

# WHAT CAN ART TELL US?

## TEACHER'S GUIDE to the Permanent Collection

WINTER EXHIBITIONS • JANUARY 19-MARCH 23, 2008

### *Eye on the Collection: Views & Viewpoints*



Isobel Bishop (1902-1988), *Encounter No. 2*, 1940, oil and egg tempera on masonite, 24 5/8 x 16 3/16 in., gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard L. Gelb.

### *Winslow Homer: Land and Sea*



Winslow Homer (1836-1910), *Under the Cliff*, *Cullercoats*, c. 1881, water-color and graphite on wove paper, 12 7/16 x 19 7/16 in., anonymous gift.

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### ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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FREE GROUP TOURS for up to 55 students are available on a first-come, first-served basis: TUESDAY-FRIDAY, 10AM-4PM

PUBLIC MUSEUM HOURS:  
TUESDAY-SATURDAY 10AM-5PM & SUNDAY 1-5PM  
Admission to the museum is always free!

## Arranging a Museum Visit

This Curriculum Packet is designed to help you connect the Addison Gallery's exhibitions with your classroom curricula and the **Massachusetts Department of Education's Curriculum Frameworks**. Museum visits and related activities developed for this packet address numerous subject areas that are often cross-disciplinary and therefore can combine two or more frameworks.

The Addison Education Department is glad to assist you in matching exhibition content with the frameworks listed below or others you may wish to use. We can also help you organize your museum visit and pre- or post-visit activities to correspond with your grade level and current classroom topics in **English & language arts, science, history & social studies, and art**.

### How to Arrange a Class Visit

- Decide which exhibition(s) is/are most relevant for your class or group to see based on this packet, viewing the exhibitions, and/or talking with education department staff.
- Select several possible dates and times to bring your class to the gallery. (Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 AM - 4 PM). Visits, ranging from 45 -90 minutes, may be accompanied by an art making or creative writing activity. Up to 55 students can be accommodated in the museum at one time.
- At least two weeks in advance and preferably more, contact **Amy Freedberg** at **(978) 749-4037** or **afreedberg@andover.edu** to schedule the visit and discuss ideas for guided tours and related activities that are particularly suited to your group.

### How to prepare your class for a visit to the Addison

- Discuss the visit with your class before you come. This packet and a pre-visit to the museum can help you inform students about what they will see and do on their trip.
- Additional information about the artists and exhibitions is always available on request.
- In-class visits (usually including slide presentation and discussion) can sometimes be arranged.
- Mention that students will need to keep in mind: stay with the group, raise hands to ask or answer questions, no touching the artwork or the walls, no running, no food or gum.

### What to expect when you are at the museum

- When you come in the front door of the gallery, we will greet you and direct students where to hang their coats and gather.
- After a brief introduction in the lobby, we will bring your students through the exhibition(s) of your choice. Students will be asked to discuss, interact with, and raise questions about the artwork that they see. We strongly encourage teachers to engage in the discussion to strengthen the connection between classroom and museum learning.
- If arranged in advance, the visit can conclude with an art making or writing activity.

### Making the most of your visit

- Pre- and post-visit activities are the best way to get the most out of your museum visit.
- Project and discussion ideas provided in this packet will help you determine the best approach for the age level and subject of your class. (If this packet does not include information relevant to your class, we can help you make connections.)
- We are pleased to assist you in developing and executing extended projects that connect the classroom and the museum.

## WHAT CAN ART TELL US ABOUT: HISTORY AND CULTURE • THE ARTIST • OURSELVES?

Whether a work of art sheds light on the context in which it was made, reveals something about the artist, helps us further understand our own experiences, or accomplishes all three of these, the act of looking at an image is always an informative one. Using as its central guiding question **What can art tell us?**, this Teacher Guide offers ideas about what we can learn from art by discussing examples from the current permanent collection exhibitions, *Eye on the Collection: Views and Viewpoints* and *Winslow Homer: Land and Sea*.

Following the exhibition summaries are examples of approaching artworks from these three perspectives.

### *Eye on the Collection: Views and Viewpoints*



Through its arrangement into four subject areas— *figuration, landscape, urbanism, and abstraction*—this exhibition offers a broad spectrum of subject, style, media, and time period. It presents a wide range of artistic responses, from colonial portraits and images of everyday life, to scenes of the country's natural and built environments. The paintings, drawings, prints, and photographs also chart the course of many of the artistic developments in the United States over three centuries and reveal how artists from different time periods respond to recurring subjects and themes.

Joseph Pennell (1860–1926), *From the Cortlandt Street Ferry*, 1908, sandpaper mezzotint, museum purchase.

### *Winslow Homer: Land and Sea*



Winslow Homer (1836–1910), *Kissing the Moon*, 1904, oil on canvas, 30 1/4 x 40 in., bequest of Candace C. Stimson.

As one of this country's most celebrated artists, Winslow Homer (1836–1910) responded to a variety of themes in his work, beginning with timely illustrations for *Harper's Weekly* early in his career to his later oil paintings and watercolors of landscapes and seascapes. In much of his work, Homer depicts men, women, and children in fields, forests, or on the open sea to represent the dynamic relationship between humans and their natural environments. Focusing on Homer's landscapes and seascapes, this exhibition encourages viewers to explore one artist's varied responses to particular themes and to discover what they reveal about the individual who created them.

## WHAT CAN ART TELL US ABOUT HISTORY AND CULTURE?

By looking at art as a primary resource, we can interpret visual clues to deepen our understanding of cultural and historical moments and developments. By combining prior knowledge with new ideas generated by a work of art, we can learn much about a time and culture through close observation and articulation of its details.



anonymous, *View of the Park, City Hall, New York*, c. 1830, oil on zinc, 21 x 35 in., gift of Mrs. John M. Woolsey, Sr.

### Discussion Questions

- What is **happening** in this scene? What are the people doing?
- What details help you determine the **location** of this image?
- What clues are there to help you estimate the **time period** of this scene?
- Putting all of the details together, what more can you tell about the time and place in which this painting was made?

### What can we learn about history and culture from this image?

People are casually walking and riding on a quiet afternoon – might this be a relaxing Sunday? In the center lies an expansive park, green with lush trees and grass and surrounded by gleaming buildings – are these signs of a developing US city? From the horses and buggies in the foreground and the unpaved roads, we might conclude that this scene is from long ago – it must be before the twentieth century with no cars or paved roads. The sunlight that fills the sky, pushing away the gray clouds and bouncing off the buildings, suggests a bright mood, perhaps indicating optimism and the promise of a prosperous future for this city's residents.

## WHAT MORE CAN WE TELL FROM COMPARISON?



Robert Hallowell, *The Battery, Icebound*, c. 1920s, oil on canvas, 22 3/4 x 27 in., museum purchase.

### Discussion Questions

- How would you describe what is **happening** in this scene as compared to the scene in the painting above?
- How can you tell that they are two different **time periods**?
- What can the **differences** tell you about the changes in US culture over time?
- Are there any **similarities**? What can these tell you?
- What can the **medium, perspective, and mood** tell you about these two moments in US history?
- What **other scenes** of New York City in the exhibition might you compare to these to get another artistic or historical viewpoint?

## WHAT CAN ART TELL US ABOUT THE ARTIST?

Artists use their artwork to communicate ideas and express opinions or beliefs. Because making art is an act of personal expression, close examination of the subject, style, and formal elements of a work of art can lead to a greater understanding of the perspective of the artist and of how an artist's work responds to his or her time.



Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975), *Cattle Loading, West Texas*, 1928-1929, oil and tempera on canvas, 18 1/8 x 38 3/16 in., museum purchase.

### Discussion Questions

- What is the **subject** of this painting?
- How do the **formal elements** – line, color, shape, contrast, scale, composition, etc. – inform how you read the image?
- How does the artist's **style** affect your understanding of the scene?
- What **message** do you think the artist was trying to convey in this painting?

### What can we see in the image?

In Thomas Hart Benton's (1889-1975) *Cattle Loading, West Texas*, we see two men on horseback in the foreground rounding up cattle. A telephone pole and a slowly moving train cut through the middle ground and a windmill and grain elevator rise up in the background. The predominant yellows and browns suggest this is an arid landscape, and the dynamic actions of the subjects imply activity and business. The cartoon-like style of the painting emphasizes the rolling brush, the dust clouds created by the cattle, the billowing smoke of the passing train, and the odd horizontal clouds in the distance.

### What can this image tell us about the artist?

Through his depiction of this subject, Benton celebrates the ranchers, their work, and the landscape of the American West. However, Benton's insertion of the telephone pole and the train engine – both prominent, dark, and ominous – suggests a possible threat to this lifestyle. By juxtaposing the cattle and cowboys with signs of modernization, Benton indicates both the advantages and potential challenges to the land and population that come with the mechanization of industry.

## WHAT CAN ART TELL US ABOUT OURSELVES?

Every viewer looks at art with his/her unique, personal perspective. We bring our own ideas and experiences to the interpretation of images. Conversely, viewing art can lead to a new understanding of aspects of our own lives. Exploring why an artist selects a particular subject and how s/he chooses to represent it can help us think about our own understanding, beliefs, and feelings about things in our lives.



### Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Winslow Homer selected this particular **place** for his watercolor?
- What do you think his **relationship with this place** might have been?
- Does this look like any landscape that **you have seen before**?
- How does this environment **compare to where you live**?
- Using Homer as a point of reference, how would you describe **your relationship with the landscape** around you?

Winslow Homer (1836–1910), *Prout's Neck: Looking Toward Old Orchard*, 1883, watercolor and graphite on wove paper, 14 x 20 in., gift of anonymous donor.

### What can we see in the image?

As in many of Winslow Homer's paintings and watercolors, this image shows the tension between land and sea through the depiction of rough winds and overlapping bands of foliage, water, clouds, and sky. The sailboat is alone and small in comparison to the overgrown brush and trees – yet it sails forward through the slice of harbor in the middle ground of the picture. Beauty and wildness appear to be in delicate balance.

### What can this image tell us about ourselves?

Exploring Homer's scene and the mood and ideas that it evokes can help us reflect on our own environments. Whether we live in a rural, seaside, urban, or suburban location, Homer's depiction can prompt us to consider our personal relationships with nature and/or the built environment. As can be seen through Homer's repeated return to the subject of the tension between humans and nature, he was awed by the power of nature and by people's fortitude to make a life in coexistence with it.

### WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT OURSELVES FROM LOOKING AT A PORTRAIT?

- Does this look like any person that **you have seen before**?
- What can you tell about **this man's life** from the details in the picture?
- How does his life **differ** from yours? Are there any **similarities**?
- **If you were related to this man** and having your portrait painted next to him, how would you look? be dressed? be standing in front of?
- If you were having your portrait painted now, **how would you present yourself** to give viewer's ideas about your life, beliefs, and interests?

John Greenwood (1727–1792), *Man in a Green Coat*, 1750, oil on canvas, 49 7/8 x 40 1/8 in., museum purchase.



# ART AND WRITING ACTIVITIES FOR THE MUSEUM AND CLASSROOM

## Be the Artist

Artists often use their artwork to express personal beliefs or to communicate concerns they may have. What belief or concern could you address with your own artwork? Choose a topic or idea that is important to you and explore and express your thoughts on the subject.

*Option:* Use a variety of media—drawing, painting, printmaking, photography, video—to discover different ways of representing the same topic.

## Be the Detective

The artwork is your evidence. Select an image from one of the exhibitions and - through close looking (not through research) - discover as much information as possible about the artist and the time and place in which the art was made. Combine the details that you see in the picture with any knowledge that you already have to support your ideas. Once you have gathered all of your evidence, write a narrative that pieces together the who, what, when, where, and why of the artwork.

## Be the Curator

Imagine Your Own Exhibition...

### In the museum

Curators are the people who select, arrange, and research artworks for an exhibition around a particular theme. Select four or five works of art from the current exhibitions and imagine how you could arrange them to explore a new theme of your choosing - for example, the rise of the middle class in America or images of women. Your theme might relate to an artistic development, an historical moment, or a cultural shift. Explain in writing your theme and how each of the artworks relates to it.

### In the Classroom

Looking at reproductions of artworks or images from popular media, choose a theme for an exhibition that is particularly relevant to today's culture or to your community. Select five to ten images for your exhibition that explore the theme. (You may include your own artwork.) Write an essay that explains why you chose the theme, how the images reveal different aspects of your idea, and what you would like the viewer to understand from seeing your exhibition.

*Variation:* As a class, select a theme to explore together. Each student selects an artwork, a media image, or contributes their own artwork, and then writes "wall text" that explains how their image relates to the class theme.

*Display options:* Turn your classroom, hallway, or school into a museum to share your class exhibition(s) with other classes. You can also display your exhibition(s) in a community location, such as the public library, the town hall, or a local restaurant. Invite family, friends, the press, and the public for a reception and "gallery talk" by the students.

## TEACHER RESOURCES

<<http://accessaddison.andover.edu/>> (or the "Collections" link at [www.addisongallery.org](http://www.addisongallery.org))

A searchable database of the Addison's entire 16,000-object collection.

*Addison Gallery of American Art: 65 Years.* Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1996.

Provides images and text for hundreds of the works in the collection.

**Other thematic books on the Addison collection** are available for viewing or purchase at the museum, including those on Winslow Homer, modern art, landscape painting, and works on paper.

"Creating a Classroom Museum" Website from the Smithsonian Institution:

<[http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson\\_plans/collect/crecla/crecla0a.htm](http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/collect/crecla/crecla0a.htm)>

A comprehensive lesson plan for creating a museum exhibition in your classroom. The ideas can be adapted to support your curricular goals, and we are glad to help you adjust the lesson plan to suit your interests and timeframe.

### Suggested Questions for facilitating discussion around artworks

- What do you see in the picture?
- What is the picture of?
- How do formal elements – such as color, shape, line, composition, and scale – create the mood or feeling of the image?
- Does this image tell a story? What story does it tell?
- What can this image tell you about the time in which the image was made?
- What can this image tell you about the culture in which it was made?
- How can you determine the artist's point of view on the subject?
- Does anything in the image make you think of something in your own life?
- How is your understanding of the image affected when you look at it next to another image?
- How could you rearrange a group of images to create a different theme?