



Grades 9 – 12

Investigating Art History

TEACHER INFORMATION:

This tour challenges high school students to investigate art on their own, using the worksheet provided. They will gather visual information, compare two works of art, and draw an independent conclusion to questions posed in each comparison. These skills are recommended in the California curriculum standards.

Before your visit, please select chaperones and prepare them for this visit; the Huntington requires one adult chaperone for each group of 10 students. Print enough copies of the worksheet and provide pencils for the chaperone and students (no pens are permitted in the galleries).

When you arrive at the Huntington, get a map for each teacher and chaperone. The Huntington guards can also direct you to the galleries. Assign different starting points for each chaperone to avoid crowding before works of art. Please be informed that some works may not be on display the day you visit.

Additional activities before and after your visit can be based on materials provided at the Huntington's website, as well as images of the highlighted works.

We hope you enjoy your visit to the Huntington!

Optional Follow-up Activities for the Classroom:

Research the periods when Bingham and Remington were active, respectively before and after the Civil War. What had changed in America that might account for the different presentations, by Bingham and Remington, of the American worker? In your opinion, are these realistic portrayals of workers or emblems of American values espoused during each historic period?

Research the Romantic movement and discuss the roles played by Constable and Turner. An advanced essay would expand the discussion to include mention of the influence of Claude's landscape paintings, the impact of their art on French painters (including the Impressionists), and the later American variant of the Romantic style.

Brief descriptions of the art works used for this worksheet:

George Caleb Bingham (United States, 1811-1879), *In a Quandary, or Mississippi Raftsmen at Cards*, 1851. Oil on canvas (17 ½ x 21 inches). Acc. No. 83.8.4

BINGHAM grew up in Missouri, where he saw flat wooden boats, navigated by long poles, carrying cargo along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. To pass the time, boatmen often played cards. The grouping of the four men in the center of the painting, the strong light that shines on them, and the relaxed, mild-mannered behavior call attention to a civilized moment on the Western frontier. Most of Bingham's genre paintings (scenes of everyday life) depict the American West as a place where man and nature coexist harmoniously.

Frederic Remington (United States, 1861-1909), *Bronco Buster*, 1895. Bronze (15 x 7 x 24 inches). Acc. 91.249

REMYNGTON grew up and went to college in the eastern United States. But during his adult life as a painter and sculptor, he lived in the West, including a period in Kansas where he owned a farm. Cowboys played an important role in the West, and some specialized in "bronco busting," or the taming wild horses to use on ranches and during the long cattle drives. As depicted in this sculpture, the job of taming a horse was a battle of wills, with the cowboy striving to stay on the horse and the horse attempting to throw him off.

John Constable (England, 1776-1837), *View on the Stour near Dedham*, 1822. Oil on canvas (51 x 74 inches). Acc. No. 25.18

CONSTABLE repeatedly painted his boyhood home, an English village near this view of the Stour (pronounced "store") River. The boats, bridge, house (on the right) and the distant church tower (from Dedham) were familiar sites to Constable, as were the cloudy sky and lush foliage of trees and plants native to southeastern England. In depicting nature with such accuracy, Constable broke with convention. At this time, artists were encouraged to include figures from the Bible or ancient history in their paintings of nature, to enhance their importance. Constable argued that detailed depictions of place could be the subject of serious art.

Joseph Mallord William Turner (England, 1775-1851), *The Grand Canal: Scene—A Street in Venice*, c. 1837. Oil on canvas (59 ¼ x 44 ¼ inches). Acc. No. 22.52

TURNER was born in Britain, but traveled throughout Europe during his adult life. His paintings combine elements of nature and architecture to create backdrops for human activity. In this work, he has crowded the boats and quays of Venice with various and seemingly unrelated activities. The figures in the lower right are thought to be Shylock and Antonio, from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Other figures participate in a pageant whose purpose is unknown. Turner saw places not as they appeared to the eye, but as sites defined by their associations with literature, history, and personal memory.



Investigating Art History Worksheet

COMPARISON #1:

George Caleb Bingham, *In a Quandary, or Mississippi Raftsmen at Cards*, 1851 (oil painting)

Frederic Remington, *Bronco Buster*, 1895 (bronze sculpture)

In the Scott Gallery of American Art

Bingham and Remington both depict people working along the 19th-Century American frontier. But the narrative, or story, varies in each work. While Bingham shows the workers at harmony with the river, working cooperatively (at cards, and by suggestion, at work), Remington shows a single figure battling nature in an attempt to overwhelm and control it.

Question: How did each artist use the materials of art (paint or metal, as well as the elements of art) to present his view of the American West?

COMPARISON #2:

John Constable, *View on the Stour near Dedham*, 1822 (oil painting)

J.M.W. Turner, *The Grand Canal: Scene—A Street in Venice*, c. 1837 (oil painting)

In the Huntington Gallery

Constable and Turner are counted among the greatest landscape painters of 19th-Century Britain. They represent two directions taken by Romantic artists. Some, like Constable, observed and carefully recorded the details of nature, celebrating the specifics of place. Others, like Turner, combined the drama of nature with unique visions of place. Turner's paintings may not capture one place, or one moment in time. Rather, they are imagined places filled with associations to literature, history, and personal memory.

Question: In your opinion, which of the Huntington examples (Constable's *View on the Stour* or Turner's *Grand Canal, Venice*) best captures the essential qualities of the place depicted? Explain your answer, based on the visual details you note on the worksheet.



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WORK OF ART

Title of work:
Date of work:
Artist's name:
Materials used:

SUBJECT: Briefly describe the subject presented:

ELEMENTS OF ART: Consider how each of the following elements of art was used to develop the subject:

Balance: Has the artist used symmetry or asymmetry? How does the balance of parts relate to the subject? (For example, asymmetry may suggest movement or drama, while symmetry often establishes a sense of order and calm.)

Color: Name the main colors. Do they describe details as you would see them in nature? If not, what role does color play in the composition, and in the subject?

Light: Does light call attention to the principal details and/or add drama? How?

Line: Identify the primary vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines. Which predominate? How is line related to the subject?

Point of view: As the viewer, where do you "enter" the composition? Can you imagine joining the activity, or are you kept at a distance?

Shape: Artists may use geometric shapes to organize compositions. (For example, the main figures may be set inside a triangle.) Look carefully for any such compositional shapes. What details do they contain?

Space: Identify foreground, middle ground, and background (and note the absence of any of these). Where does the principal action take place? How does the artist lead your eye through space; consider overlapping forms, atmospheric and/or linear perspective, or any other device you find.

Texture: Notice the painted texture of the work. Is it smooth or rough? Does surface match the mood of the work of art? If so, how? Now consider the representation of varied textures in the work itself, i.e. details like clothing or natural elements. Are these details accurately represented or abstracted?

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

What other details seem important?