collected by European Museums web site, an exhibit co-organized by the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, the Denver Art Museum, and the Seattle Art Museum

[www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org) – The Metropolitan Museum of Art web site; search the online collection of European Art, which contains an impressive array of Impressionist works arranged by artist

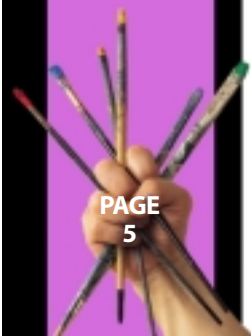
[www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/glo/impressionism](http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/glo/impressionism) – The WebMuseum network offers a wide range of Impressionist works from museum collections around the world

## BOOKS

**Thompson, Belinda.** *Impressionism: Origins, Practice, Reception.* World of Art Series. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

**Welton, Jude.** *Eyewitness Art – Impressionism.* In association with the Art Institute of Chicago. London: Dorling Kindersley, 2000.

\* Zinc white ( $\text{ZnO}$ ); Vermilion (opaque red) ( $\text{HgS}$ ); Chrome yellow ( $\text{PbCrO}_4$ ); Cobalt blue ( $\text{CoO}\cdot\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ); Emerald green ( $\text{Cu}(\text{CH}_3\text{COO})_2\cdot 3\text{Cu}(\text{AsO}_2)_2$ ).



# VOCABULARY

CLAUDE MONET



**Academic art:** art that met the standards defined by the French Academy of Fine Arts, characterized by hard outlines, smooth surfaces, idealized figures, and mythical and biblical themes; this artistic style was popular in Europe from the 17th to the 19th centuries

**composition:** arrangement of forms in a painting or another work of art

**cool colors:** colors that contain blue tones and suggest coolness; cool colors appear to recede in a painting, suggesting depth

**Expressionism:** artistic style that exaggerates or distorts the painting's subject in order to express the artist's emotions

**genre painting:** use of scenes of everyday life as the subject matter of a painting

**Impasto:** paint applied to the canvas in thick, raised brushstrokes

**Impressionism:** a style of painting, which emerged chiefly in France during the late 19th century, that focuses on the artist's general impression of an object or scene and often uses unmixed colors and small brushstrokes to depict reflected light

**naturalistic:** representing objects or people as they actually appear

**optical mixtures:** technique that places pure, primary colors, in small touches, right next to each other, so that the colors appear to merge

**palette:** range of colors used in a painting or the flat surface upon which an artist mixes paints

**plein air painting:** French term meaning "open air"; used to describe a painting that is created out of doors

**Realism:** French artistic movement, led by Gustave Corbet, that focused on painting ordinary objects and people, instead of the lofty themes traditionally represented in French painting

**still life:** painting of non-living objects, such as flowers, fruit, or utensils

**series painting:** a set of paintings that represent a single motif seen under different combinations of light, weather, and seasons

**warm colors:** colors that contain red tones and suggest warmth; warm colors seem to advance in a painting, appearing closer to the viewer

