Modern-Day Monet

Subject Area: Art, Visual Arts
Grade Level: 3–6
Topics/Themes: Impressionism
Studio Skills: Water-Based Paint, Dry Brush and Wet-on-Wet
Type of Lesson: Pre-Visit or Post-Visit

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will examine Claude Monet’s *The Studio Boat* as an example of an impressionist painting. The impressionists were a group of painters who worked together in the 1870s and 1880s in France and rebelled against what was considered acceptable in art at the time. Students will learn the elements of impressionism using the acronym ELBOW (Everyday, Light, Brushwork, Outdoors, Water/Weather) and then create a watercolor painting of a modern river scene.
Objectives

1. Students will look closely at eight artworks and identify the impressionist works by using the five elements of impressionism (ELBOW). The instructor will assess this ability through a sorting game.
2. Students will use at least two of the five elements of impression in their completed artwork.
3. Students will paint using both wet-on-wet and dry-brush methods.

Materials

- Paint (watercolor or tempera cakes)
- Paintbrushes
- Paper

Introduction

1. Introduce the elements of impressionism by using the ELBOW acronym. Include an image of *The Studio Boat* as reference:

   **E** is for everyday life. While other artists in late-1800s France painted scenes of historical, mythological, or religious significance, the impressionists painted everyday life.

   **L** is for light. Impressionist painters were interested in capturing the momentary effects of light on a scene. They often painted quickly to capture a singular moment.

   **B** is for brushstrokes. At the time, the art world preferred smooth brushstrokes that resulted in realistic, photograph-like paintings. The impressionists employed visible brushstrokes in their paintings. By looking carefully at an artwork, we can see the brushstrokes that the artists used.

   **O** is for outdoors. While most painters worked indoors in studios, impressionist painters ventured outdoors to paint, working en plein air, a French term meaning outside. They took advantage of the recent invention of paint tubes and sought to capture the momentary effects of light and nature.

   **W** is for water or weather. The impressionists were interested in capturing the momentary effects of water and weather on a scene.
2. Ask questions to help students identify the elements of impressionism in *The Studio Boat*.
   
   - How do you think this painting represents everyday life?
   - How would you describe the light? (Sunny, cloudy, bright, direct, etc.)
   - Imagine your finger is a paintbrush. In the air, can you show me how the artist may have moved the paintbrush to create the water?
   - Where outside is the painting? Now, can we describe the area outside of our school? How are they similar or different?
   - How might the weather feel in the painting? What would you wear to prepare for that weather?

3. Monet painted *The Studio Boat* in 1876. Ask students, if you were to make a modern-day version of this painting, what would it look like?
   
   - What mode of transportation would you show?
   - How would people be dressed?

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**Art Making**

**Overview**

Students will paint a modern river scene using watercolors or tempera cakes. Our goal is for the painting to feature at least two of the five impressionist elements in ELBOW.

**Demonstration/Guided Learning**

Use two small pieces of scrap paper for this demonstration, one for dry brush and one for wet-on-wet. For dry brush, demonstrate using a paintbrush with as little water as possible (just enough to activate the paint) on dry paper. This will create a clear brushstroke. Wet your other piece of paper with water and then, using more water on your brush, paint a brushstroke. This wet-on-wet brushstroke will spread. Allow students to practice both methods on their own before providing them with their final project paper.

**Independent Studio**

Using watercolor or tempera cakes, students will create a modern-day version of *The Studio Boat*. If your school is in the Philadelphia area, consider showing pictures of the Schuylkill or Delaware Rivers.

Remind students they are expected to use both the wet-on-wet and dry brush methods to complete the brushstroke element of impressionism.
Assess

Formative assessment: After introducing ELBOW, check for understanding by playing a sorting game with eight artworks (four impressionist and four non-impressionist). Ask students to sort the impressionist and non-impressionist works. Selected works from the Barnes collection are formatted for printing and available at the end of this lesson plan. Students can work individually, in pairs, or by tables, based on how many sets of images are printed. Using ELBOW will help students identify impressionist work correctly. Once students have correctly sorted their sets, they can begin their art project.

Summative assessment: Review each student’s artwork when it is completed. Did the students use two elements of impressionism in their painting? Be clear with students that this is an expectation before they start working. The assignment can be made harder by requiring a higher ratio of impressionist elements.

Discussion Questions

1. What modern-day features did you add to your painting? Why did you choose to add these elements?
2. Do you think that one element of ELBOW is more important to understanding impressionism than the others?

National and PA State Academic Standards

- National Visual Arts Standard VA:Cr2.1.5a: Experiment and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice.
- National Visual Arts Standard VA:Cr3.1.5a: Create artist statements using art vocabulary to describe personal choices in art making.
Featured Artworks from the Barnes Collection

Impressionist works (clockwise from top left):

Alfred Sisley. *Sèvres Bridge*, 1877

Édouard Manet. *Laundry*, 1875


Camille Pissarro. *Garden in Full Sunlight*, 1876
Non-Impressionist Works (clockwise from top left):

Susan Cray. New Jersey Cut-Out, 1843

Corneille de Lyon. Man with a Feather in Hat, third quarter of 16th century

José Raphael Aragon. Archangel Saint Michael (San Miguel), c. 1840

Unidentified artist. Interior Scene, late 18th or 19th century

Learn more about each work by clicking the link or visiting collection.barnesfoundation.org.