

Title of the Teaching Unit

“impressionism”

Level

CEFR: B1/B2

Grade, type of school and course

Objectives

Intended knowledge and competence outcomes:

- be aware of the connection between the language used and the content in the target subject, that is Art
- interpret visual elements
- be able to recognise the main features of the impressionistic period, impressionistic paintings and techniques, and adopt the proper art vocabulary to describe them.
- be able to compare the main features and traits of the landscapes genre and of the impressionistic themes.

5th year of a secondary school specialising in scientific subjects

Interdisciplinary links

Art, English, History.

Pre-requisites

The students are familiar with:

- the basic structures and verb tenses of the English language
- some specific lexis related to Art introduced and revised throughout the year
- approaching the analysis of a painting/work of art on the basis of the historical background, the main features of the artistic period and the main techniques adopted by the artist.
- various exercise typologies such as fill in the gaps, scrambled texts, matching, clozes, reading and listening comprehensions, videos, etc..
- collaborative tasks such as group and pair work

Teaching Approach

Communicative. The students will be engaged in different kinds of activities specifically meant to encourage their participation and use of the target language in the classroom.

Target class

30 students aged 18
Mixed ability class with no special needs students

Teaching Aids

IWB, blackboard, copies made from books, images and videos taken from the Internet so as to match the students' different learning styles.

Duration

3 hours

Class dynamics

Individual, pair and group - work, dialogic teacher to student interaction.

What is Impressionism?

Listen to the video, write down the key words referring to Impressionism

[://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pySjmzqVIQI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pySjmzqVIQI)

Impressionism

The Impressionist movement developed in France during the 1860s when several artists began experimenting with naturalistic painting based on a careful consideration of the reality and contingencies of visual perception, especially with regard to light and colour.

The main exponents were Édouard Manet (1832-1883), Claude Monet (1840-1926), Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), Alfred Sisley (1839-1899), Edgar Degas (1834-1917) and Paul Cézanne (1839-1906).

In 1874 they organised the first exhibition of this new trend in art at the Paris gallery belonging to photographer Felix Nadar.

Influenced by M.E. Chevreul's scientific theories on colour as well as by the completely new perspectives offered by photography and by Japanese art (admired in prints by Hokusai and Hiroshige), the Impressionists sought to recreate the eye's experience of sight without any preconceived notions about the object.

Their goal was to observe nature and to translate its immediate impression directly to paper or canvas, an effect they could best achieve by working en plein air, that is, outdoors. They focused on effects of light and colour; the latter was applied to the support with touches of selected tonalities unblended and juxtaposed one next to the other. In this way it was up to the eye to reconstruct the image from these traces. The final result was a complete fusion of object and space, taken as a phenomenon of chromatic and light values.

Matching exercise

- Refusal of themes taken from historical, mythological, religious or literary sources in order to favour scenes derived from observations of nature or from the many aspects of modern life
 - The refusal to use preparatory drawing and perspective to organise the painting in a traditional way.
- In general line is absent and the artworks are carried out without preparatory sketches
 - Brush strokes apply the paint in small, quick and dense marks.
- Painting occurs outdoors, en plein air, juxtaposing pure colours (those belonging to the solar spectrum) without blending them. The palette becomes lighter and black is no longer used for shadows
 - The new subjective way of seeing attempts to capture a moment, a precise instant. This leads to a constant study of the phenomena of light, the way it strikes objects, the way it separates into various colours.

Light

Line

Subject

Composition

Style

Colour

Get to know these two paintings on the websites of the museums where they are conserved.

http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/search/commentaire/commentaire_id/the-ballet-class-3098.html?no_cache=1&cHash=e6d1e20a82

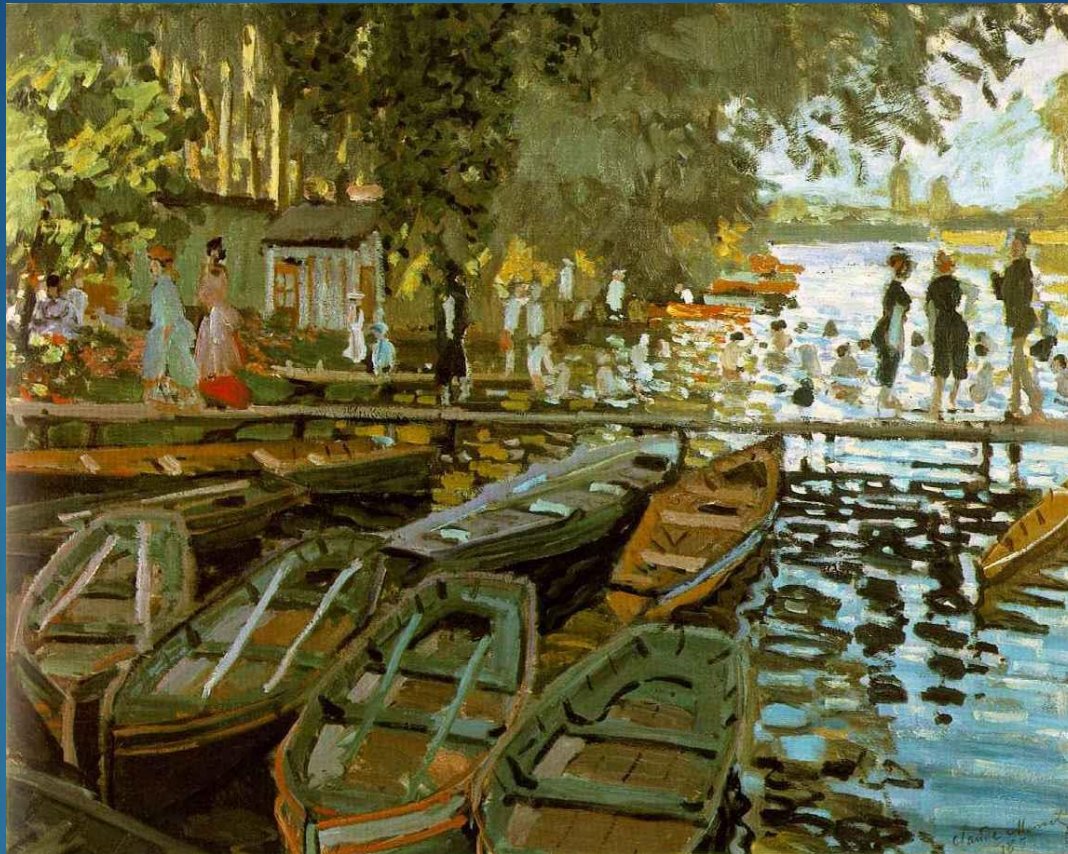
<http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/dance-at-bougival-32592>

NOW LISTEN TO THIS VIDEO:

<https://it.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/avant-garde-france/impressionism/v/degas-the-dance-class-1874>

**Reflect on the following aspects, highlighting their innovative features
(3 lines of text each):**

- subject
- composition
- colour
- brushwork



Claude Monet, *Bathers at La Grenouillère*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 73×92 cm.

Pair work.

Look at this painting and answer the following questions.

- What is in this picture?
- Which pictorial elements strike the viewer at first glance?

Glossary

resort a place that is frequented for holidays or recreation

foreshadow to act as a sign of a future event

outdoors in the open air

brushstroke a mark made by a paintbrush across a surface

pier a structure used as a landing dock for boats

echo to repeat a sound which bounces back

take up to occupy

stroll to walk in a slow, relaxed manner

bather a person swimming or spending time in the water

outline to draw the main shape or edge of something

ceaselessly in a constant way

foreground the part of a picture or photograph that is nearest to the observer

shadow a dark area or shape

rendition a visual representation

Now read the text and check your answers.

Claude Monet, *Bathers at La Grenouillère*

This painting depicts a popular riverside resort with an adjacent café located on the Seine near Bougival, west of Paris. Working alongside Renoir, Monet painted it during his stay there in the late summer of 1869.

This work is one of two preparatory sketches – the other sketch is in the Metropolitan Museum in New York – both foreshadowing a larger canvas, now lost. The *Bathers at La Grenouillère* was most likely painted outdoors, as was typical of most impressionist paintings – not in a studio.

The subject – a portrayal of ordinary people enjoying themselves on a sunny day – is also typical of the impressionistic period.

An element that makes this painting unique is the painting technique employed by the artist. The whole scene is constructed with detached brushstrokes, applied rapidly and with seemingly random strokes. The horizontal line of the pier cuts across the middle of the canvas. The broad shapes of light and shadow above and below the line echo each other, giving a decorative unity to the painting.

Over half of the canvas is taken up by water and boats, while the people strolling and the bathers appear as thinly distributed shapes.

Long, unbroken strokes outline the boats, while the contrast of light and dark colours suggests ceaselessly moving water patterns in the foreground. Sunlight breaks through from both the left and right but the central part of the scene is in shadow.

The general effect is that of a powerful rendition of an everyday scene.

Read the text again and complete the fact file.

Subject:

Setting:

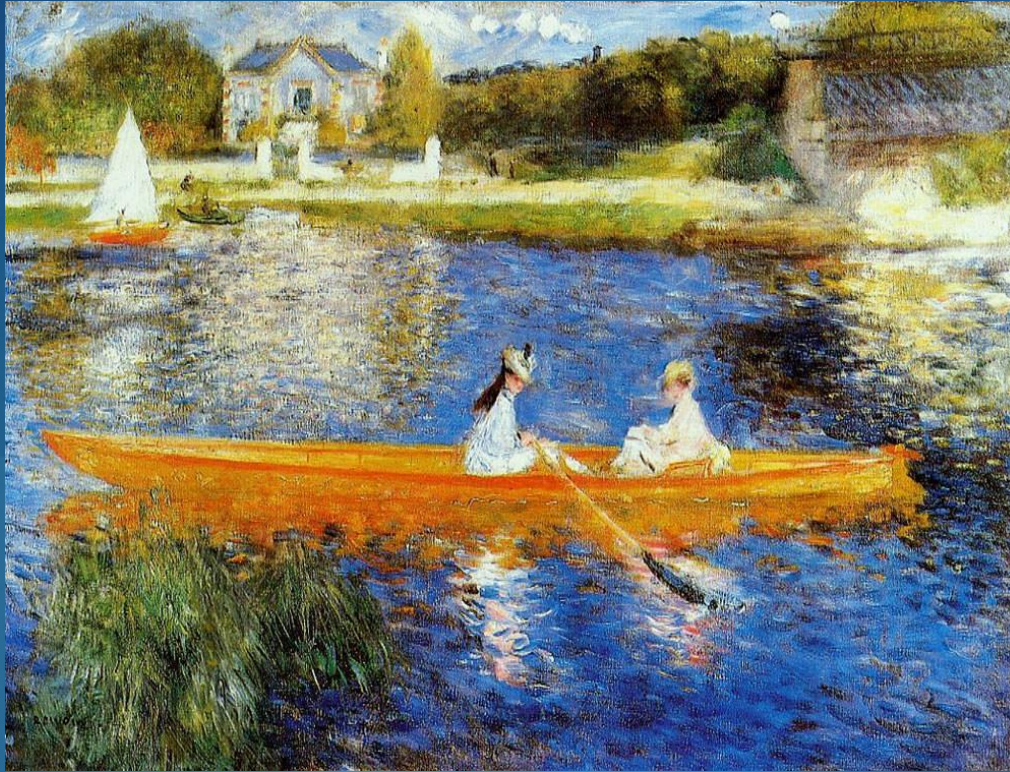
Innovative impressionist elements:

.....,,

Choose for each adjective the correct synonym among those given.

1. The painting depicts a popular (well-known, alluring, exclusive) riverside resort.
2. This work is one of two preparatory (quick, rough, preliminary) sketches.
3. The whole scene is constructed with detached (unbroken, unvaried, separate) brushstrokes.
4. The broad (smooth, large, blurred) shapes of light and shadow above and below the line echo each other.
5. The people strolling and the bathers appear as thinly distributed (clustered, unified, scattered) shapes.
6. The general effect is that of a powerful (effective, balanced, accurate) rendition of an everyday scene.

Compare and contrast.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Skiff*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 71 × 92 cm.

Pair work.

This is *The Skiff* by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, another impressionist painting.

In pairs, find two similarities and two differences between *The Bathers at La Grenouillère* and the Renoir mentioned above. Focus on the subject chosen and the painting technique used. Then compare your list with those of your classmates.

THE CATHEDRAL OF ROUEN

CLAUDE MONET



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWHJx0kFQCo>

Pair work: answer these questions

1. How many canvases did Monet paint about Rouen's cathedral?
2. Which kind of effects did Monet search?
3. In which period of 1892 and of 1893 did Monet stay in Rouen?
4. Did he finish all the canvases "en plein air"?
5. Which is the real subject of his work?
6. Can you capture some medieval symbols in these canvases?
What do they mean?

- During the winter of 1892-93 Monet carried out about fifty canvases of the Cathedral of Rouen, painted from his second-floor hotel room facing the church's main facade.

Through this series of works the artist studied the variation of colours caused by the ever-changing conditions of natural light during the course of the day.

On each canvas Monet painted the same subject but changed the view of it, in keeping with the change in natural light using prevalence of white, grey, light blue and golden pink. By so doing the artist overturned the principles that had been the basis of his previous works. His earlier pieces owed their dynamic quality to the real mobility of the subjects depicted and to the complexity of things in their landscape, by contrast the Cathedral works emphasize that the movement is generated by the appearance – in its colours, light and atmosphere – while the object remains stable.

- The Cathedral's façade fills every canvas but is only partially seen, thus creating a new form of composition, a chance cutting in which we can clearly see an influence of the recently commercialized technology of photography. The slightly diagonal arrangement indicates the spatial depth between viewer and building.
- The dominant theme is light as it strikes the Gothic façade, reflecting and dispersing over thousands of sculpted reliefs; light mixes with colours, achieving a tactile quality and even seems to originate from them.

Even the architectural form, which has been brought to the painting surface and thereby denied any usual relationship with a background, seems to dissolve in Monet's light. Overlapping touches of pure colour erase the profiles, blur the details, transforming the Cathedral's refined sculptural ornamentation into pure pictorial matter. The façade's sparkling quality is highlighted by the contrast between the prevalent areas in light and the parts in shade. The latter are not rendered by using black but rather by overlapping complementary colours, from light blue to ochre, from dark blue to burnt Siena.

Our perception of the form in each Cathedral painting varies according to the atmospheric quality, meaning the weather conditions and the presence of light. This results in a group of artworks in which no two images of the same subject are even identical.

By breaking traditional ways of working Monet invites the viewer to think not about stability but rather about what changes architecture carries within itself. Monet's artistic biography is emblematic of one of the explorations carried out by Impressionists. From the representation of movement, from pinning down the unique character of the fleeting second, it evolves into the desire to capture changes, the constant flow.

Although the initial givens of the subjects are still recognisable, the perceptive dissolution of the forms leads to Monet's investigation to the limits of abstraction process. In this way the subject's variation becomes an affirmation of the relativity of our relationship to reality and, therefore, to our consciousness of it.

Read and Recognise

Choose the best answer to complete the sentence.

1. As a subject for art, cathedrals had
 - a. already been seen in painting.
 - b. never been seen before

2. Monet chose the Cathedral of Rouen as a subject
 - a. to celebrate Gothic art and the roots of French culture.
 - b. for the qualities of its three-dimensional aspect and its plays of light.

3. The dominant theme of the painting is
 - a. light.
 - b. architecture.

4. The composition is
 - a. classical.
 - b. influenced by photography.

5. The sense of depth is rendered by

- a. applying central point perspective.
- b. studying light and colour variations.

6. Movement is conferred by

- a. the subjects' real mobility, as seen in Monet's prior works
- b. the changes of light and by atmospheric effects.

7. The details

- a. are extremely realistic.
- b. tend to dissolve.

Art and Language

Colour. In the text, find the English equivalents to the following Italian terms.

1. Colore puro: _____
2. Colore complementare: _____
3. Luminosità: _____
4. Ombra: _____
5. Pennellata: _____
6. Forma: _____
7. Contorni: _____
8. Sfondo: _____

Light

Fill in the blanks with the following words:

- light • blurred • lit • natural light • street lighting • luminous effects
- illumination • luminous

The main theme of Monet's work was _____
both in his countryside and cityscape canvases.
The modern city of Paris was _____ by the new invention
of _____, fueled by gas, a kind of public
_____ that allowed movement after dark. Working
en plein air Monet's observations were bathed in
_____ which often _____
the outlines of his subject. In Monet's outdoor scenes like
The Haystacks his technique of overlapping juxtaposed,
pure colours gave a _____ quality to the paint,
while in such interiors as the Saint-Lazare station the
_____ were decidedly darker.

The Musée d'Orsay in Paris has five paintings of Monet's Cathedral of Rouen Series in its collection.

See them all together at:

http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/index-of-works/resultat-collection.html?no_cache=1&zsz=1&zsr=1&w=11625~dbouclecreole&zsboucle=La%20cath%C3%A9drale%20de%20Rouen.%20Le%20portail%20vu%20de%20face&zsr=-mos_a&zsmf=21&zssf=0&zsend_x=1

For each painting title, tell what time of day/season of the year you think is represented and what details are particularly clear or blurred in each work. Motivate your observations with specific examples from the paintings.