



Introduction

To



Impressionism

And

Acrylic Painting

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REBEL PAINTERS: IMPRESSIONISTS

At the time the Impressionist painters began their careers, the commonly accepted style of painting was very conventional, very realistic oil paintings. These paintings were very meticulously done, and the subjects were portraits or historical, religious, or mythological themes. The colors tended to be somber. In order to be successful, an artist had to be displayed at the Salon in France. This was an annual showcase of art. In order to have a painting displayed there, an artist had to be voted as acceptable by a group from the Salon called a jury.

Impressionists rebelled against the old way of painting. They wanted to paint in the open air, and make airy, sketchy, bright pictures. Instead of meticulous details, they were content to make “impressions” of an object or person, letting a few lines or strokes of color represent the object. To the French Salon, this seemed ridiculous and childish. They refused to exhibit most of the paintings.



When thousands of works were rejected by the Salon jury in 1863, the Emperor of France ordered that all of the rejected works of art should be shown in another show called “The Salon of the Rejected”. The two shows could not have been more different. Eventually, critics of the show took the name “impressionism” from one of the paintings called *Impression, Sunrise*, by Claude Monet.

In 1874, frustrated by the criticism and lack of recognition by the Salon, they boycotted the Salon and held a privately organized show of their own. From April to May 1874, thirty members of a newly organized Societe Anonyme des Artistes Peintres Graveurs exhibited their art.





The purpose of this unit is to:

Introduce students to Impressionism

Introduce students to the art of Claude Monet

Allow students to paint in the style of the Impressionists

Experience acrylic paint techniques

Students are frequently frustrated by their inability to “make something look real”. The great thing about Impressionism is that here an artist is striving to portray the “sense” of something, rather than every little detail. I have found that often younger children are more adept at this than older ones.

Outstanding art ability or not, students will have fun and success creating these paintings.





A New Way of Painting: Claude Monet, Impressionist

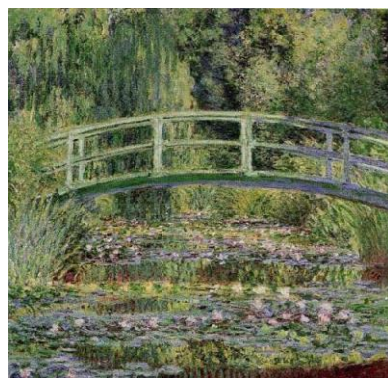
Claude Monet was born in Paris, France, in 1840, and lived until 1926.

It is one of his paintings—*Impression, Sunrise*—that gave the group its name. He started as a caricaturist, but later changed to landscape painting.

Monet's devotion to painting out of doors can be seen in a famous story. One of his early works is called Women in the Garden. This painting is about 7 feet high. In order to paint all of it outside he had a trench dug in the garden so that the canvas could be raised or lowered by pulleys to the height he required. A fellow painter said that he would not even paint the leaves in the background if the lighting conditions were not exactly right.



Monet traveled around England and France. He painted the Thames River and London parks, and eventually moved to Giverny, France. His outdoor scenes included boats, bodies of water, and gardens.



As he grew older he began several series of canvases for which he is very famous. One is a series of haystacks, that he painted and repainted under different lighting conditions and from different angles. Another series was of his water-garden at Giverny. They show water-lilies. He also painted many bridge scenes. Many of these paintings are huge: they are taller than the height of a man.



Monet, Claude

Painting with Acrylics

The original Impressionists used oil paints. But we are going to use Acrylic paints. Acrylics work much like oil paints, but they wash up with soap and water. Acrylic paints came into general use in the 1960s, and have become very popular due to their extreme versatility.



Acrylics dry relatively quickly, so you don't have to wait much before painting the next layers. This makes them great for limited time art classes, and students can keep busy. The film formed by acrylics is more flexible than that of other media and is unlikely to crack and peel off.

Acrylics are resistant to water once dry, which means the artist can paint over a mistake once the mistake is dry. Color cannot be dissolved with a damp brush as it can with watercolor.

Acrylics can be thinned with water, and the brushes can be cleaned with soap and water. Simply put a little dish-washing soap in the palm of your hand, and swirl the brush in that. Now rinse thoroughly.

When used straight from the tube, acrylics have a consistency much like that of oil paint. They will keep the impression of the brush or knife you are using, so it is possible to make a variety of textural effects.

Acrylics can also be thinned with water to make them transparent like water colors.





10 Acrylic Painting Tips for Beginners

Practical painting tips for anyone starting to use acrylics.

Acrylic Painting Tip 1: Squeeze only a little paint out of a tube onto a damp palette. Acrylics dry very fast. To keep them moist, you can spray the paint with a light mist with a squirt bottle. Or, put them on a damp palette. PLAN your painting before you squeeze out paint. Cheap paper plates can be dampened and work well.

Acrylic Painting Tip 2: Blot your Brushes.

Keep a piece of paper towel or cloth next to your water jar and get into the habit of wiping your brushes on it after you rinse them. This prevents water drops from running down the brush and onto your painting, making blotches.



Acrylic Painting Tip 3: Opaque or Transparent.

If applied thickly either straight from the tube or with very little water added, or if mixed with a little white, all acrylic colors can be opaque. This means they will be thick, and you can't see through them. If diluted with water, they can be used with air brushes and will appear transparent.

Acrylic Painting Tip 4: Acrylic Washes.

A wash is a transparent layer usually put down as a background. When an acrylic wash dries, it's permanent and is insoluble and can be over-painted without fear of disturbing the existing color. The colors of the next washes will optically mix with the earlier ones. If you make a mistake and the paint is still wet, blot it off with a paper towel. If not, wait until it is dry to paint over it.





Acrylic Painting Tip 5: Think Thin When Thinking Glazes.

If you want transparent glazes, these should be built up in thin layers; a heavy layer will produce a glossy surface.

Acrylic Painting Tip 6: Improve Flow Without Losing Color.

If you don't like the consistency of your paints, you can increase the flow of a color by adding flow-improver mediums rather than just water.





Acrylic Painting Tip 7: Blending Acrylic Paints.

Because acrylics dry rapidly, you need to work fast if you wish to blend colors. You need to work with a damp palette. If you are painting on paper, dampening the paper will get you more time.

Acrylic Painting Tip 8: Hard Edges.

Masking tape can be put onto and removed from dried acrylic paint without damaging an existing layer. This makes it easy to produce a hard or sharp edge. Make sure the edges of the tape are stuck down firmly on DRIED paint, and don't paint too thickly on the edges; otherwise you won't get a clean line when you lift it. Tape may be difficult to remove if it goes down on bare paper or canvas; so make sure there is gesso or paint underneath.



Acrylic Painting Tip 9: Brush Care

Keep a cup of water handy for keeping brushes in as you switch from brush to brush. When your session is ended, wash brushes thoroughly as soon as possible with soap and lots of water. Whatever you don't get out will ruin your brush!

Acrylic Painting Tip 10: Using Acrylic Paint as a Glue for Collage

Provided it's used fairly thickly and the item to be stuck isn't too heavy, acrylic paint will work as a glue in a collage.



Making a Moisture-Retaining Palette for Acrylic Paint

You can make rather than buy an acrylic paint palette that will keep acrylic paints wet during and between painting sessions.

I. SIMPLE AND CHEAP

For kids' art sessions, paper plates work fine. Buy the cheap paper plates. Give each student a stack of four or five. Moisten the top one by running water over it or dipping it in a bucket. Pouring water from a cup does not work well. Put it back on the stack of plates. Put the paint directly on the damp plate.

If you intend to water the paints down, it might be a good idea to use a Styrofoam plate under the paper ones. For clean up, simply pick up the top plate or two and throw away.



There are also interlocking plastic plates that may make it possible to save paint from one session to the next. If you try this, you might want to add additional water to a plate underneath.

II. A PALETTE TO KEEP COLORS LONGER

If you don't want to buy one of the various moisture-retaining palettes available at art stores, it's quite simple to make your own. The advantage (besides cost) is that you can use a container that's the exact size you want, rather than having to make do with the sizes available.

❖ What You Need:

- A shallow plastic container with a tight-fitting lid, such as a food-storage container or lunchbox. It doesn't matter what shape it is, but look for one that's quite shallow rather than deep.
- A piece of watercolor paper. It doesn't matter what kind, though a thicker sheet works best as it holds more water.
- Greaseproof paper (baking parchment). Buy a roll, because you'll replace this every time you clean your palette.
- A pencil.





- Scissors.

❖ **What You Do:**

- Cut a piece of watercolor paper to fit in the bottom of the plastic container. The easiest way to get a good fit is to place the plastic container on the sheet of watercolor paper, trace around it with the pencil, then cut just inside the line.
- Cut a piece of greaseproof paper the same size.
- Soak the piece of watercolor paper in clean water, then put it in the bottom of the plastic container.
- Moisten the sheet of greaseproof paper and put it on top of the sheet of watercolor paper.
- Squeeze out your acrylic paints onto the greaseproof paper and start painting.
- When you've finished a painting session, simply put on the lid of the container to keep the acrylics moist until you next pick up your brushes.

❖ **Tips:**

- If you haven't got a suitable plastic container, you can use a baking tray or deep plate and plastic film instead. The disadvantage of using plastic film rather than a stiff plastic lid is that it's likely to touch the paint and so be more messy to take off and replace.
- If the sheet of watercolor paper begins to dry out, lift one corner, pour in a teaspoon or two of water underneath, then gently tip the palette so the water runs under the paper.
- If you cut the piece of greaseproof paper slightly smaller than the piece of watercolor paper, you needn't lift the sheets to remoisten the watercolor paper.

III. COMMERCIAL PALETTES

Various art supply companies have produced moisture-retaining acrylic palettes to solve this problem; the best-known is [Daler-Rowney's Stay-Wet™ Palette](#).





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How to Hold a Paint Brush: Option 1 -- Like a Pencil

You can pick up an artist's brush and hold it in your hand in the same way you would a pencil or pen, with your fingers close to the ferrule. If you never hold a brush in any other way, you'll be limiting the range of marks you create with a brush. But you will have a lot of control.

This is the most instinctive way to hold a brush, as it gives us a familiar sense of control. Using your wrist to move a brush held this way provides fine control, suitable for making precise marks. For even greater control, rest the side of your hand or your little finger on the canvas (protect your work by putting a sheet of paper under your hand if necessary). For more flowing marks, use your whole arm not just your wrist



Option 2 -- Wrap Your Hand Around It

This way of holding a brush will probably feel strange at first, but it encourages you to use your whole arm to paint, not just your wrist and hand. Turn your hand palm up, rest the paint brush handle across your fingers, from where the little finger starts to the first knuckle in your forefinger, then wrap your fingers





and thumb around the handle.

Paint energetically, moving your arm and shoulder, not just your wrist. Also consider how far down the handle you are holding the brush. Don't strangle it! Experiment with moving your hand further down the handle, all the way to the end, making a note of the results. Buy a long-handled brush and work at arm's length from your canvas.

Most artists work on large canvases. You will probably have a small paper. Experiment with different techniques to see which one fits your needs.





Lesson One: An Impressionist's Flower

Learning about backgrounds and foregrounds and shading

Needed: palettes, acrylic paints, large brushes, acrylic paper, water, pencils.

Teacher Notes: *Prepare a palette in one of the three ways described above. Acrylics can be used on just about any surface; however, acrylic paper works the best for this project. It can be bought in Walmart for about 40 cents a sheet or less.*

Acrylic paints are very safe but they are not meant to be eaten. Emphasize to students that they are to try to keep their hands clean. For really messy students, you may want to consider disposable gloves.



Talk about foreground and background. If you use three sizes of any shape, you can demonstrate how, in order to see things in the foreground, you must paint from background forward. Emphasize that things in the foreground will block part of the background.

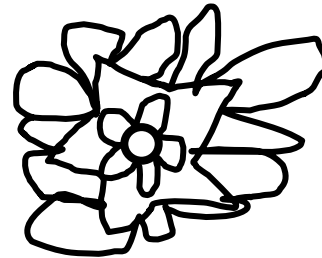
Find the approximate center of the paper. It does not matter which way the paper is held.

Draw a circle in the center. Now put "petals" around the center. Make them large! You may use different shapes, but don't make them too small!





Next, make several more alternating rows, until you are almost out to the edges.



Now, decide what main color you want, and add that color to your palette. Put a little black and white on the edges of your palette and experiment with what shades you get. But don't blend too much; part of the interest in your painting will be from the brush strokes and shading.

Begin by painting with broad strokes on the **OUTERMOST** petals. Add white or black for another shade for the next row. Each time you come to another row, change the color shade. Use yellow for the center.





Paint fairly rapidly! Remember, you are an impressionist! Do not get hung up on very small details. Let the thickness of the paint add some texture.



You may want to try several versions of the flower over the next few weeks. Try one that uses only one color, but with different shades of the color.

Try a flower with different colors that go together, like blue and purple, or red and orange.

Or try colors that clash: orange and blue, or pink and orange. Try making the paint ultra thick, leaving ridges and texture to your painting.

Whatever you do, make it colorful and bright! And even though it might only slightly resemble a real flower, people will still know it is a flower. That's impressionism!



A Gallery





Lesson Two: *Impressionist's Sea*

Learning to do washes

On a piece of acrylic paper, draw a faint horizon line about one-third of the way from the bottom. Keep the line light!

On a clean palette, put a small blob of blue paint. Add a few teaspoons of water and stir with the brush. Brush across the **BOTTOM** of the paper, below the line. This should not end up as a solid color.

Next, add a few more teaspoons of water (no more paint) to the mixture. It will get more transparent. Now brush this **ABOVE** the line on the **TOP** of the paper.



Next, get some white and add clouds to the sky and "whitecaps" to the sea. Explain that the paint can be thinned to make wispy clouds or put on thick for puffy clouds. If a student feels that a really bad mistake has been made, use a damp paper towel to blot it off. (If you wait until it dries, you can also paint over it.)



You will probably want to dump the paint palettes while the painting is drying.

While the painting is drying, practice sketching a boat or a simple island or bird. Our focus for this lesson is learning to do washes, not sketching boats, so a detailed lesson about sailboats does not need to be taught. However, you may want to sketch a few boat shapes for the students.

Impressionism A Unit Of Acrylic Painting



Paintings do not need to be completely dry before you begin painting boats; if you have not soaked the paper, they can be fanned dry or placed in a sunny spot where they will dry rapidly.

Now, start with a new palette (remember to dampen it!), and assemble the colors that you want for the boat. Sails do not have to be white. (Discourage the skull and crossbones or specific flags.)





Keep sketches simple, mere outlines. Your paint will add the details.



GALLERY







Lesson Three: Walkway to the Sea

Vanishing Point using masking tape

This lesson will probably take several class periods, because it needs drying time. For best results, use a piece of acrylic paper that has been painted white and allowed to dry. However, this lesson can be done without preparing the paper. The tape may stick.



Place a paper in the "portrait" position.

Draw a line about one-third from the top of the paper.

Now, use masking tape to make a "ladder" toward the line. This should be in an inverted "V" shape to form a vanishing point out somewhere on the top of the paper. But the tape should stop at the line.



When that is completed, decide whether you would like to do a garden or a sandy beach.

You will paint right over the masking tape!!



If you are doing a sandy beach, paint the lower part of the paper in sandy, yellowish tones. Paint the upper part in blues.

If you are doing a garden, paint the lower part of the paper in green tones. Paint the upper part in blues.



Let this background dry.



Impressionism A Unit Of Acrylic Painting



Next, on the dry background, paint flowers, shrubs, grasses, trees, or seashells—whatever you want. Again, paint over the masking tape. Let dry.



When the paint is thoroughly dry, CAREFULLY pull off the masking tape. Display your "Walkway to the Sea"

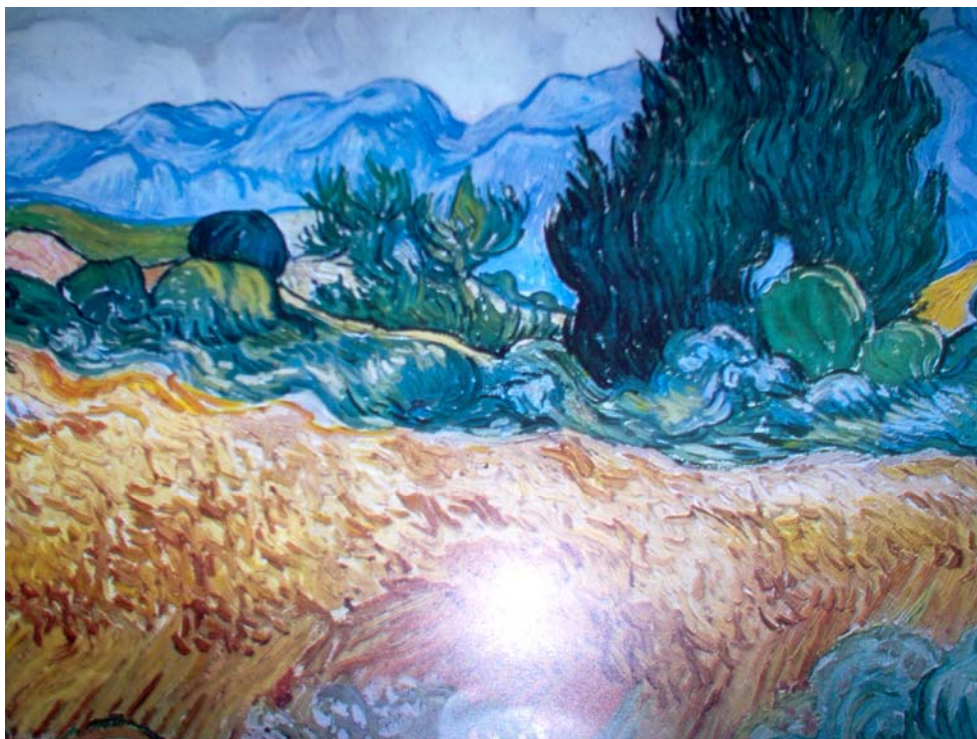




Lesson Four: Pumpkins Go Van Gogh

The colorful oranges of pumpkins against the swirl of a Van Gogh background.

Vincent Van Gogh is another famous impressionist. Van Gogh's paintings got more and more abstract the longer he painted. He is famous for cutting off his own ear. Today, it is thought that the lead in his oil paints may have caused brain damage. The acrylic paints that you are using do not have lead in them.



Look at this Van Gogh painting carefully. Can you recognize the trees, the shrubs, a wheat field, and mountains?

Even though they are not realistic, you still know what they are.

Notice the bold strokes and swirls that Van Gogh uses.

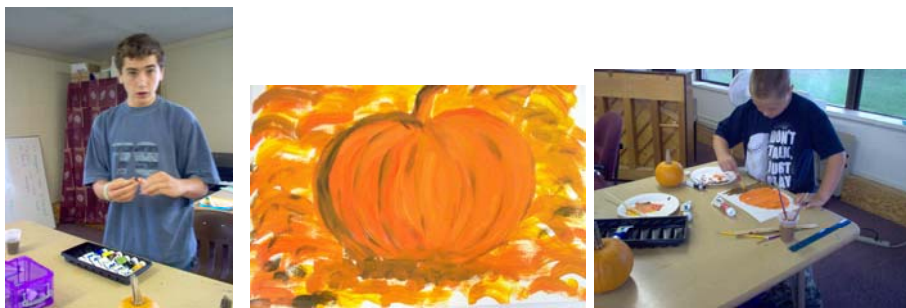




It would be nice if you had a pumpkin to look at for this project.
Put your paper in landscape position.

Now, sketch a nice, big pumpkin.
Remember, do not make the pencil marks too thick.

Your paint set may not have orange colors. You can make orange by starting with yellow and adding a little red. It only takes a little red to turn the yellow orange.



Usually, we start by doing a background first. But this time, we want to make the pumpkins "pop" out at us. **So begin by painting your pumpkin!**

You can see from the pictures that these students used several techniques. Some students outlined the segments. Others painted the segments more subtly. And one student made his very abstract.



Give the pumpkin a few minutes to dry.
Now, think of "fall colors": the colors of the leaves.

Paint your background in these colors with broad swirls and bright colors. Paint as near to the pumpkin as you can, but don't paint on it. You may add leaves or vines.





The Gallery





Lesson Five: Art Appreciation

Appreciating one of Monet's paintings



Claude Monet (mow-NAY)

French, 1840-1926

The Cliff at Fécamp, 1881

Oil on canvas

25 5/8 x 32 in.

Picture owned by:

Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums,
Aberdeen, Scotland.





As you read this information, jot down the terms, places, or people that you do not know. Some suggestions for research are underlined. It will help you understand the painting and the artist.

This cliff painting is one of a series created at Grainval, just south of Fécamp on the Normandy coast. It reflects the artist's philosophy that "landscape is nothing but an impression - an instantaneous one." Monet waited and watched the shifting sun and shadows and then quickly brushed in the moment he wanted. He liked to paint the same scene many times so he could study the effects of changing light and weather. Children frequently trailed the artist and carried his canvases.

The writer Guy de Maupassant also followed Monet in his quest for impressions and vividly described the artist's gifts: "He would pick up with a few strokes of his brush the falling sun ray or the passing cloud, leaving aside the false and conventional. I saw him seize a sparkling downpour of light on the white cliff and fix it in a shower of yellow tones which made the effect of this fleeting and blinding marvel seem strangely astonishing."

This painting is Monet's reaction to a brisk spring day at Fécamp, as the breeze ruffles the sea, and clouds tumble by in a luminous sky. Like a true Impressionist, he has applied *brush strokes* of brilliant blue, green, and yellow in contrasting patterns. There is no evidence of human habitation, although some people say they see animals suggested in the cliffs.

Notice the off-center composition of the cliffs against the sea. Like other Impressionists, Monet was probably influenced by the asymmetrical compositions of popular Japanese woodblock prints.

Technological advances such as portable easels, and metal tubes that stored paint indefinitely allowed Impressionists like Monet to take extended painting trips outdoors. A wide range of pigments was also available, though Monet used a small, typical Impressionist palette of eight to ten colors. "The real point," he wrote a friend, "is to know how to use the colors."

Observation

(photographs of cliffs)

Describe the shapes that you see. What shapes are repeated?
Notice brushstrokes of warm colors next to brushstrokes of cool colors.





Name two colors that contrast, and tell where they contrast.

Do you see any outlines?

Look carefully at the textures of the plants, rocks, water, and sky. How do the brushstrokes describe different textures?

Math or Science

Scientists John Dalton, Stanisloa Cannizzaro, and Amedeo Avogadro all worked in Europe at the same time as the Impressionists did. The Impressionist painters were interested in how smaller parts (like brushstrokes, bits and blobs of paint, and colored dots) make up the whole (a painting). The scientists made discoveries about atoms (smaller parts) and matter (the whole).

Have the students make four headings on their paper: **gas**, **liquid**, **solid**, **other**. Next, analyze this whole painting by listing its smaller parts. Write under each of these four headings the parts that apply to it. For example, list **breeze**, **air**, and **atmosphere** under the heading of **gas**. Use the same headings and analyze other works of art.

Language Arts

Tell the students to imagine jumping into the painting. How would it feel to be on these cliffs? What would the ground feel like? Is it warm or cool? Where is the light coming from? How does the scene smell? How is the weather? Ask the students to explain their thoughts by writing a paragraph that describes the experience of jumping into the painting.

Social Studies

Do a search for the names of other artists who were Impressionists. Make a powerpoint about an artist and feature some of his or her paintings.

Pick a twenty- year span in the Impressionist period, and research what was going on in France at that time.



Art

Experiment on a plate with putting strokes of different colors next to each other. Then stand back a distance and look at them. Which effects do you like?





Now, paint a landscape using strokes next to each other in order to produce the effects of waves, mountains, trees, or grasses.



Bibliography and Resources

Places to Look for More Information on Impressionism and artists

<http://creativeartist.com/decArts/beginningLandscapes.asp>

<http://www.impressionism.org/>

<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/theme/impressionnisme.html>

http://www.alifetimeofcolor.com/study/g_impressionism.html

About.com: Painting

This is a great site that has many articles about painting.

http://painting.about.com/od/acrylicpainting/Painting_With_Acrylics.htm

http://painting.about.com/od/colourtheory/ss/color_theory.htm

Video about various painting topics

http://painting.about.com/od/paintingforbeginners/youtube/painting_knife.htm





Impressionism Paintings Collected by European Museums: A Resource Packet for Educators, by The High Museum of Art, The Seattle Art Museum, The Denver Art Museum

