

Art of the Masters

Unit 2 of 6

Winslow Homer (1836-1910)

Winslow Homer was born in Boston in 1836 and grew up in a close, wealthy family. Winslow began drawing at the age of ten, and by eighteen, he was illustrating sheet music covers. He was always open to new ways of seeing the world. He had a deep, romantic feeling about the ocean and the fog.

When he was twenty-one, Winslow did free-lance drawings for *Harper's Weekly*, an American political magazine published from 1857 until 1915. He moved to New York to be near the magazine's headquarters. His illustrations were very well known, and he became known as one of the country's best illustrators. In the early 1860s, *Harper's Weekly* sent him to follow General McClellan's army to cover some of the battles of the Civil War. These sketches became very popular. One of his works was an oil painting titled *Prisoners from the Front* (Appendix 1). It was an instant success and the first painting that made him famous. Critics found it to be very moving.

1. Why do you think this painting appealed so much to the public?

2. What do you think is happening in this painting? How does the landscape contribute to the mood of the scene?

Winslow Homer felt that Americans should stop believing that Europe's art and culture were better than America's, so he was much encouraged when *Prisoners from the Front* proved to be a success. Shortly after this, he and a friend decided to go to Paris to paint. They stayed ten months, working very hard at drawings for *Harper's Weekly*. While there, Winslow was influenced by the work of Eugene Boudin, who did paintings of families at the beach. After returning to this country, Winslow spent time in the Adirondacks in New York and was determined to find inspiration in his native land. He was drawn to typically American subjects, such as men who lived by hunting and fishing. He admired these people and loved painting nature as a dynamic background. An example of this is in his painting *End of the Hunt* (Appendix 2). This painting was thought by some to be glorifying violence because of the manner in which the deer were killed at that time - not by a bullet, but by drowning or clubbing as they were forced to escape the dogs by swimming across a lake.

3. Do you feel this type of hunting was more cruel than others? Explain.

One of Homer's watercolors done in the Adirondacks is *The Berry Pickers* (Appendix 3).

4. Looking at these totally different works, what do they tell you about Homer's personality?

In 1878, Winslow entered his schoolyard painting, *Snap the Whip* (Appendix 4) in an exhibition of American Art in Paris.

In the early 1880s, he went to Tynemouth, a fishing village along the English coast. While there, he did many paintings of the sea and seafolk. It was there that he painted *Lifeline* (Appendix 5), an image of a woman being rescued from drowning. It was one of Homer's most dramatic paintings.

5. What details does Winslow incorporate that add to the dark atmosphere? Pay attention to color, brush stroke, etc.

After his stay in Britain, Winslow settled in Prout's Neck, Maine, where his father had a studio. His first marine oil painting was done in 1890. At times while at Prout's Neck, he would feel discontented and the need to be alone. He needed privacy so much that he put signs on his studio door warning of "SNAKES and MICE!"

6. This need to be alone is common among artists. Why do you think this is so?

After awhile, things did not go well financially. He had to resort to turning out paintings for the masses in order to bring in some revenue. Later on, when things improved, he would occasionally travel to the Bahamas, where he captured the perfect balmy day in watercolor. See *Sponge Fishing* (Appendix 6). The scenes of the sea contrasted greatly with his seascapes of Prout's Neck with their cold and tempestuous Atlantic.

In 1900, the French Government awarded Homer a gold medal and bought his painting *Summer Night*. He had now achieved international recognition. He died in 1910 in his studio at Prout's Neck.

Claude Monet
(1840-1926)

Claude Monet was born in 1840 in Paris, and then moved with his family to Le Havre a few years later. As a child, he loved to do caricatures of his fellow students and actually sold some of them. He was a rather undisciplined youth and his parents had bad feelings about his future. When he went to college in the city, he felt as if he were in prison.

7. Why do you think college felt like a prison to him?

In 1858, Monet met Eugene Boudin, who encouraged him to paint outdoors. Monet eventually adopted this "en plein air" way of painting.

8. Have you ever launched into some new undertaking because of the encouragement of a friend or mentor?

In 1865, Monet submitted his first painting for exhibition. About this time, he also began painting with Renoir and some of the other, better-known French painters of the day.

When Monet was painting toward the end of the century, a new world of inventions, such as electricity and the automobile, were replacing the old. People were confused because of changes in society and unprecedented hedonism (the pursuit of pleasure and sensual self-indulgence), expressed in the increased use of alcohol and drugs and the spread of prostitution. It was at this time that the Impressionists came upon the scene. Impressionism has always been difficult to define. It was a radical change in the way things were painted - based on the belief that a work of art need not necessarily be a replica of physical objects or of nature, but an expression of its own reality - a real thing in itself subject to the laws of art rather than nature. At this time, Monet went to London and created his famous work *Impression Sunrise* (Appendix 7), one of the first of this new style of paintings. After seeing this, people latched onto the word "Impressionism" to define these new paintings. *Impression Sunrise* was entered at the first Impressionist Exhibition in Paris.

9. Does this painting appear peaceful or stormy to you? What painting techniques contribute to this?

10. What do you think is going on in the background of the painting?

In 1883, Monet moved to the country in Giverny, a few miles south of Paris. It was here that he began his series of fifteen *Haystacks* (Appendix 8) in 1891. He painted the same motif at various times of the day, with its atmospheric and light changes bringing about slight nuances in each painting. He was painting the atmosphere. He used delicate shades of pink and gold, light blue and lavender. This series became quite successful. The following year, he did a series of the Rouen Cathedral in northwestern France in the same way.

11. Which one of these three is your favorite and why?

In 1907, at the age of sixty-seven, Monet's eyesight began to fail, but he still went on painting.

12. How might failing eyesight negatively and positively impact his painting? Are there any techniques or features you can think of that he may have relied on when his eyesight was failing?

In 1911, Monet did a series of the *Japanese Bridge* (Appendix 9) on his property at Giverny. The bridge is still there today and tourists can walk across it.

13. Can you think of a quiet place that you would enjoy painting? (If not, make one up!)

Monet spent the last ten years of his life painting his *Water Lilies*. Upon completion, they were donated to the French Government. Two especially designed rooms in the Orangeries, an Impressionist art gallery in Paris, were constructed to house the *Water Lilies*, a series of floor-to-ceiling murals surrounding the room - an incredibly beautiful sight. Standing in the center of these rooms, a viewer feels as if he's in the midst of moving waters containing mysterious plants. This is the last and finest example of decorative art from this period. Half-blind, Claude Monet continued painting almost until the day he died at 86 years of age in 1926. Monet had painted in troubled times, believing that awareness and sensitivity to nature were vital to a meaningful existence.

14. Do you agree with this?

15. Try your hand at an Impressionist work (even if you use just a pencil)!

John Singer Sargent
(1856-1925)

John Singer Sargent was born in 1856 in Florence, Italy, and was the son of a Philadelphia doctor who moved to Europe in retirement. As a child, he traveled throughout Europe with his parents. While in Paris, at the age of nine, he made drawings of the animals in the zoo. He had art lessons and began painting at the age of twelve. He continued traveling with his family and painted while visiting Italy, Switzerland, and France. In 1874 he gained admission to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the premier art school in France. He rented a studio in Paris and continued to paint and travel, meeting famous people, such as Oscar Wilde and Henry James. At this time, he began to paint portraits of the wives and families of famous men. In 1882, he painted *Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (Appendix 10).

16. How is the girls' attitude conveyed in the painting?

Sargent became friends with the Impressionist painters Degas, Renoir, Pissarro, and Monet in particular, whose portrait he did several times. Also, in 1882, he completed *El Jaleo* (Appendix 11), a dramatic painting of a gypsy dancer, and soon became the most talked-about painter in Paris. This painting now hangs in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. It is in the reception hall and is one of the first objects to capture a visitor's attention.

17. Write a short paragraph about what you imagine the Gypsy's life to be like.

Mrs. Gardner had become a patroness of Sargent, who painted a full-length portrait of her.

Sargent created a scandal in Paris in 1884 when he exhibited his portrait *Madam X* (Appendix 12). Because of Madame X's sleeveless gown, among other things, people were commenting that the painting was, "Detestable, monstrous, what a horror!" It offended the morality of the fashionable world of Paris.

18. How would you compare the morality of Paris in 1884 to the morality of United States in current times?

The following year, Sargent went to London and lived in the painter Whistler's studio and became friends with other artists and writers.

19. Do you think the advantages of travel contributed to Sargent's exceptional talent in painting? Is it best to hone in and become familiar with the details of one location, or is it better to paint different parts of the world?

In 1890, Sargent traveled to the United States to work on the murals in the Boston Public Library. In the early 1900s, he received many honors. The British offered him knighthood, but he refused it because of his American citizenship. Harvard University awarded him a Doctor of Arts degree. Oxford University honored him, and France gave him the Legion of Honor award. In 1918, he became an official war artist stationed at the front lines in France.

Works from both Sargent and Homer were exhibited together at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburg. In the early 1920s, while John was in his sixties, he decorated the rotunda and stairwell of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He died shortly after that in 1925.

20. Of the three artists - Homer, Monet, Sargent - whose life would you want to live and why?

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes

Appendices
Art of the Masters: Unit 2 of 6

(Appendix 1) *Prisoners from the Front* c.1866



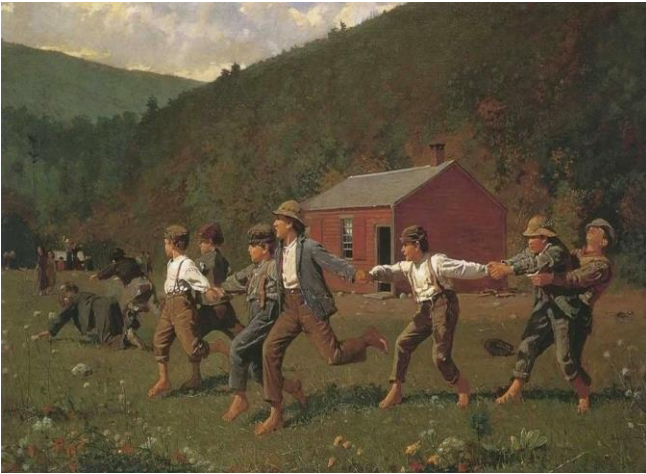
(Appendix 2) *End of the Hunt* c.1892



(Appendix 3) *The Berry Pickers* c.1873



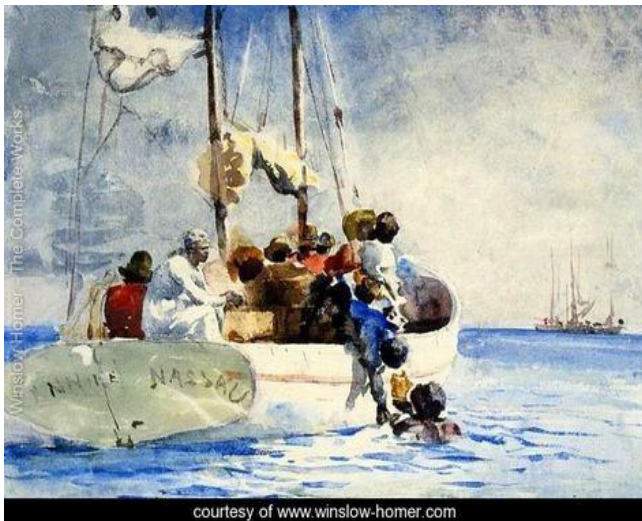
(Appendix 4) *Snap the Whip* c.1878



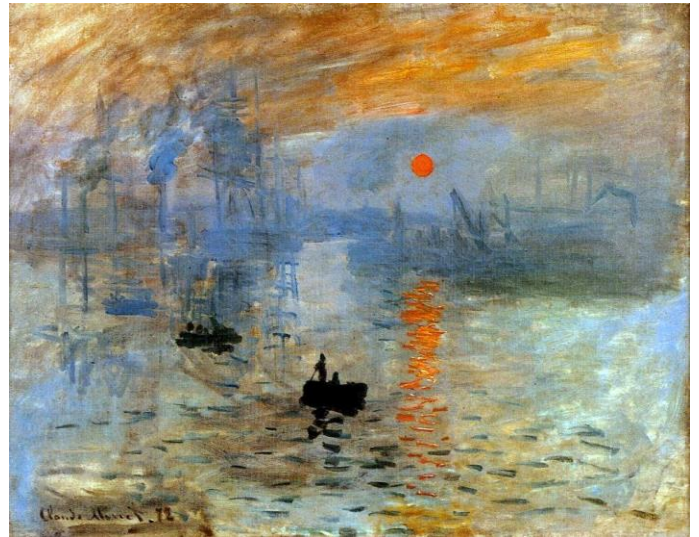
(Appendix 5) *Lifeline* c.1884



(Appendix 6) *Sponge Fishing* c.1885

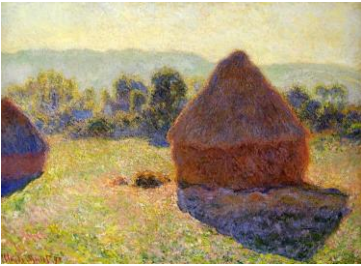


(Appendix 7) *Impression Sunrise* c.1872



(Appendix 8)

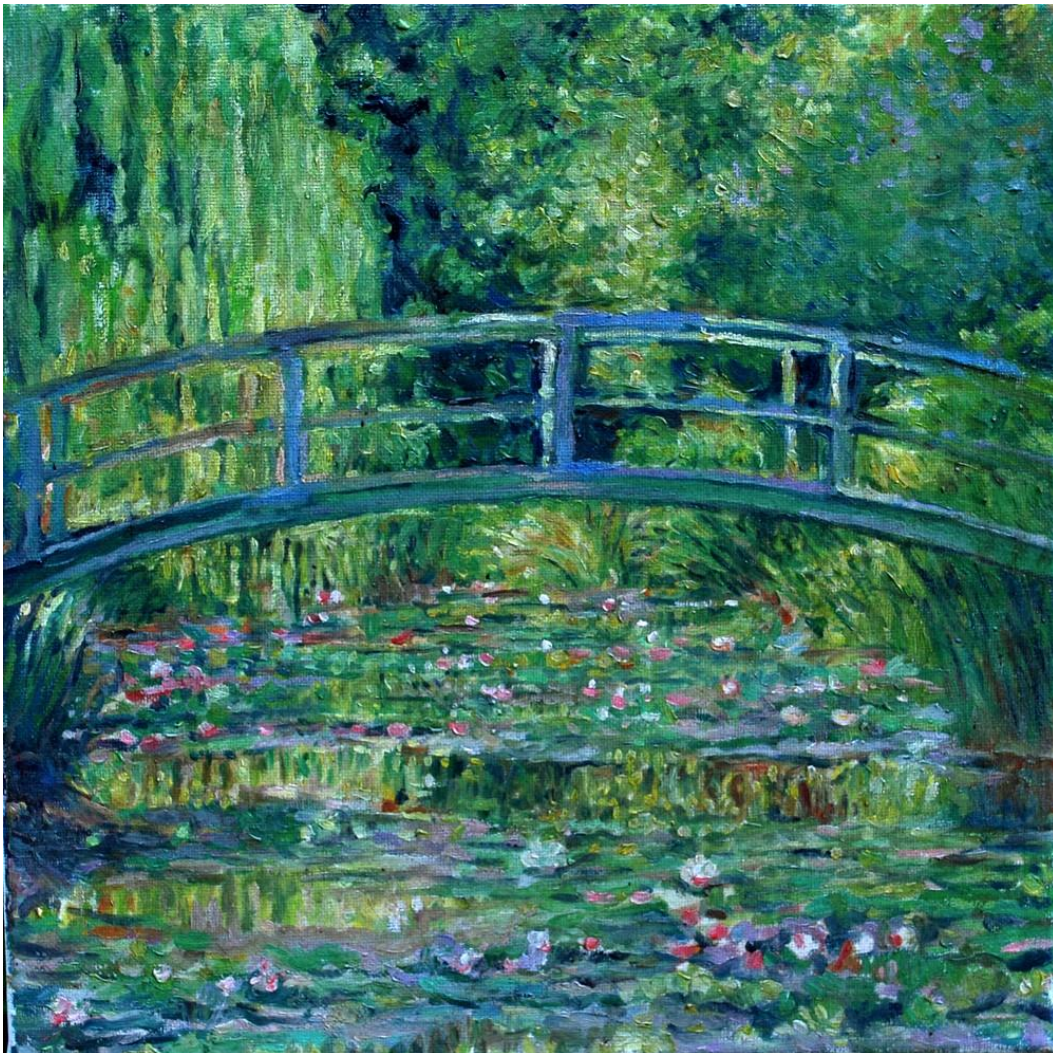
Haystacks, Midday
c.1890



Haystacks at the End of Summer, Morning Effect c.1890



Haystacks, Snow Effect
c.1890-91

(Appendix 9) *Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge* c.1899

(Appendix 10) *Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* c.1882



(Appendix 12) *Madame X.* c.1884



(Appendix 11) *El Jaleo* c.1882

