

What? How? Wow!

The Subject Matter and Artistic Styles of the Lyme Art Colony

Grades: 5-8

Time: over the course of a few days

Grouping: whole class, small groups, individual

Materials: access to Museum's website, writing paper, color print out of paintings (PDFs below); copies of Tonalism and American Impressionism definitions (PDFs below).

Description

The Lyme Art Colony was a group of artists who were drawn to Old Lyme, Connecticut, as early as 1900. They stayed at the Griswold boardinghouse that was owned and operated by Florence Griswold. The first group of artists who came were influenced by the painter Henry Ward Ranger who painted in a style known as Tonalism. The Tonalists were interested in creating subdued, poetic, and mood-filled landscapes of the New England countryside. In 1903, however, the artist Childe Hassam came to Old Lyme with a group of younger artists who were interested in painting in another style known as American Impressionism. This style, like its inspiration French Impressionism, featured bright colors and painterly, broken brushstrokes, that sought to capture the fleeting emotion, or "impression" of a scene.

This lesson introduces students to the Lyme Art Colony by having them compare and contrast two painted panels in the Griswold boardinghouse in terms of subject matter and painting styles. Students use the Museum's on-line resources to view key examples of the painting styles and distinguish their similarities and differences as well as to select their own painted panels. This lesson demonstrates how the artists painted the same subject matter but in a different style to achieve a different kind of reaction from the viewer.

Objectives

- To learn the history of the Lyme Art Colony
- To view paintings and determine their subject matter
- To compare/contrast works of art with similar subjects
- To compare/contrast works of art painted in different styles
- To view historic photographs and paintings
- To use the Museum's website to read about subject matter and style
- To describe both "the what" and "the how" and "the wow" when looking at a painting

- To hear what other people think about works of art
- To understand the use of the style terms Tonalism and American Impressionism
- To describe a painted panel in terms of subject matter and artistic style

Curriculum Connections

Social Studies educational experiences in Grades 5-8 will ensure that students:

- Formulate historical questions based on primary and secondary sources, including documents, eyewitness accounts, letters and diaries, artifacts, real or simulated historical sites, charts, graphs, diagrams, and written texts
- Gather information from multiple sources, including archives or electronic databases, to have experience with historical sources and to appreciate the need for multiple perspectives
- Interpret data in historical maps, photographs, art works and other artifacts
- Be active learners at cultural institutions such as museums and historical exhibitions
- Describe relationships between historical subject matter and other subjects they study, current issues, and personal concerns

Visual Art educational experiences in Grades 5-8 will ensure that students:

- Consider and compare the sources for subject matter, symbols and ideas in their own and others' work
- Know and compare the characteristics and purposes of works of art representing various cultures, historical periods and artists
- Describe and place a variety of specific significant art objects by artist, style and historical and cultural context
- Describe and analyze visual characteristics of works of art using visual art terminology
- Compare a variety of individual responses to, and interpretation of, their own works of art and those from various eras and cultures
- Describe their own responses to, and interpretations of, specific works of art
- Reflect on and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of their own and others' work using specific criteria (e.g. technique, formal and expressive qualities, content)

Language Arts educational experiences in Grades 5-8 will ensure that students:

- Determine purpose, point of view and audience, then use the appropriate features of persuasive, narrative, expository, and poetic writing to achieve desired results
- Plan, organize, create and revise visual, written and oral pieces at a level of elaboration appropriate for middle school
- Identify and use primary and secondary sources to paraphrase, elaborate on, and integrate information into a final product (e.g. historical fiction, news article, research paper, documentary)
- Use and examine the effectiveness of multiple ways of generating ideas (brainstorming, listing, writing, talking, webbing, drawing), then compose, revise, edit, and present a variety of products

The above goals align with this lesson and were selected from *The Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards* (adopted in March 1998, published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, Division of Teaching and Learning). Go to: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/site/default.asp> to download a copy of the entire publication *The Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards*.

Inclusion Activity (Engaging Prior Knowledge)

Begin the lesson with a Student Grouping Activity that places students into unique pairs or trios to discuss a question designed to stimulate their prior knowledge on a subject or idea related to the lesson. Several activities that will help organize students into unexpected groups are listed below. Of course, other methods of pairing up students may be substituted for these activities.

Student Grouping Activities

Musical Pairs

Use a portable CD player or simple instrument to play music/sound. Explain to the students that when the music/sound starts they are to walk around the room silently in a safe but random pattern (nodding friendly hellos to their fellow students). When the music stops, the students should pair up with the nearest person to discuss the question read aloud. After each question is discussed, start the music again. Repeat until all three questions have been discussed.

A Circle of Friends

Ask your students to get into a circle facing the center. Ask every other student to step into the circle facing out. Have the inner circle rotate to the right until they are face to face with a partner. Ask the first question. After the question is discussed, have the outer circle move three or four people to the right to line up with a new partner. After the question is discussed, have both the inner circle and outer circle move three to four people to the right to line up with a final partner.

Enjoying a Little Tete-A-Tete

The term “tete-a-tete” refers to a private conversation between two people (as well as a short sofa intended to accommodate two persons). Ask your students to put their chairs into pairs (side by side, but facing in opposite directions) and take a seat. After each question is discussed, have students move to another seat and partner up with a new person.

Find Two Like You

Ask your students to find two other students who match a certain criterion like: *Find two other students with your hair color*; or *Find two other students with birthdays close to yours*; or *Find two other students who have same kinds of pets*; or *Find two other students who like your favorite ice cream flavor*. Students usually begin to call out their answers and cluster with those whose answers match. Once they have three people, their group is complete. Teachers may have to make a cluster of non-matching students.

Once the students are in their pairs or trios, have them discuss one of the following questions read aloud by the teacher. After a minute of discussion passes, remix the groups and continue with next question. Repeat until all questions have been discussed.

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean to be “in style?”
- Describe something that is “plain” and something that is “fancy”.
- What kind (style) of music would be appropriate for a wedding?, a child’s birthday party?, a parade

Instructions

1. Begin by reading aloud *The Story of Miss Florence and the Lyme Art Colony* to introduce students to the Lyme Art Colony.
2. Introduce the assignment of comparing two works of art from the Florence Griswold Museum's collection in terms of subject matter (what is painted), style (how it's painted), and impact (how the subject matter and style work together). Have the students gather information about subject matter and style via their computer by going to *The Fox Chase* section of the Museum's on-line learning site. After their virtual visit, they will select two panels from the Museum's collection of painted panels to compare and contrast using the new vocabulary.
3. Divide the class into working groups of three or four and distribute a color printout of both paintings listed below. Ask the groups to determine the subject of the paintings by making a list of everything they see in both paintings. Instruct them to draw a line between similar things in both paintings. Have the groups report out their discussion.

Painting A:



Henry Ward Ranger (1858-1916)
Autumn Woodlands, 1902
Oil on canvas
Gift of Mr. Ezekial Liverant

Painting B:



Childe Hassam (1859-1935)
Ten Pound Island, c. 1896
Oil on canvas
Gift of the Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection
and Insurance Company

4. Distribute the definitions of Tonalism and American Impressionism, the two painting styles popular in Old Lyme. Have the groups read the definitions and match a style to each painting and list why they made that choice. Have the groups consider the following questions in terms of subject matter and style. What

questions do they have now? What more would they like to know? What did the definitions make them think about? Do they have any pictures in their heads after reading the definition of other paintings? Which style do they like more?

5. Ask volunteers from the class to identify their favorite part of the paintings. This is a list of personal “wows.”
6. Before ending, ask the whole class to respond in writing to this question: How does the style of a painting change the way you feel about it?
7. Ask students to share their answers with each other.

Tonalism: The Tonalists sought to capture the old-fashioned qualities of the region, the quiet forest interiors and time-worn small farms, using earthy tones of browns, golds and muted greens. Tonalism is characterized by subdued and poetic landscapes that were rich with mood and sentiment. Twilight and dusk were favored times of day for the Tonalists, as were more atmospheric conditions of fog, mist, and rain. They painted dimly lit woods and rural settings, and finished them with a layer of toned varnish.

American Impressionism: American Impressionism, like its European inspiration, featured bright colors and painterly, broken brushstrokes that sought to capture the fleeting emotion, or “impression” of a scene. Unlike their French paintings, however, the subjects did not derive from the modernity of urban Paris but rather presented a fresh look at rural New England. They often layered thick brushstrokes of paint upon the canvas to suggest the light hitting their subject, enhancing the color and form. Inspired by Japanese prints and black and white photography, their compositions incorporated areas of flat color and pattern with abrupt cropping, slight blurring of edges, and intriguing juxtapositions.

In preparation for the students to select and write their own compare and contrast essays about two of the painted panels, have them use a computer to investigate *The Fox Chase* to see and read more about subject matter and style.

The following suggestions of where to look on-line might help speed up their discovery process.

Subject Matter

Artistic Styles

Where on *The Fox Chase* to find information:

[The Cow Icon](#)

[The Village of Old Lyme Icon](#)

[The Lyme Landscape Icon](#)

Where on *The Fox Chase* to find information:

[Henry Ward Ranger](#)

[Childe Hassam](#)

[Painting Tools Icon](#)

[Tonalism from the Henry Ward Ranger Icon](#)

[American Impressionism from the Childe Hassam](#)

[Icon](#)

[Characteristics of American Impressionism from the Childe Hassam Icon](#)

8. Instruct the student to visit the *In Situ: The Painted Panels* section of the website to select two panels from the collection to write about. They need to select one good example of Tonalism and one good example of American Impressionism. They should write an essay comparing the two panels in terms of subject matter and artistic style. They should end with why they chose the panels identifying their favorite parts (the wow) as well as how the artists' choices of subject matter and artistic style work together for each panel.

9. During the draft stage, have students occasionally gather in their groups to share their research, ideas, and writing. Encourage students to make suggestions to enhance each other's writing.

A Time for Reflection

Have students reflect on the following questions in their own journals.

Content/Thinking:

- What is artistic style?
- If you were one of the Lyme Art Colony painters, what subject matter would you choose?

Social:

- Which painting did your group like the most?
- Did anyone in your group pick the same panels as you?

Personal:

- Would you rather be a Tonalist or an American Impressionist?
- What is the best part, or WOW! Part, of the painting you liked least?

Appreciations

Before concluding the lesson, be sure to invite appreciations from the group (i.e. thank group partners for good brainstorming or suggestions for better writing). To help students begin making statements of appreciation, use such sentence starters as these:

- I liked it when ... (describe the situation)
- I was amazed when ...

Follow-Up Activity

Consider planning a field trip to the Museum in Old Lyme with your students. Information about a visit can be found on the [Planning A Visit](#) page.

Feedback

Please share your suggestions for making the lesson better. Let the Museum know how this lesson worked for you and your students by sending your comments and suggestions to david@flogris.org. Educators are encouraged to submit copies of final products and/or digital images to be shared on our website.