

The Painter's Eye

Grades: 2–4

45 minutes

This tour replaces Learning to Look at Art. Please disregard all older tour plans.

Procedures

As with all tours, timing is critical. **Therefore please refrain from discussing paintings that are not included in this tour packet.** If you are asked by the teacher or students to do so, invite them to return to the galleries after the tour or activity themselves. When the teachers sign up for this tour, they are informed that their students will not see the entire museum.

Although groups can begin at any of the tour stops listed below, all tours should start with a discussion about paintings. The tour will expose students to the various types of subject matter artists incorporate. Props need to be placed at each stop prior to the beginning of the tour. Be sure to give yourself enough time (roughly nine minutes) to cover all five stops.

Tour Objectives

Students will...

- View a variety of paintings in the Morris's permanent collection and discuss the subject matter and technique used by each artist.
- Define broad subject categories, such as portraiture, landscape, genre painting, still life, and non-representational artwork, and recognize the unique characteristics of each.
- Compare and contrast different artworks of the same subject matter.
- Discuss why artists create art and how artworks are judged.

Vocabulary

Genre painting

Stretched canvas

Non-representational artwork

Abstract

Realistic

Landscape painting

Acrylic paint

Oil paint

Still life

Portrait

Portraiture

Bust

Two-dimensional

Three-dimensional

Props

Sample bust sculpture

Photographic portrait reproduction

Abstract portrait reproduction

Georgia Red Clay reproduction
Sample stretched canvas
Paint samples
Mica sample

Tips for talking to young children:

- Ask them to repeat terms or concepts in unison.
- Ask questions—even if you don't think they will know the answers.
- Repeat new concepts 2–3 times.
- Don't require them to always raise their hand to talk. The museum is not school, and we want to avoid turning tours into classroom experiences.
- Use proximity—have them sit as close to you as possible.
- Speak up. Don't be afraid of the kids being too loud. Just relax!
- Let them know what they are going to talk about.
- Wait about 4–5 seconds for responses to questions. If you don't get any response after that time, use prompts to work answers out of them.
- If you are talking to an individual student, never directly tell them they are wrong. Instead say something like, "That is an interesting thought, but....."
- Frequently praise participation.
- Keep it fun! Again, we are not a school. The kids, as well as their teachers, are at the museum to have a good time.
- If there is a child or group of children that is misbehaving, wait for a break in the conversation then ask the teacher to intervene. (Example: "Excuse me Ms. Smith, would you mind asking that student to pay attention/quiet down/not to touch?") Another technique is to simply make eye contact with the teacher and point to the student who is causing a disturbance.
- Allow the teacher to add comments or information. Even outside of the classroom, teachers will still act like teachers. Many like to add to the conversation; after all, they are on the field trip too!
- Don't try to teach biographical information (unless it is part of the tour). Stick to concepts and techniques.

Tour Stops

Introduction [Can be presented at any stop.]

1. Relate that this tour will focus on only paintings, and that you will discuss some of the different subjects that artists portray and talk about their intentions.

Samuel F. B. Morse

Mrs. Samuel Thurston, Charleston, undated

Concept:

Portraiture

Props:

Sample bust sculpture
 Photographic portrait reproduction
 Abstract portrait reproduction

Procedure:

1. Define the term portrait. [An artistic representation of a person.]
2. Discuss the reasons why nineteenth century painters created portraits. [There are several including the desire to reproduce the likeness of a person, the painting's use as a status symbol, and the lack of other means—such as photography—to capture someone's image. NOTE: While photography was technically invented in the 1820s, its use was limited until the development of the daguerreotype and the collotype in the 1840s. Even then the technology was not very widespread.]
3. Discuss the reasons why any artist, even contemporary ones, would choose to create a portrait. How are the reasons the same? How are they different?
4. List the different ways an artist can create a portrait. [Pull out the reproductions while they are being called out.]
5. Compare and contrast the different media. How are they alike? How are they different? Which one took more talent to create? Why do you think this? [Introduce the terms two-dimensional and three-dimensional.]
6. Study the portrait of Mrs. Samuel Thurston by Morse. How would one describe her? How has the artist's technique contributed to your opinions? What other visual cues support your ideas?
7. Compare the portrait of Mrs. Samuel Thurston with others in the room. Do painters always create exact copies of their sitters? Did all of the people in this room actual look the way they do in the paintings? Find some examples of works that are slightly "off" proportionately. Why would the artist do this? [Sometimes it is simply the artist's painting style or technique. The Cooke paintings are a good example of this.]

Martin Johnson Heade

Two Magnolias in a Glass Vase, c. 1890

Concept:

Still Life

Procedure:

1. How are the paintings in this area different from those you have seen before? [If this is the first stop, ask what the paintings have in common.]
2. Define the term still life. [A work of art depicting mostly inanimate subject matter, typically groupings of commonplace objects which may be either natural or man-made in an artificial setting.]
3. Discuss the reasons why an artist would want to create a still life painting. [There are several. They include the fact that these images are highly marketable, they are a means to display the artist's painting skills, and they **sometimes** convey symbolic meanings.]
4. Study Heade's painting. Is it realistic? Describe the visual clues that led you to this decision.
5. Even though the painting is flat (two-dimensional), how has Heade created a sense of depth and space? [The darker background, the use of shadowing, and the light from above

reflecting off the leaves and vase.] How do the different textures he depicts contribute to this?

6. Compare and contrast Heade's painting with the other still lifes in the room. Which one is better? Which one took more or less talent? Why do you think this? [Note that some are very realistic, while others are not.]

William C. A. Frerichs

Toula Waterfalls, undated

[You can include the other Frerichs's paintings that flank this piece in your discussion as well. They are *Gorge, North Carolina, 1855-60* and *Waterfall, North Carolina, 1855-60*.]

Concept:

Landscape painting

Props:

Reproduction of *Georgia Red Clay* by Nell Choate Jones

Procedure:

1. What do the paintings in this area have in common?
2. Define the term landscape painting. [Artwork depicting the visible features of an area of land. The scene can be real or imagined.]
3. Discuss the reasons why an artist would want to create a landscape painting.
4. Study *Toula Waterfalls* by William Frerichs. Is it realistic or abstract? How can you tell?
5. Describe the landscape depicted in the painting. Imagine yourself in the scene. What does it sound like? How does it smell? What is the weather like? How does the artist represent these characteristics (if at all)?
6. What is the mood of the painting? Why do you think this?
7. Compare this landscape with the reproduction of *Georgia Red Clay* by Nell Choate Jones. What is the mood of this painting? Why do you think this?
8. In what other ways are the two paintings different? How are they the same? Which place would you rather visit and why?
9. Is the Jones painting abstract or realistic? How can you tell? Why would an artist paint an abstract reproduction of a landscape? Besides depicting the subject, what other message is he trying to convey? How can you tell?
10. Which painting is more successful? Why do you think this?

Lamar Dodd

Bargain Basement, 1937

Concept:

Genre painting

Props:

Stretched canvas and paint sample

Procedure:

1. Describe what is going on in *Bargain Basement*. Who are the people in this painting? How can you tell?
2. Define genre painting. [Artwork depicting scenes of everyday life.]
3. How does *Bargain Basement* fit into this category?
4. Discuss why an artist would want to paint a scene of everyday life.
5. Discuss the mood of the painting. Is the artist trying to say anything? Why or why not?
6. What is the focal point? How can you tell?
7. How does the artist move your eye around the painting? What techniques did he use?
8. Look around you. Point out other examples of genre subjects. How are they the same? How are they different? [Use *Church Meeting* by Rachel V. Hartley and *The Potato Pickers* by Alfred Herber Hutton.]
9. This image, as with all the others on the tour, was painted on a stretched canvas. [Show the stretched canvas sample, stressing that if we were to turn Dodd's painting over, the back would be similar to it.]
10. Dodd used oil paint, while others used acrylic [Herb Jackson]. [Allow the students to touch the sample canvas and paint.] How is the paint different? [Oil paint is created by suspending colored pigment in an oil base—generally linseed. Acrylic paint on the other hand is created by suspending colored pigment in a clear polymer emulsion. As a result, acrylic paint dries faster and has a more plastic consistency. Acrylic paint can be thinned with water, while oil paint requires a solvent such as turpentine. Some oil paints take weeks to dry, which increases the time the artist works on one canvas. Oil paints are generally more translucent than acrylics when thinned with spirits, allowing for underpainting. Forms of oil paints have been around since the seventh century, whereas acrylic paints were introduced in the 1950s.]

Herb Jackson

Signal Fire, 1997

Concept:

Non-representational artwork

Props:

Paint sample board

Mica sample

Procedure:

1. What is the subject of this painting? [Note that not all paintings need to portray something specific, instead artists may choose to relate an emotion, visually depict movement, or simply stress technique. If you have introduced the term abstract at an earlier stop, build off of that discussion.]
2. Define the terms non-representational and abstract. [Non-representational artwork does not depict a specific person, place, or thing. Abstract paintings depict something in an unrealistic manner, and sometimes the subject matter is based on an actual object. Non-representational paintings are always abstract, while abstract paintings ARE NOT always non-representational. Non-representational describes the subject matter, while abstract describes the style in which the work was painted.]
3. Why would an artist not want to paint a recognizable picture?

4. Discuss Jackson's technique. [The artist layered acrylic paint mixed with pumice and mica, and then scraped and dug into the various layers, exposing the underlying colors. Allow the students to touch the sample canvas.]
5. Study the painting's surface. Jackson was fascinated with the idea of excavation. How does this idea relate to the painting?
6. What is the painting's mood? How can you tell?
7. Look at the Jonathan Green painting behind you. How is Jackson's painting the same? How is it different? Which is better? Why do you think this?