

# *intimate impressionism*

FROM THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE



# OVERVIEW

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

In 1874, a group of innovative artists who called themselves “**Société Anonyme des Artistes, Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs**” (translated as Anonymous Society of Artists, Painters, Sculptors, Engravers) showed their work at an exhibition in **Paris**. A critic of the exhibition gave them the name **Impressionists**—an insulting term that reflected his opinion that their work was unfinished. However, despite this critique, these artists came to revolutionize painting and ushered in a new era focusing on their innovative techniques and perceptions of modern life.

Presenting 68 small-scale works of art from the **National Gallery of Art**, *Intimate Impressionism from the National Gallery of Art* showcases paintings by Impressionists and the artists that followed, including **Claude Monet** and **Auguste Renoir**. SAM’s Educator Resource Guide highlights three works from the exhibition and explores ideas about leisure, artistic collaboration, innovation, and public vs. private spaces.

## ABOUT IMPRESSIONISM

Departing from the strict traditional representational painting techniques of the **Académie des Beaux-Arts**, Impressionist painters incorporate loose brush strokes and bold contrasting colors creating an “impression” of subjects and subject matter within their environment. Advances in technology allowed painters to grab tubes of paint and move into the landscape, *en plein air*, in a direct conversation with the subject, sunlight, and changing weather. The invention of photography also influenced composition through tight cropping and the inference that a scene extends beyond the canvas.

Focusing on non-traditional subjects—scenes from everyday life, nature, common people of working class or leisure, still life compositions, and city life—Impressionists also broke from the traditional painter’s subject matter demanded by the Académie des Beaux-Arts since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although categorized under one style of painting, each Impressionist artist reflects an individual artist’s journey exploring new territories of technique and subject matter.

## ABOUT THE WORK



*Madame Monet and Her Son*, Auguste Renoir, French, 1841-1919, Oil on canvas.

**Auguste Renoir's** *Madame Monet and Her Son*, portrays an idyllic day in his friend Claude Monet's backyard. This classic Impressionist painting utilizes broad brushwork and application of paint to block in forms and capture the light and mood of the scene. Outfitted in a flowing dress comprised of a combination of long and short strokes of white, Monet's wife rests in the grass with her son who wears an outfit made of white, light, medium, and dark blue color accents that suggest the folds of cloth. In the background, dashes of pink paint form the flowers blooming in the upper left corner while long brown strokes define a tree supporting the two figures as a rooster makes its way into the scene. The exchange of ideas among artists at times occurred during moments of leisure, similar to this scene, and created an air of collaboration.

## LOOKING QUESTIONS

### **MADAME MONET AND HER SON,** Auguste Renoir

- What is going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Where might this scene be taking place? What do you see that makes you say that? Have you ever been somewhere similar? If so, what types of activities did you do there?
- Focusing on Madame Monet's dress, what color do you see at first glance?
- Looking more closely at the brushwork in the painting, with a hand and arm gesture, pretend you were making that brushstroke. What does that physical gesture look like? What other types of strokes do you see?
- Imagine that Renoir decided not to add in the rooster. How would this change your thoughts about the image?

## ABOUT THE WORK



*Behind the Scenes*,  
Jean-Louis Forain, French, 1852 - 1931  
ca. 1880,  
Oil on canvas.

Split between light and dark, the background of **Jean-Louis Forain's** *Behind the Scenes* helps tell the interpersonal story of two subjects caught in the spaces between public and private worlds. With hands held in front of her, the young dancer leans against a theater backdrop while a formally dressed older man looks on. Dancers of this era often gained employment through the influence of the male elite. The composition prompts questions about the nature of the relationship between the two figures, a working class woman and a wealthy man, and gives the viewer a glimpse into a typically unseen moment in modern life.

## LOOKING QUESTIONS

**BEHIND THE SCENES**,  
Jean-Louis Forain

- What is going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Describe the two people in the image. How are they similar? How are they different? What do you think their occupations might be? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Imagine you can hear these figures talking to each other. What do you think they would say?
- Where do you think they might be in this image?
- How does the use of contrasting colors, light and dark, affect what the viewer focuses on within the image?
- How does a facial expression set the tone and mood of an image? What do you think the mood is in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?

## ABOUT THE WORK



*Child Wearing a Red Scarf*,  
Édouard Vuillard, French, 1868 – 1940,  
ca. 1891,  
Oil on cardboard.

Hand in hand, a young girl and a male adult walk down a sidewalk toward figures standing in the background in a scene from daily life in Paris. Using a cropping technique found in photography, an invention over 50 years old at this time, **Édouard Vuillard's** *Child Wearing a Red Scarf* leaves a lot to the imagination, making it challenging to decipher the setting and narrative of the piece due to the image's narrow focus. In creating an image from life, the artist must choose what elements are included in the final composition, and which are not. As Vuillard wrote, "I don't do portraits. I paint people in their surroundings." Photography highlighted the ability to isolate or crop certain elements of the image, yet still imply that the scene continues beyond the frame.

Impressionists explore a wide range of technique and subject matter. It is only loosely through similar processes and techniques along with associations and collaborations that they hold together as a group and movement. Innovative brushwork and technical experimentation—a hallmark of their work—connects to the explorations of new media by contemporary artists today who continue the investigation of themes, subject matter, and process.

## LOOKING QUESTIONS

### **CHILD WEARING A RED SCARF**, Édouard Vuillard

- What is going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?
- How can color set the mood and also direct the eye within this image?
- What do you think the relationship might be between these two people? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What do you think might be happening beyond the frame of this image?
- Have you ever gone on a walk with your parents, immediate or extended family, or friends? Where have you walked? How did you feel when you were on the walk? What did you see?

# ART ACTIVITY



## DESCRIPTION

In all three works—*Madame Monet and Her Son*, *Behind the Scenes*, and *Child Wearing a Red Scarf* (see image above)—please note image—the use of cropping leaves much to the viewer’s imagination. What is happening outside of the image?! Using the exquisite corpse method and in the Impressionist style, students will depict what happens outside of the four edges of an Impressionism painting and/or current event-sourced photograph (see template).

## MATERIALS

Pencil  
9” x 12” Multi-Media Paper  
View Finder (Make by cutting out the center of a 3” x 5” index card. Can be used as a tool for additional image cropping).  
Water Soluble Oil Pastels  
Markers  
Crayons

## ACTIVITY EXTENSION

Have students use their completed works to create a storyboard for a film or play. Students can create narrative links to connect the different themes present in the work.

## STEPS

**ONE:** Start with a discussion through close looking by using the looking questions provided in this document.

**TWO:** Have students source either a current event, historical photograph, or one of the Impressionistic images featured in this guide. Make sure to center the image on an 11”x 17” sheet of paper with several inches around the edge. Students can also print out an image, trim the excess, and mount in the middle of a larger sheet of paper.

**THREE:** Students will cut slits from the bottom of the paper up to the image corner on each side of the bottom and top. This will allow the students to fold back the area they are drawing into after they finish contributing.

**FOUR:** Students will divide into groups of four. Making sure that each student has their own image. After forming the groups, have each student pass their image clockwise.

**FIVE:** Using colored pencils, crayons, markers and/or water soluble wax pastels, have students imagine what is happening outside of the known image border. If necessary, you may set a time limit for how long students can work on each side. Once they finish, have the student fold the portion back so as not to reveal the addition to the next student.

**SIX:** Once each student contributes to extending their side of the image, reveal the complete composition by unfolding the flaps on all four sides and laying the image flat. Students can do a gallery tour to see all of their classmates’ innovative additions. If time permits, each group can collectively title the work and/or write a short narrative. Groups could also write stories and give titles to other groups’ images.

**ART ACTIVITY TEMPLATE**

1) CUT THE DOTTED LINES 2) FOLD AROUND THE IMAGE

**CUT**



**CUT**



**CUT**



**CUT**



*Madame Monet and Her Son*, Auguste Renoir, French, 1841-1919, 1874 oil on canvas overall: 50.4 x 68 cm (19 13/16 x 26 3/4 in.)  
framed: 77.4 x 95.5 x 11.4 cm (30 1/2 x 37 5/8 x 4 1/2 in.) Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection T2014.30.24





*Behind the Scenes*, Jean-Louis Forain, French, 1852 - 1931 ca. 1880, Oil on canvas overall: 46.4 x 38.4 cm (18 1/4 x 15 1/8 in.)  
framed: 55.25 x 63.18 x 6.67 cm (21 3/4 x 24 7/8 x 2 5/8 in.) Rosenwald Collection T2014.30.4



*Child Wearing a Red Scarf*, Édouard Vuillard, French, 1868 - 1940, ca. 1891 oil on cardboard, overall: 29.2 x 17.5 cm (11 1/2 x 6 7/8 in.) overall (support and wooden collar): 30.2 x 18.4 cm (11 7/8 x 7 1/4 in.) framed: 48.9 x 37.2 x 7.3 cm (19 1/4 x 14 5/8 x 2 7/8 in.) Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection T2014.30.32

# GLOSSARY

**Académie des Beaux-Arts:** Founded in 1648 to foster the education of the most talented students in the following areas: drawing, painting, sculpture, engraving, architecture, and other media. Focusing on classical arts and architecture from ancient Greek and Roman culture, many of Europe's most famous artists trained here under the structure of a demanding classwork regimen and the highest standards set for education at the time. For a long time, French artists had to meet its criteria for success when submitting works to the annual Salon.

**Auguste Renoir:** (1841–1919) As a founding member of the Impressionist movement, he developed a personal style that influenced many avant-garde artists pivotal in shaping 20<sup>th</sup> century art. He experimented in technique and medium until late in life and continued to work in other mediums such as sculpture. Renoir is celebrated as one of the greatest French painters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Édouard Vuillard:** (1890–1940) A French painter who studied at the Académie Julian in Paris and was influenced by richly colored patterned materials that his mother, a seamstress, often had around their home. He was also influenced by Japanese woodblock prints, producing flattened and patterned intimate interiors with unusual compositions.

**En plein air:** A French expression that means “in the open air” and used to describe the act of painting outdoors.

**Impressionism:** Originating in Paris, an informal and changing group of 19<sup>th</sup>-century artists held independent exhibitions during the 1870's and 80's to rebel against the established art practices of the era. Many Impressionist paintings have short, visible brushstrokes that emphasize capturing the light and mood of a particular scene. They often focus on landscapes and scenes of everyday life.

**Jean-Louis Forain:** (1852–1931) A French painter influenced by Impressionist light and color theory who depicted scenes of everyday life such as popular entertainments and themes of modernity.

**Claude Monet:** (1840–1926) Known for his landscapes and portraits of leisure, he is noted as a key artist in the Impressionist movement that transformed French painting. His initial rejection by the Salon inspired him to join with others to establish an independent exhibition in 1874.

**Paris:** Founded in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC by a celtic people called Parisii, it is home to one of the most visited museum in the world, the Louvre, and includes many cultural icons such as the Eiffel Tower and the Notre Dame Cathedral, as well as cafes, wine, pastries, and world-renowned art schools and artists.

**Salon:** Beginning in 1667 in Paris, France at the Académie des Beaux-Arts, the Salon was considered one of the greatest exhibitions in the world with paintings hung closely from floor to ceiling on every wall. The original purpose was to show recent graduates of the École des Beaux-Arts, an essential aspect of achieving success in France.

**Société Anonyme des Artistes, Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs:** An independent group of artists who took on the role of advocating for the avant-garde when art critics were not supportive of their new and radical art practices. In 1874, they organized as an alternative to the official exhibition Salon and began a series of their own exhibitions. Many in this group became major artists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20th century.