

**BACKGROUND READING FOR PRESENTERS**

*Claude Monet (November 15, 1840 – December 5, 1926) Nymphs*

Claude Monet was born on November 15, 1840 in Paris, but his family moved to the port city of Le Havre, France while he was still young. He loved to draw as a child. He began drawing caricatures of people that were quite good. Even as a kid he was able to make some extra money drawing pictures of people. Around the age of eleven, Claude entered a school for the arts. His mother supported his becoming an artist, but his father wanted him to take over the family grocery business. Claude met some other artists around this time and began to use oil paints to paint the outdoors.

A few years after his mother died in 1857, Claude moved to Paris to study art at the Academie Suisse. He was there for about a year when he was drafted into the army. He became sick with typhoid fever in the army and returned home a few years later.

Monet continued to paint outdoor scenes. His paintings were becoming accepted by the art critics in Paris. War broke out in France in 1870 and Claude moved with his new wife, Camille, to London. There he met art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel who would become one of his strongest supporters. Monet became friends with several of the leading artists of the time including Pierre Renoir, Edouard Manet, and Camille Pissarro. Together they formed the Society of Anonymous Painters, Sculptors, and Printers. They wanted to experiment with art and not do the same classical art that satisfied the art critics of Paris. They organized an exhibition of their art in 1874. One critic called it the Exhibition of the Impressionists. The term "impressionist" was used to imply that the art was just an impression of something and not completed. It was meant as an insult.

The critic got the word "impression" from one of Monet's works. It is called *Impression: Sunrise*. This painting was a great example of the new style. The lighting gives the viewer the feeling or "impression" that the sun is just rising. Monet's use of light was unique. Despite the critics of Impressionism, Monet continued to refine his work. He continued to try and capture the changing effects of color with light. He used a wide range of vibrant colors and painted quickly using short brushstrokes. Soon, Monet's work began to gain recognition. His paintings started to sell. He even organized an Impressionist art exhibition in the United States in 1886.

In order to continue his experiments with light, Monet began to paint series of the same scenes. He would paint them at different times of the day and in different types of weather. He painted a series on haystacks, the Rouen Cathedral, and the London Parliament.

Near the end of his life, Monet embarked on his largest project. It was a series on the pond at his home in Giverny. It involved a number of huge paintings of the pond in different lighting and conditions such as morning, sunset, and clouds. He called it the Grandes Decorations. When finished, all the panels together were over 6 feet tall and nearly 300 feet long. During much of the project the aging Monet was suffering from bad eyesight and lung cancer. He spent the last ten years of his life on the project and donated it to France in honor of the end of World War I.

***He once said "Everyone discusses my art and pretends to understand, as if it were necessary to understand, when it is simply necessary to love."***

## **SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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1. Does this place remind you of anywhere you have been? Where was that place?
2. What do you think surrounds the pond? How do you know?
3. What sounds might Monet have heard while painting this image?
4. How has Monet shown the depth of the water?
5. Can you describe the surface of the painting?  
What effect does the surface create?
6. Examine the brush strokes. What different ways has Monet applied the paint in this image?  
How many different brushwork techniques can you see?
7. How have the colours been applied?
8. If you were a frog, what would it be like to live here?
9. What three words would you use to describe this painting to someone who could not see it?
10. What questions would you ask Monet about this painting if he was here?
11. Monet's *Water Lily* series has become very famous. Why do you think these paintings are so highly regarded?

## **SUGGESTED EXTENDED ACTIVITIES**

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(Art supplies are available at the Buchanan Center)

### **1. Watercolor resist lilies**

Materials: paper, crayons, watercolors or thinned tempera paint (add a bit of water to tempera paint to make it thinner.)

- Using crayons, draw lily pads with greens or brown. Then add colorful lilies.
- Next use blue or another warm color to paint over the lily pads as the water. Because of the nature of paint this easily gives the feel of water.

### **2. Chalk lily pond**

Materials: blue paper, colored chalks or pastels

Have students draw their own lily pond using chalks or pastels. They may add other water plants, creatures to their pond as well.