

F.A.M.E.
Claude Monet (1840-1926)
January 2005

Preparation

Cover “Water Lilies” with the posterboard with peek windows so that the painting is not showing.

Docent costume suggestions: An artist’s smock with a straw boater-style hat.

Alternatively, anything made out of impressionistic-looking fabric will do as well.

Introduction

When you were outside earlier today at recess or walking to school, how was the weather? What did the sky look like? What was the temperature like?

Did you notice any trees today? What do many trees look like at this time of year? How do trees look different at different times of year?

Did you ever notice that things outside can look different at different times of day, too? Close your eyes for a moment, and imagine what the grass and trees on the playground look like on a sunny morning. What do you imagine?

Now close your eyes again and imagine the exact same scene later in the day, just after the sun has set but before it is dark. What do you imagine looks different? (*Colors, textures*). Do you know why there is a difference? It is because the light is different at different times of day, so that everything you see in that light looks different, too.

What you have been imagining and describing are your **impressions** of what a certain scene might look like at different times of day. What about the same scene in the winter and in the summer? What might be some of the differences?

Impressionism

Have you ever heard of a group of artists that were called the Impressionists? These artists wanted to paint their **impressions** of their subjects, not a fully realistic image of the subject. This means that they wanted to paint their ideas and feelings about the subject as they painted the subject. (*Show the Manet painting of the fife player from the last F.A.M.E. lesson*). Do you remember this painting? Manet, the artist we studied in the last F.A.M.E. lesson, was called the “father of impressionism.” Do you remember why? (*He did not attempt to paint a fully realistic portrait of the fife player, but instead tried to capture some feelings and ideas about the boy.*) The artist that we are going to study today painted a few years after Manet, and he was one of the leaders in the style of

painting known as “impressionism.” His name sounds sort of like Manet—it is Claude Monet (*pronounced “Mo-NAY”*).

Peek Window

The painting we’re going to look at by Monet is hidden behind this board. Let’s have a couple of volunteers come up and open a window, and see if they can guess from the window what the whole picture is about. (*Have student volunteers open a window and make a guess, and then have the class agree or disagree with a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down.”*)

So now you have some impressions about what the painting might be about. Let’s look at the whole painting and see if your impressions are true. (*Take poster board off and show the painting.*) This is “Water Lilies” by Claude Monet.

“Water Lilies”

Can you tell what this is a painting of? (*Pond with water lilies*). Have you ever seen real water lilies? They are plants that float on the surface of still water with flat round leaves and flowers. Monet painted this picture in his backyard. Have you ever tried to draw or paint a picture outside? Monet preferred to paint outside. He would take his box of paints and brushes, canvas and easel outside to paint so that he could capture the changes in color, light and shadow, and the movement of things outdoors. This was a new idea for most painters. Before Monet, most painters had painted indoors where they could control the setting. But Monet and the other Impressionists wanted to fill their canvases with light and movement, and so they went outside to capture their impressions of the scenes surrounding them. Once time, Monet even complained that he had icicles hanging from his beard on a particularly cold winter morning.

Monet loved his garden; he spent hours planting many different types of water lilies so that something would be in bloom almost all the time. He spent even more time painting the lilies day after day at all different times of day. Why do you think he wanted to paint them at different times of day? (*So he could capture the different effects of the light. Also, water lilies open in the morning and close at night.*) What do you see reflected in the water in this painting? (*Clouds, trees*). What time of day do you think he might have painted this? (*Maybe early morning: the clouds are a bit pink and the light is indirect*).

(*Show other paintings of water lilies from the book Monet, pp. 97, 104 & 105, 106.*)
What times of day or times of year do you think he might have painted these paintings of the lilies? Why? (*Emphasize the change in light in the different pictures.*)

Monet would stay in the garden for hours, working on different canvases throughout the day as the light changed. He would work furiously on one canvas until the light changed, and then work on a different canvas, and so on. Then the next day he would go back to

the first canvas and work again. He was very critical of his own work and he wanted things to be perfect; if his paintings did not look like he thought they should, he destroyed them. Even though he destroyed many more paintings than he kept, today there are 19 paintings of water lilies hanging in museums around the world.

(*Show the “Elements of Composition” poster.*) We’ve been talking about light and shadow, but there is one other element that is very important in impressionist painting. Do you remember which element was very important in Manet’s “Fifer”? (*Line*). Do you think that line is going to be important in “Water Lilies”? (*No—there are no clear lines*) Texture, however, is very important. If you look at this painting close up, it looks like a bunch of colorful brush strokes. You have to step back a little to have the painting make sense. The brush strokes add texture.

Do you know what “texture” means? (*The way things feel.*) In paintings, texture is the way things look like they might feel. If you could touch these flowers, how do you think they might feel? (*Point out different textures in the room.*) Even though this is just a copy of the painting, you can tell it has texture because of the roughness and bumps made by the paint that Monet used. (*Show “The Japanese Bridge” pp. 108 & 9.*) Here is one of Monet’s late paintings—can you see how much texture is in the paint? It doesn’t look much like the other picture we saw of the Japanese Bridge (*pp. 97*), does it? By the end of his life Monet was just painting his impressions using light, color and texture, without even trying to capture the visual details.

When the people of Paris first saw these paintings, with their lumps and bumps of oil paint in thousands of short strokes, they were shocked. They did not like this new style of painting. They were used to paintings where everything looked clear and sharp and smooth. But the paintings of the Impressionists were brilliant with light and color and full of feeling and movement.

Biography

Claude Monet was born in Paris, France in 1840. When Claude was little, his family moved to the town of Le Havre, on the coast of France. Many of Monet’s paintings are pictures of the water. Boats, lakes, and oceans were some of his favorite subjects.

Monet loved to paint from the time he was small. He did not do very well in school because he spent most of his time drawing funny pictures of his teachers in the margins of his books instead of listening. By the time he was a teenager, he was so good at drawing these pictures that he was able to sell them to other kids for 10-20 francs (about \$2 to \$4). When he was 16, Monet met a well-known artist named Eugene Boudin, who encouraged Monet to try painting outdoors. Monet was very interested in this new idea, and soon he began to do all of his painting outdoors.

By now, Monet’s father was ready for him to get a job, but he soon realized that Monet was much more interested in painting than in any other type of work. Monet persuaded

his father to send him to Paris to study painting, where Monet met many other young artists who later became Impressionist painters. Monet was the one who showed them how wonderful it was to paint outdoors.

During this point in his life, Monet was very poor. He was unable to make much money from his painting. Sometimes he got kicked out of an apartment because he couldn't pay the rent, and then he would stay with a friend for awhile until he had a bit of money. Monet fell in love with his favorite model, Camille, and they got married and had two sons. She appears in many of his paintings, but unfortunately she became sick and then died, leaving him alone with his sons. Her death was a great loss to Monet.

Finally, when he was about 50 years old, Monet began to become famous and successful. He bought a home in Giverny (*jee-vair-nee*), France, which is where he planted his famous garden. He married a widow named Alice, who had six children; with his two sons, that meant that there were eight children living in the house. It was in this busy and noisy environment that he painted the paintings we've seen today.

Monet had problems with his eyesight beginning to fail, but he kept on painting until the end of his life. He finally died at the age of 86. Remember the two pictures of the Japanese bridge? You can see that as his eyesight grew worse, the shapes in his paintings became much less distinct, but up until the very end he captured the light and movement in the garden that he loved.

Transition to Composer

Monet painted his impressions of things that he saw. Now we're going to learn about a composer who wrote music to convey his impressions of animals.

Art Activity

Pour small amounts of tempera paint into different containers. Dampen sponge squares, squeezing out excess water, and place one square of sponge with each paint. Set up stations with 4-5 colors of paint for 4 children to use at one time. Show them how to get a small amount of paint on the sponge and then lightly press the sponge on the paper to make a square. If they get too much paint on the sponge or press too hard, they will just have a blob of paint on their paper. The idea is to have a light mark that shows the sponge texture.

They can use various colors of paint to make an outdoor scene. You might want to choose something simple like a tree with various colored leaves for the primary grades; the upper grades might prefer to choose their own scene (lake, mountains, ocean) with suggestions from you.