

BACKGROUND READING FOR ART PRESENTERS
The Boating Party, Mary Cassatt (1844-1926)

Mary Cassatt was born May 22, 1844, in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania – now part of Pittsburgh. She was an American painter and printmaker. Her paintings often showed women with children in everyday scenes.

Mary was the daughter of a wealthy Pittsburgh businessman. Her family thought travel was an important part of education. When she was a child, she had her first drawing and music lessons in Europe where she also learned German and French. She saw paintings by many famous French artists at the Paris World's Fair in 1855.

Although Mary's parents did not want her to be a professional artist, she began to study art in earnest at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia when she was fifteen. She continued her studies while the United States was torn apart by the Civil War. In 1866, she returned to Europe to study. She worked hard to study painting. Women could not attend the art school in Paris, L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, so she asked one of masters from the school to tutor her privately. She got a permit to copy art in the Louvre Museum so she could improve her artistic techniques, and she traveled in Europe studying and copying old master paintings.

In 1874, she finally settled in Paris. Her work was shown at the annual government-sponsored exhibition called the Salon. In 1875 she discovered the pastel work of Edgar Degas in a gallery window. Mary later said, "I used to go and flatten my nose against the window and absorb all I could of his art. It changed my life. I saw art then as I wanted to see it." She and Degas became friends and worked side-by-side. She learned a lot from his knowledge of art, especially his techniques with pastels, copper engraving and draftsmanship. She developed a talent for working with pastels and used them to create many of her most important works. She experimented with different printmaking techniques like etching, aquatint and drypoint.

Mary was the only American invited to join the Impressionist painters. In 1911, however, Mary was diagnosed with diabetes, rheumatism, neuralgia, and cataracts which weakened her eyesight and forced her to stop painting. She became interested in the women's suffrage movement and sponsored an exhibit to support the cause.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Boating Party, Mary Cassatt

1. What do you see in this painting? Where do you think this scene is? Have children find the sail of the boat, the buildings that are far away or in the background, and the man's shoe.
2. Ask children to find horizontal lines. The horizontal lines are on the shoreline, the yellow boat seats, and the supports. Relate horizontal to the horizon.
3. Have the children find curved lines, point to them, and follow them with their fingers. There are curved lines on the sail, on the sides of the boat, and in the hats of the man, woman, and child.
4. How do you know this picture is a painting? How is this painting like a photograph or other pictures we've seen?
5. Explore colors in this painting. Ask children how many different colors they can identify. Where is the yellow in the painting? Where is the blue in this painting?
6. The name of this painting is *The Boating Party*. Why do you think the artist named it that?
7. Why do you think the man has his foot on the boat? Children might say for balance, to hold on, he's going to use the oars, or he's going to row. (He needs to push against that piece of wood to provide resistance.)
8. Let's demonstrate how the man might row. What if the boat rocks while you are rowing?
9. Pretend or imagine the man and woman are talking to each other. What do they think the man and woman are saying or talking about?
10. What season do you think it is? What clues are there?
11. Are there other things you would like to tell me about this painting? Children might say: I saw it in a book; I like the water best; I think it was hard to paint; I want to go in or row a boat too.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES TO ACCOMPANY

The Boating Party—Mary Cassatt

Kindergarten

1. Plan a picnic

Materials: paper, pencils, crayons

- Have the children plan a pretend picnic. What do they want to eat? Where do they want to go? What do they need? Will there be places to sit? Will they need a large blanket or tarps? How could they get there?
- Make a list of what they need and check off what they have and what they still need to get or make.
- Draw a picture of their picnic.

2. Family Time

Materials: paper, crayons or chalks

- Have students discuss a special time they had with their family.
- Draw a picture to show that time.

3. Boat on the water

Materials: paper (thicker than computer paper), watercolors and brushes (from BCA), large construction paper to mount project on after it's done, construction paper for the hull of the boat in a variety of colors, craft sticks for oar, containers for water (BCA)

Have students paint the water first, then clouds, the sun, and a sail of some type. Be sure they clean their brushes in between colors or use a different brush. While those are drying, cut out the hull of the boat and paint the craft stick for the oar. Glue those onto their picture. Then, add some people in the boat (probably stick figures). Their paper will probably be rolling a bit, so staple it to a larger piece of construction paper to give it some backing.