Paintings by the famous artist Edgar Degas reveal glimpses of life in New Orleans during Reconstruction. Degas, who later became famous as one of the French Impressionists, visited his family in New Orleans in 1872. His mother was a French Creole who was born in Louisiana, and Degas had many relatives in the city. These family members still spoke French and lived in the style of the old Creole families. But they also had begun to speak
English, and the men were taking part in the American-style business in the city. During this visit, Degas used his art to comment on his experiences.

One painting that makes a dramatic statement was actually painted in France before Degas visited New Orleans. His aunt and two female cousins came to visit their French relatives to escape the American Civil War. His portrait of his cousin Estelle reveals the grief of a young woman whose husband of ten months...
**Focus on Skills**

**Determining Fact from Opinion**

**Defining the Skill**

Students sometimes mistakenly think that everything they read in a textbook is fact. It becomes more of a challenge to separate fact from opinion when authors weave facts, inferences, and opinions into their writing to make it more interesting. In order for you to distinguish fact from opinion, you must be able to apply critical thinking skills as you read your textbook. You must evaluate and make judgments about what you read.

The first step in being able to distinguish fact from opinion is simply knowing how to recognize each. The following definitions will help you to make the distinction.

- **A fact** may be defined as something that can be proved or verified. Facts may be verified by observation or by information found in reliable sources such as textbooks, reference books, periodicals, and Internet sites.

- **An opinion** may be defined as an expression based on personal belief or judgment. Opinions are not verifiable but are open to debate. There are a number of cue words that often signal an opinion. Words that imply an opinion include *bad, good, may, probably, believe, feel, think, greatest, worst, should, should not, best, most, least, always, never, all, none.*

**Try This!**

Create 2 two-column graphic organizers on a separate sheet of paper. For the first graphic organizer, skim through the chapter and, in the first column, write what you believe to be three opinions. In the second column, identify any cue words that helped you classify the sentence as an opinion. For the second graphic organizer, write three statements of fact in the first column. In the second column, cite evidence that can be used to verify the statements as facts.

**It’s Your Turn!**

Read the following statements and, on a separate sheet of paper, indicate whether each is a fact or opinion. Give a reason for your choice.

1. After most wars, people come together in their misery and in their hope for the same future.
2. It took twenty-five years for the livestock count in Louisiana to reach pre-Civil War levels.
3. When courthouses were burned, the parish’s legal records were permanently lost.
4. After the Civil War, economic recovery became more important than anything else.
5. In 1865, the federal government established the Freedmen’s Bureau.
6. Northerners believed that the South still wanted slavery after the Civil War.
7. Louisiana and almost all of the other southern states refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment.
8. In 1867, Congress passed a new Reconstruction Act.
9. Under military Reconstruction, Sheridan set up a system to register black voters.
10. To most people, the political struggle was important only in the ways it affected their daily lives.
had been killed in an early battle of the war. The artist said, “one cannot look at her without thinking that that face filled the eyes of a dying man.”

Later, in New Orleans, Degas painted the business of his uncle who was trying to cope with the economic changes caused by the war. This painting, *A Cotton Office in New Orleans*, shows a business that looks busy and prosperous. Actually, these cotton factors struggled because of the changes caused by the war; they went out of business soon after the painting was complete.

Another Degas painting shows a New Orleans business that represented success in this economic period. The Louisiana Ice Manufacturing Company, a new steam-powered ice manufacturing plant, was the largest in the world. After visiting the plant, Degas returned to France and painted a portrait of Henri Rouart, who had designed and financed the business. The painting included the ice plant in the background.

Through these three paintings, the aftermath of the Civil War in Louisiana is described. From Degas paintings, we learn that the medium of art is one way of learning about the past.

The subjects reflect the conflict between continuity and change that defines this time in history.

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**Figure 25 Timeline: 1860–1880**

1865
- Mechanics Institute riot
- James Madison Wells elected governor; Black Code enacted

1866
- New state constitution written

1867
- Congress established military Reconstruction
- Louisiana’s Reconstruction constitution adopted; Henry Clay Warmoth elected governor

1870
- Most of Chicago destroyed in Great Fire
- First transcontinental railroad completed

1871
- Colfax Riot

1873
- White League formed; Coushatta massacre; Battle of Liberty Place

1874
- Reconstruction ended

1875
- Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone

1880