

# A Century of Art

By Tammie Bairen

Since the beginning of time, art has been part of our world. No matter the period, artists have created beautiful and interesting works of art. Throughout history, the style has changed dramatically. There were at least nine prevalent styles in the century that spanned 1870–1970. It is in this century we will spend our time. Discussion of each style will include an introduction to some of the prominent artists of the time period, and students will also have an opportunity to practice each particular style on their own.

- Impressionism
- Postimpressionism
- Fauvism
- Expressionism
- Cubism
- Abstract Art
- Surrealism
- Art Deco
- Pop Art

Every effort will be made to provide images within these lessons, but much artwork is not in the public domain and, therefore, cannot be reprinted in any form without permission. Links will be provided, however. Also, note that the dates of each movement are approximate, as different sources use different dates.

***Parents' Note: It is recommended students not be permitted to search on their own for works by these, or any, artists. Various images will be provided in this lesson. If students would like to search for more, consider searching for them and allowing them to look once you have found an image that is acceptable.***



*Still Life with Peaches*  
Auguste Renoir, 1881  
Oil on Canvas

## Week 1: Impressionism (1870–1900)



*The Houses of Parliament, Sunset*  
Claude Monet, 1903  
Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

Before Impressionism became an art form, the dominant forms were romanticism and realism. **Romanticism** (1780–1850) focused on nature, the goodness of humanity, the promotion of justice, and the emotions and senses. **Realism**, which was prevalent during the second half of the nineteenth century, focused on the working class, peasants, and real-life events and rejected traditional techniques, such as **perspective**. Many of the works of realism were painted using darker colors, challenging the established ideals of beauty. Though these two styles were different in form, the artists of each believed it was important to showcase their art at the Salon

held by the Royal Academy of Art in Paris. The Royal Academy was a place where aspiring artists could improve their technique and display their work for others to see.

Those artists who began the **art movement** of Impressionism in the 1870s—Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet—rejected the official exhibitions that took place in the Royal Academy. In doing so, they were shunned by prestigious academic art institutions. (They couldn't get into a good art school.) Their rejection of the typical exhibitions was only one of the things Impressionists rejected. They also rejected the fine finish and detail of the art at the time. Remember that Realism is the main movement at this point. Instead, Monet and Renoir aimed to capture the moment, the sensory effect, the impression objects made on the eye in a “fleeting instant.” The best way, they believed, to capture this effect was to go out into the streets and the countryside to paint. This was called *en plein air*.

As you can see in *The Houses of Parliament, Sunset* by Claude Monet (on the previous page), it isn't a realistic depiction of the scene that would have been before Monet as he painted. He would have seen this:



Impressionists' works typically focused on subjects from life and the natural world and were painted with short, choppy brushstrokes which **dappled** color onto the canvas. Are you able to see the short, choppy brushstrokes in *The Houses of Parliament, Sunset*? What colors do you see? Why might Monet have used those particular colors?

In 1874, a group of painters decided they would hold their own exhibition, one wholly unconnected from the Royal Academy. This exhibition included artists such as Degas, Monet, Renoir, Morisot, Pissarro, Sisley, Boudin, and Cézanne. There were also sculptors, printmakers, and others who tried to become successful in their art, whichever form it took.

Though this group had departed from the norm in holding their own independent exhibition, it was well attended, especially by the critics. These folks aimed to make fun of this new group and their art style; they were used to the established definition of beauty, which in their eyes included the ability to discern what had been painted. This was one of the paintings in the exhibition:



This is Claude Monet's *Impression Sunrise* (1872). The name for the new art movement—Impressionism—arose because a critic who had looked at this painting dismissed all the art as “mere impressions,” not finished paintings. There have been quite a few times in history when a group of people proudly took on the name given to them that was meant to be an insult by critics or enemies. Take, for instance, “Yankee Doodle Dandy” (<https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/12/short-history-yankee-doodle/>).

Impressionists sought to capture the optical effects of light. They lightened their **palettes** from the dark colors used by the painters of Realism. Often focusing on scenes of public leisure—especially scenes of cafés and cabarets—the Impressionists conveyed the new sense of alienation experienced by the inhabitants of the first modern metropolis: Paris. Perhaps they were also conveying their sense of alienation from the established art society. What do you think?



*Dancers Practicing at the Barre* by Edgar Degas (French, Paris 1834–1917 Paris) via The Metropolitan Museum of Art is licensed under CC0 1.0



*View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph* by Paul Cézanne (French, Aix-en-Provence 1839–1906 Aix-en-Provence) via The Metropolitan Museum of Art is licensed under CC0 1.0

**Choose any or all of the following activities.**

1. Create a timeline, beginning with the period of Romanticism, the period of Realism, and the time span of Impressionism. Pick at least three of the Impressionist artists mentioned and place them on the timeline according to their birthday and/or date of death.
2. Define: Romanticism, Realism, perspective, art movement, *en plein air*, dappled, palettes
3. Some of the main characteristics of Impressionism are: 1) painting *en plein air*, 2) using short, choppy brushstrokes, 3) capturing an impression, and 4) using bright colors. Gather your paint (or whichever medium you are choosing) and recreate this style. Go outside or look outside through a window if it is too cold (or too hot); use short, choppy brushstrokes and bright colors. After you have chosen a subject for your painting, paint the impression the scene has on you. Your art should look like you painted it, not like you were simply trying to copy what another artist did. It should reflect *your* imagination and creativity.
4. Learn more about an American-born Impressionist painter, Mary Cassatt, here: <https://artanddesigninspiration.com/mary-cassatt-independent/>. Make a list of between five and ten interesting facts about her life and painting.
5. Enjoy any of the following unit studies about Impressionist artists found in Everyday Easels (<https://schoolhouseteachers.com/teachers/art/everyday-easels-lessons/>): *Children Playing on the Beach* by Mary Cassatt, 1884; *Young Mother Sewing* by Mary Cassatt, 1900; *Two Young Girls at the Piano* by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1892.
6. If you are interested, and you have your parent's permission, you can watch these videos to learn more about Impressionism:
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyIFzRs4qQ8>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RHGbWBgDvI>
7. Which painting did you like best? Who painted it? Why did you like it? What did you notice first about it? Answer these questions in paragraph form and share some of your other thoughts about this painting.

*SchoolhouseTeachers.com note: Parents should closely monitor children's use of YouTube and Wikipedia if you navigate away from the videos and articles cited in these lessons. We also recommend viewing the videos on a full screen setting in order to minimize your students' exposure to potentially offensive ads and inappropriate comments beside or beneath the video.*