

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM

STUDENT PREPARATORY PACKET

ART OF FRANCE

Introduction to the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known as one of the world's most remarkable private art collections. Seven centuries of European art dating from the Renaissance to the 20th century are on permanent display, including Old Master paintings by Raphael, Rubens, Zurbarán, Rembrandt and Goya. The Museum also features a celebrated Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection—with paintings by Manet, Monet, Degas, Van Gogh and Cézanne—as well as 20th-century works by Picasso, Matisse and Brancusi. Moreover, the Museum has one of the premier collections of South and Southeast Asian art in the country, spanning a period of 2,000 years.

Curriculum Materials

The following curriculum materials are intended to help prepare your students for their tour. These materials include lesson plans and vocabulary guides for a selection of artworks. You may also find it helpful to visit our [website](#), where you can find information about special exhibitions, podcasts and a collections database with information about individual works of art.

Lesson Overview

Each lesson provides brief background information about the artwork and artist, followed by questions that promote observation and discussion. Suggested classroom activities offer students the opportunity to explore the collection through writing and art-making projects.

Learning Objectives

Students are encouraged to:

- *take time to look closely*
- *describe what they see*
- *connect the visual arts with historical periods and religious traditions*
- *create original artworks focusing on themes and formal elements of art found in works from the Norton Simon Museum*

Curriculum Standards

The materials address content standards for California public schools in visual arts, history–social science and Common Core English-language arts for grades 5–12.

Happy Lovers, c. 1760–5
Jean-Honoré Fragonard
French, 1732–1806
Oil on canvas
35½ x 47¾ in. (90.2 x 121.3 cm)

Fragonard: Painting Pastoral Romance

Jean-Honoré Fragonard was a prolific and hugely popular 18th-century **Rococo** painter. He was known for his paintings of amorous subjects, rendered in his signature fluid, exuberant style and meant to decorate the grandiose homes of the aristocracy.



Key Concepts

Fragonard's paintings radiate harmony, sensuality and merriment. An example of 18th-century **genre painting**, *Happy Lovers* portrays the aristocracy, who were Fragonard's clients, enjoying leisure pursuits.

Happy Lovers was painted during the **Enlightenment**, when European society began to shake off the overpowering traditions of the monarchy and the Church. Here Fragonard portrayed an affectionate encounter that, in practice, was still considered risqué for society.

Fragonard imagined nature as abundant, blooming and unstructured, as a triumph of color over line. His ideal environments underscore the carefree, blissful subjects he portrayed and contribute to the playful character of **Rococo** art that is widely appreciated.

A Closer Look at *Happy Lovers*

- Notice the joyful energy of the composition: the two lovers come together at diagonals, framed by a canopy of foliage and linked by a loving gaze, and there is a sense of abundance that reflects the excess of the French aristocracy in the era leading up to the **French Revolution**.
- The male figure holds a dove—the bird associated with Venus, the Roman goddess of love—to his chest, while the woman holds a birdcage directly over him, signaling her intent to capture his heart. The birdcage, along with her finger-waving gesture, signals that she is in control of the situation and the relationship.
- Here Fragonard continued the tradition of the **pastoral**, which was closely tied to contemporary comic operas and had been reinvented by his former teacher, [François Boucher](#).

Discussion Questions

- How would you describe the mood of the painting? What elements contribute to this mood?
- Compare the style and subject of this painting to that of an earlier **French classical** painting, Poussin's [Camillus and the Schoolmaster of Falerii](#) of 1635, and/or a later French **Impressionist** painting, Degas's [Women Ironing](#) of 1884. How do these paintings differ in style, subject and composition? When you compare these paintings, what changes in French art and culture over time do you see?



Activities

- Write four or five words that come to mind when you look at this painting, and then share your words with the class. Next write a poem or story about the scene using the words you chose to describe it.

Vocabulary

- **Enlightenment:** an intellectual and cultural movement in 18th-century Europe that emphasized reason and individualism over tradition and faith. It promoted scientific thought and the value of the rational.
- **French classical:** the predominant style in 17th-century French art that looked to the classical past for inspiration and often featured classical or religious stories set in rigidly structured and balanced compositions.
- **French Revolution:** a period of radical political and social upheaval in late-18th-century France that developed in reaction to the decadence of the aristocracy.
- **Genre painting:** paintings that depict aspects of everyday life; romanticized in the 18th century.
- **Impressionism:** a movement or style of painting that originated in the 1860s in France, characterized by the use of unmixed colors and small brushstrokes to capture the effects of light and create an “impression” of the subject matter at a given moment.
- **Pastoral:** a form of idealized landscape populated by mock shepherds and shepherdesses in silk dresses, enacting scenes of sentimental love.
- **Rococo:** an artistic movement that arose in 18th-century France, characterized by a florid style of painting that features delicate colors, curving forms and romantic aristocratic subjects, often set in lush landscapes.

PAGE 1:

Camillus and the Schoolmaster of Falerii, c. 1635–40

Nicolas Poussin

French, 1594–1665

Oil on canvas

39³/₈ x 54 in. (100.6 x 137.2 cm)

Women Ironing, Begun c. 1875–1876; reworked c. 1882–1886

Edgar Degas

French, 1834–1917

Oil on canvas

32³/₈ x 29³/₄ in. (82.2 x 75.6 cm)

Baron Joseph-Pierre Violetès de Mortarieu, 1805–6

Jean-Auguste-Pierre-Dominique Ingres

French, 1780–1867

Oil on canvas

24 1/8 x 19 3/4 in. (61.2 x 50.2 cm)

Ingres: Master of Line

A brilliant draftsman with a gift for line, Ingres is regarded as one of the greatest portraitists of the 19th century. Artists as varied as Degas, Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso claimed Ingres as an influence, and the Museum contains two paintings based on his works by [Pablo Picasso](#) and [Georges Seurat](#).



Key Concepts

Precision of line was key to Ingres's approach to art. His scrupulous depictions of his contemporaries leaned toward the intellectual rather than the emotional, reflecting the sober, moral purpose of the **Neoclassical** style and his profound respect for the art of the past.

Few artists succeeded in presenting their subjects as impeccably attired as Ingres. Masterful at capturing surface textures—in this portrait evidenced by the soft curls of hair, the weight of his blue-black coat and the sinuous rhythms of his crisp white collars and cravat—Ingres imposed a clear order over details in this **academic painting**.

Ingres also imposed a geometric order on his compositions. The **baron's** figure is contained within a stable triangle, inside of which is a strict vertical axis—from the curls on his forehead to his aquiline nose and the red accent highlighting his Legion of Honor ribbon. The resulting stability and grandeur harken back to **Renaissance** masters, including [Raphael](#), whom he greatly admired.

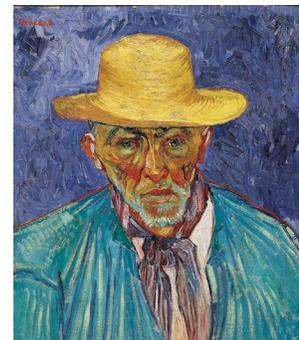


A Closer Look at *Baron Joseph-Pierre Violetès de Mortarieu*

- Ingres was deeply influenced by Italian **Renaissance** painters such as Raphael, and, in addition to the geometric structure of the composition, this influence can be seen in the portrait's **bust-length** format, the clarity of light and color and the sky-filled background.
- The **baron's** status is represented through his impeccable attire, posture and the Legion of Honor ribbon, France's highest award, on his lapel.
- Ingres came to resent his reputation as a gifted portraitist because **portraiture** was then considered frivolous compared to **history painting**, the **genre** for which he aspired to be known.

Discussion Questions

- How realistic do you think this portrait is? What is or isn't lifelike about it?
- Compare this portrait from 1805 to Van Gogh's *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)* from 1889. In what ways are they alike? How are they different? (Topics to consider include the style in which they were painted, color, background, status and dress.)



Activity

- What clues did Ingres give about the character of his subject? Do you think he is important? What makes you think he is or isn't? Looking at this portrait, how would you describe the baron as a person? What do you think his life was like? Write a short story about him based on your observations.

Vocabulary

- **Academic painting:** paintings in the style of the Academie des Beaux-Arts, a fine arts institution in France that determined the art styles in the 19th century.
- **Baron:** a title of honor, often hereditary, among nobility.
- **Bust:** a depiction of a person's head, neck and shoulders, ending at the chest.
- **Genre:** a particular type or category of art.
- **History painting:** a genre depicting serious narratives, often derived from ancient history, that include examples of noble behavior to be emulated. In the Academic tradition, history painting was considered the most important genre.
- **Neoclassical:** art that draws inspiration from the classical art and culture of ancient Greece and Rome. This style of art became increasingly popular in late-18th-century France and was characterized by an emphasis on formal composition, harmony, historic subject matter and monumentality.
- **Portraiture:** a painting or sculpture meant to represent the likeness of a specific person.
- **Renaissance:** a cultural and artistic movement that revived classical art and literature. It spanned from the 14th through the 17th centuries, beginning in Italy and then spreading to the rest of Europe.

PAGE 3:

Madonna and Child with Book, c. 1502–03

Raffaello Sanzio also called Raphael

Italian, 1483–1520

Oil on panel

21¾ x 15¾ in. (55.2 x 40 cm)

Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier), August 1888

Vincent van Gogh

Dutch, 1853–1890

Oil on canvas

25¼ x 21½ in. (64.1 x 54.6 cm)

The Ragpicker, c. 1865–70
Édouard Manet
French, 1832–1883
Oil on canvas
76¾ x 51½ in. (194.9 x 130.8 cm)

Manet: The Painter of Modern Life

Often referred to as “the painter of modern life,” Édouard Manet bridged the transition from **traditional studio practice** to Modern painting. While his subjects and style were considered innovative and even rebellious, he retained an interest in the Old Masters and a desire to gain the approval of the Academy.

Key Concepts

Manet’s *Ragpicker* exemplifies the beginning of Modern painting; it represents a shift from traditional subject matter (biblical or historical themes) to that of everyday, contemporary life.

Manet’s visible **brushwork** and honest subject matter caused the first significant break from **traditional studio practice**, a precedent that was soon followed by his friends Monet, Degas, Renoir and others who came to be known as the **Impressionists**.

Depicting a figure beyond the confines of middle-class values and responsibilities, Manet’s *Ragpicker* suggests the freedom to live outside traditional societal expectations and cultural norms, a reflection of the spirit of liberal urban Paris at the time.



A Closer Look at *The Ragpicker*

- The subject and title of the painting refer to a ragpicker, someone who collected rags to sell to paper manufacturers in the 19th century.
- The painting is one of Manet’s “Four Philosophers” series, which consists of portraits of **beggar-philosophers** inspired by a similar series painted by the 17th-century Spanish master [Diego Velázquez](#). Manet’s depiction of the **beggar-philosopher** does not romanticize the figure but instead shows him hunched over and dirty, with torn clothing and a hardened expression.
- The painting’s near-life-size format made it controversial, as portraits of this scale were normally reserved for subjects of much higher social status.

Discussion Questions

- Describe the man in this painting. How does Manet convey his social status?
- How would you describe Manet’s painting style and the color **palette** he used? What impact do these stylistic choices have on the overall effect of the painting?

Activity

- Compare this painting to a painting of a similar size, [Portrait of Theresa, Countess Kinsky](#), by Marie-Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. Discuss how these two works are similar, and identify some differences. (Topics to consider include dress, background, level of realism and tone.) Then write a short story about Countess Kinsky and the Ragpicker. How might their lives be different? How do you think they would interact?



Vocabulary

- **Beggar-philosopher:** a poor person who lives a seminomadic life free from middle-class concerns and thus is able to focus on less worldly and loftier philosophical thoughts; the beggar-philosopher was a popular concept in literature and art.
- **Brushwork:** the manner in which a painter applies paint with a brush.
- **Impressionism:** a movement or style of painting that originated in the 1860s in France, characterized by the use of unmixed colors and small brushstrokes to capture the effects of light and create an “impression” of the subject matter at a given moment.
- **Palette:** the range of colors used in a particular painting.
- **Traditional studio practice:** paintings in the style of the Academie des Beaux-Arts, a fine arts institution in France that determined the acceptable art styles in the 19th century.

ABOVE:

Portrait of Theresa, Countess Kinsky, 1793

Marie-Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun

French, 1755–1842

Oil on canvas

54 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (137.5 x 100.0 cm)

The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil, 1881

Claude Monet

French, 1840–1926

Oil on canvas

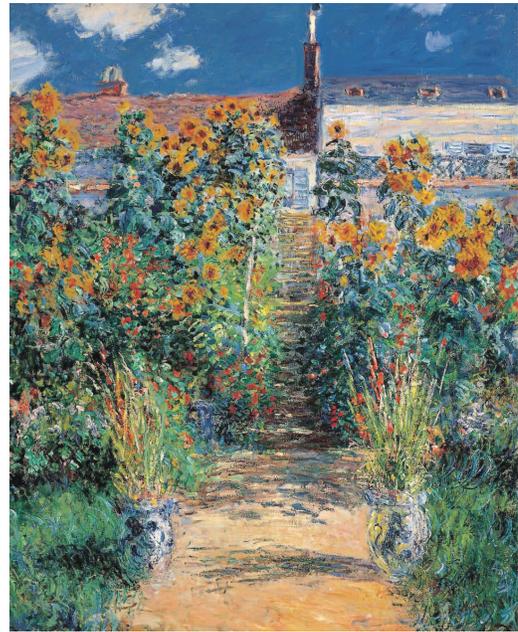
39½ x 32 in. (100.3 x 81.3 cm)

Monet: Painter of the Moment

Claude Monet was a key figure in the Impressionist movement. In the increasingly fast-paced world of 19th-century France, his desire to capture a single moment through the filter of personal experience had special relevance, calling attention to the transience of modern life.

Key Concepts

Monet's desire to capture the ephemeral atmospheric effects outdoors, or *en plein air*, exemplifies the goals of the Impressionists.



Monet's quick, dappled brushwork was a standard for the Impressionists, and it defined a break from the **Realism** of the past and led to the free brushwork of the Postimpressionists, as seen in the paintings of Vincent van Gogh (also in this packet), [Paul Gauguin](#) and [Édouard Vuillard](#).

This painting is one of four Monet painted of the [same subject](#), and these serialized images—of the same subject portrayed under different atmospheric conditions and at different times of day—are a hallmark of his work. He also made series of haystacks, poplars and the Rouen Cathedral.

A Closer Look at *The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil*

- The influence of [Japanese Prints](#) is visible in the way Monet tilted the ground upward, raising the horizon line to show more of the garden, and in the variety of his brushstrokes, from dots to long dashes.
- If you look closely at the painting, there are no clear outlines or divisions between subjects. The surface of the painting is defined purely by shifts in color and the character of brushstrokes.
- Monet often applied flat expanses of pure, unmixed color directly to the canvas straight from the tube. A number of 19th-century innovations, including paint tubes, allowed artists to paint outdoors and work with more intensely colored synthetic paints that required less advance preparation.



Discussion Questions

- Monet gave the following advice to young artists: “When you go to paint, try to forget what objects you have before you. Merely think, ‘Here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow,’ and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact color and shape, until it gives your own naive impression of the scene before you.” What evidence do you see of his philosophy in this landscape?
- The **emergence of photography** forced artists like Monet to think about painting as something more than an illusionistic representation of people, places and events. What do you think Monet added to his painting to distinguish it from a photograph? How is Impressionism a reaction to photography (see definition below)?

Activity

- Write a letter to someone, like your parents or a friend, as if you are in the painting. Describe what you are doing, where you are, what it feels like and what you see.

Vocabulary

- **Emergence of photography:** black-and-white photography was invented in the mid-19th century. It changed one purpose of painting—as a means of capturing appearances—and freed artists to experiment with new, more expressive and less naturalistic techniques.
- **En plein air:** a French expression meaning “in the open air” used to describe the act of painting outdoors, a practice that became more prevalent in the mid-19th century due to the invention of premade tubes of paint.
- **Japanese prints:** in the mid-19th century Japan opened its ports to the West, and Western artists were strongly influenced by the compositions, patterns, colors and subjects of Japanese *ukiyo-e prints* and woodblock prints.
- **Realism:** an artistic movement in which artists attempted to represent things truthfully, as they were, and produce unidealized images of everyday subjects.

PAGE 7:

Asukayama Mountain, Edo, 1858

Ando Utagawa Hiroshige

Japanese, 1797–1858

ōban tate-e, sheet: 14³/₁₆ x 9⁷/₁₆ in. (36.4 x 24.0 cm)

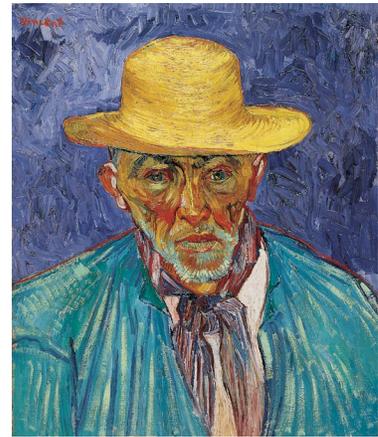
Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier), 1888

Vincent van Gogh

Dutch, 1853–1890

Oil on canvas

25¼ x 21½ in. (64.1 x 54.6 cm)



Van Gogh: Expressive Color

Vincent van Gogh was a **Post-Impressionist** painter known for his thick, colorful and expressive style. In 1888 he moved to the South of France and was inspired by the strong light and colors there.

Key Concepts

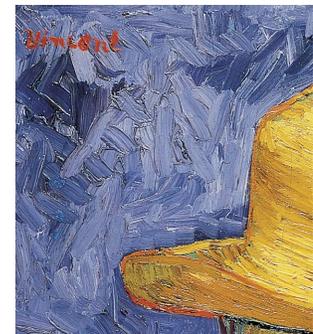
Van Gogh described his vibrant palette “as a means of arriving at the expression and the intensification of character;” this approach liberated him from the use of color for purely representational reasons.

This portrait represents a return to the depiction of peasants, whom Van Gogh had painted years earlier in his native Netherlands. He felt they expressed authenticity and honesty in contrast to the decadence and corruption exhibited by Parisians.

The **expressionist** use of color (which emphasizes feeling over actual appearance) was his most significant legacy. It influenced Henri Matisse and the **Fauves**, the **German Expressionists** and even **Jackson Pollock** and the American **Abstract Expressionists**.

A Closer Look at Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)

- The subject is a peasant named Patience Escalier, an old gardener and former goatherd who reminded Van Gogh of his father. Van Gogh painted him two times using different color palettes.
- Notice how Van Gogh changed his brushstrokes to create the pulsating background and the rough **texture** of the straw hat. In some places the painting is more like a **relief** than a flat painting.
- Van Gogh used **complementary colors** such as yellow-orange and blue-violet to create visual interest and a timeless, spiritual quality.



Discussion Questions

- What colors do you see in the painting, and where do you see them? Is there anything about the use of color in this portrait that surprises you?
- What can you learn about Patience Escalier from this painting?

Activity

- Paint a self-portrait in which you use color to express something about yourself, such as your tastes, mood or personality. Then write a short description of why you chose the colors that you did.

Vocabulary

- **Abstract Expressionism:** a movement or style of painting that originated in the United States in the 1940s and used gestural abstraction to express the artist's innermost feelings.
- **Complementary colors:** any two colors that are directly opposite each other on the color spectrum, such as red and green or purple and yellow. These opposing colors create maximum contrast and, when combined in the right proportions, produce a neutral color.
- **Expressionist:** art filtered through the subjective feelings of an artist toward his subject.
- **German Expressionism:** an art movement that originated in Germany before World War I and reached its peak in the 1920s; it presented the world from a subjective perspective, distorting it for emotional effect.
- **Post-Impressionism:** an art movement that originated in France in the late 19th century in reaction against the naturalism of Impressionism. Post-Impressionist artists emphasized symbolic content, formal order and structure.
- **Relief:** a sculpture in which objects project outward from a flat supporting background.
- **Texture:** the surface quality of a painting created by the artist's choice and handling of materials. It can be smooth, rough, polished, matte, etc.

Woman with a Guitar, 1913

Pablo Picasso

Spanish, 1881–1973

Oil on canvas

39⁵/₈ x 32¹/₈ in. (100 x 81.6 cm)

Picasso: The Most Influential Artist of the 20th Century

Pablo Picasso is known for his experimentation and mastery of many styles over his long career. Under the influence of Cézanne, Picasso and his colleague Georges Braque developed **Cubism**, which uses highly **abstract** geometric forms to emphasize the flatness of their paintings.



Key Concepts

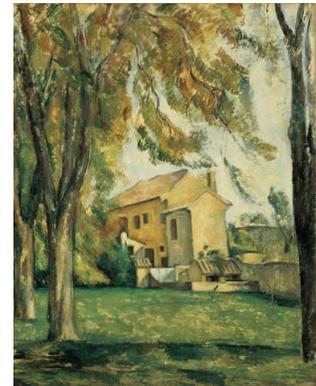
Cubism is the most transformative style of art of the 20th century, and Picasso was its biggest proponent.

Cubism wrestled with representing the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional canvas, openly exploring painting's formal qualities (balance, composition, color, line, scale, shading, texture and volume).

In these early **Cubist** works, Picasso juxtaposed flat areas of color against highly modeled surfaces and provided multiple viewpoints of the same object.

A Closer Look at *Woman with a Guitar*

- The painting consists of a series of flat shapes and black lines arranged to overlap like a **collage** within a shallow, relief-like space.
- If you look closely, you will recognize fragments of the woman's head and the guitar's body. Figures and musical instruments were favorite motifs of **Cubist** paintings.
- Like Cézanne before him, Picasso left blank canvas visible in the background to remind the viewer that this is a painting rather than a naturalistic representation, and yet elsewhere he attempted to create the illusion of marble.



Discussion Questions

- Do you recognize any of the objects or figures named in the title of the painting? The woman and her guitar are simplified and fractured into shapes, so viewers can see them from multiple perspectives at once. You can see part of her head and hand as well as the curves and sound hole of the guitar.
- Picasso often restricted himself to near-**monochromatic** palettes of brown, black and gray. Why do you think he chose these colors? What effect does this have on the painting and the way you look at it?

Activity

- Cut out objects from magazines and patterned paper for a **collage** and then cut these various components into geometric shapes. Then glue your cutouts on paper to create a geometric **collage** that plays with shape and pattern.

Vocabulary

- **Abstract art:** art in which only some of the visual elements resemble subjects taken from the natural world, and artworks that fall only partially, if at all, into what is commonly understood to be representational.
- **Collage:** a technique of creating a work of art by gluing various materials on a flat surface.
- **Cubism:** a style of art in which subjects are reduced and fractured into geometric forms and then realigned within a shallow, relief-like space. Cubists also often used multiple or contrasting viewpoints so that several sides of an object could be seen simultaneously.
- **Monochromatic:** consisting of shades of one color rather than a range of different colors.

PAGE 11:

Farmhouse and Chestnut Trees at Jas de Bouffan, 1884–1885

Paul Cézanne

French, 1839–1906

Oil on canvas

36 1/8 x 28 1/16 in. (91.8 x 72.9 cm)