

Henri Rousseau

1844- 1910

We're going on an imaginary trip today. Can you guess by my hat and clothes where we might be going? (the jungle)

To get you on the mood, we're going to turn out the lights and look for some imaginary creatures you might find in the jungle. Have you ever been in your room at night and seen shadows? It was probably only a tree outside your window, or your lamp, or some stuffed animals, but it looked like some kind of creature.until you turned the lights on.

(DIM LIGHTS IN CLASSROOM)

We're going to see if we can find some creatures in this classroom. You really have to use your imagination. (SPOT FLASHLIGHT AROUND) I'm going to move the flashlight around and the objects will take on different shapes. (As you move to different objects, ask the students what jungle creature it looks like.)

Our artist today used his imagination too, in his paintings. He especially loved to paint jungle scenes even though in his whole life, he'd never been to a jungle. His name is Henri Rousseau. I want you to remember his name, so please repeat it after me. (Explain that the pronunciation is French. Repeat with the class several times.)

(TURN OVER PAINTING)

There are many things to see in Rousseau's painting. We're going to discuss those a little later. Right now, I'm going to let you enjoy the painting while I tell you a little about this very fascinating man.

He was born in Laval, France in 1844. In school, he enjoyed poetry and music and he liked to draw. He studied violin for a while and learned to play the clarinet. He tried many things. And even served in the French army for seven years. He was stationed in the west of France, but later often told people his army battalion had been sent to Mexico to fight the Mexicans. But that wasn't true; he spent the whole time in France.

After he got out of the army, he was restless, and didn't really know what he wanted to do with his life so he moved to Paris. There, he married Clemence Boitard, and 19-year-old dress maker. They had 7 children.

He got a job as a toll collector in a toll house in Paris. It was his job to make people pay their taxes, and believe me, it wasn't a very popular job! Later, he told people he had been a customs officer....another lie! Didn't I tell you Henri Rousseau and a great imagination? Even now, people sometimes refer to him by the nickname he was given, "Douanier" (DOOWAN- e- yeah) which means customs officer. Even though he never was one!

He retired at age 40 and led a simple, quiet life of teaching music and writing poetry. His wife encouraged him to take up painting at the age of 40---proving it's never too late to try something new. He was a self-taught artist---he never took a lesson.

He learned by copying pictures from the galleries at the Louvre, pictures from postcards and advertisements he collected. He especially loved to spend time at the botanical gardens and the zoo, and used the images of the exotic plants and animals he saw in his paintings. He painted from his heart, and it was his rich imagination more than anything else that was the source of his inspiration.

Rousseau was the most famous of the “Primitive” (WRITE THE WORD ON THE BOARD) French painters. Primitive painters painted in a very simple, childlike manner. At first, the general public treated his paintings with amusement and thought he was a bit odd. In fact, one art critic said, “Monsieur Rousseau paints with his feet, with a blindfold over his eyes.” However, famous painters of the time encouraged him and recognized his talent.

It was in his jungle and desert scenes where Rousseau showed his true genius. He would come home from his visits to the zoo and create his own jungles, sometimes painting into them animals that may never have existed and inventing trees and flowers.

Let’s look at the painting. Does this look like a real jungle to you? (HAVE CHILDREN DISCUSS WHAT THEY SEE: NOTE HEIGHT OF GRASS, TREES AND FLOWERS, SUN, LIGHT SOURCE, SHADOW OF A MAN BEING BITTEN BY THE LEOPARD.)

Let’s think about some of the elements an artist uses and see how Rousseau used them. (PULL OUT POSTER WITH ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION, REVIEW COLOR, LIGHT AND SHADOW, LINE AND TEXTURE AND LET THE CHILDREN POINT OUT HOW HE USED THEM.)

LINE: Rousseau used very definite horizontal and vertical lines, giving a sense of a very neat and orderly jungle. The plants and flowers seem to reach to the sun but the upward lines are broken by a network of both horizontal and downward pointing leaves. The row of giant pink flowers forms a line of color leading our eyes to the two central figures.

COLOR: The colors in the picture are bright and brilliant; Rousseau only applied one color at a time, first doing all the red areas, then the green, etc. Even

through he would use as many as 22 shades of green in his jungle paintings, he would complete all the green first before moving on to another color.

TEXTURE: In spite of the fact that Rousseau would bring fresh plants and flowers into to his studio to study in detail, his textures are very smooth rather than highly textured.

LIGHT AND SHADOW: Aside from the shadow of the man in the center of the painting, and some darkened central areas, Rousseau does not make great use of light and shadow and the painting lacks depth. We don't see a jungle like you'd envision: dark, shadowy and ominous. Instead we see a very primitive style jungle: clean, dry, simple and happy.

A painting will usually have a center of interest, or a spot where your eye is drawn first. Stare at Rousseau's painting for a moment and then I'm going to turn it away from you. (ALLOW THEM TO LOOK FOR ABOUT 5 SECONDS)

When you looked at it what did you see first? (MOST STUDENTS WILL LIST OBJECTS IN THE CENTER OF THE PAINTING—SUN, MAN, LEOPARD. SEE IF THEY CAN 'DISCOVER' THE COLOR, FLOWERS AND OTHER ELEMENTS THAT SURROUND THE CENTER AND THAT THE CENTER OF INTEREST MAY NOT ALWAYS BE IN THE CENTER)

There's a special word that artists use when they discuss a work of art. This important word is "composition" (WRITE ON BOARD)—it's the name you give a total painting when it is finished. It is the word that means how the artist blended color, light and shadow, line, and texture to form an interesting painting. Henri Rousseau had flawless composition.

Sadly, he died alone and penniless at the age of 66. He sold very few paintings during his lifetime. Today, they are worth millions and are scattered in collections

throughout the world for us to continue to enjoy. (PASS OUT THE OTHER THREE, SMALL ROUSSEAU PRINTS FOR STUDENTS TO LOOK AT.)

Art Project: Have each child draw a “primitive” jungle animal using their imagination. Remind them that it should not be realistic, but child-like and fanciful.