The Impressionist Era

What made the art of the Impressionists so different? This lesson introduces students to work by notable nineteenth-century artists and may include Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, or others, and places them within the context of their time.

Grade Level
Grades 4–12

Common Core Academic State Standards
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

National Visual Arts Standards
- Responding: understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning
- Connecting: relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context

C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards
- Dimension 2: History – Perspectives
- Dimension 2: History – Change, Continuity, and Context

Suggested Learning Goals
Students will be better able to:
- Analyze the progression of artistic styles and themes from academic art to Impressionism and Post-Impressionism
- Discuss how Impressionist styles and themes reflect modern life and the inventions and innovations of the 19th Century

Essential Questions
- What made the art of the Impressionists so different from the art of previous eras?
- Why did art start to change dramatically in this era?

Suggested Vocabulary
Brush strokes | Light
En plein air | Realistic/realism
Impressionist/impressionism | Shadow
Landscape

Manne-Porte, Étretat, 1885
Claude Monet, French
Oil on canvas
25 3/4 x 32 inches (65.4 x 81.3 cm)
Framed: 39 1/4 × 45 × 5 inches (99.7 × 114.3 × 12.7 cm)
John G. Johnson Collection, 1917
Cat.1051
Lesson-Specific Activity
This activity is designed to prepare students for thinking and talking about artworks they may see during an “Impressionist Era” lesson.

- Select two images to display for students. One should be an Impressionist painting (a still life or a landscape would work best), and the other should be very realistic painting of the same subject. See Suggested Art Images.
- Display the images side-by-side. Give students some time to look closely, and then ask them to describe what they see. Have students compare and contrast the two images. It may be helpful to use a Venn diagram to organize their responses.
- Ask students what they notice about the artists’ use of color, light, shadow, and brushstrokes. What do you think was important or beautiful to each artist? What do you think the artists wanted to show you about their subjects?
- If weather and time permit, take students outside to experience en plein air. Give them a simple writing or drawing activity to complete. Ask them how working outside affects their senses. How is the light different? How are the sounds and smells different? What effects do the wind and air temperature have?

Suggested Art Images
- *Beach at Étretat*, 1890, by Eugène-Louis Boudin
- *Manne-Porte, Étretat*, 1885, by Claude Monet