

Revised Sept. 2011

FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES: MARY CASSATT (1844-1926)

"Breakfast in Bed" 1897

Oil on canvas

Supplies Needed:

- * Framed Cassatt painting, "Breakfast In Bed
- * Laminated examples of Cassatt's work (14 total including sample)
- * Template for mother and child project from supply box
- * Colored oil pastels (1 box per table)
- * Copies of mother and child on white paper (1/2 sheet)
- * Construction paper to matte student artwork
- * Project sample
- * **Mary Cassatt: Portrait of An American Impressionist**, by Streissguth in the supply box for reference

Reference Books:

- * The Life And Work of Mary Cassatt E. Giesecke
- * Getting To Know The World's Greatest Artists: Mary Cassatt
M. Venezia
- * What Makes a Cassatt A Cassatt?, Richard Muhlberger
- * Mary Cassatt Modern Woman, Judith Barter
- * Mary Cassatt, Nancy Mowll Mathews
- * Mary Cassatt Oils and Pastels, John Bullard

AHEAD OF TIME NOTE: Mount copies of mother and child picture on construction paper with glue stick. Make copies of master "Famous Artists Series" take home letter for each student.

Today we are going to talk about a famous artist named Mary Cassatt.

Present laminated picture #1 of Mary Cassatt.

Mary Cassatt was born in Pennsylvania in 1844. That was over 150 years ago. She had a very strong personality and knew from a very early age that she wanted to be an artist. This was not an easy thing to do! One hundred and fifty years ago, most artists were men. Women were expected to stay home and take care of the family and house.

Cassatt would not accept this. She pleaded with her father to go to art school. Her father said absolutely no at first, but he finally agreed that she could go to art school when she was 16. From the beginning of her career, Cassatt was unbelievably talented.

Present laminated pictures #2 and #3 (this is also presented later as #8) of Cassatt's early work. Talk about how beautiful these paintings are. Point out how realistic and detailed they are. Cassatt painted these pictures when she was 28 and 31. Discuss the colors of the paints she used. (These paintings are very dark.

Later she would use the more Impressionistic bright colors. Her painting style would change also. It would become softer and less realistic.)

When she finished art school in the United States, Cassatt talked her father into letting her go to Europe to study more about art. It was very hard for Cassatt in Europe. Women were not allowed to go to the European art schools. But this didn't stop Cassatt! She would go to the art museums and copy famous artist's paintings.

Present laminated picture #4 of artists in the museums. Talk about how artists would take all of their supplies into the museums and stay there all day and try to paint other artists' pictures. When you go to museums today, you might see students copying famous works. Usually they have to get permission to do this.

This was the way many artists learned to paint better. Cassatt also took private lessons from art teachers. Cassatt was doing very well on her own. Five of her paintings were chosen to be shown at the most famous art showroom in Paris.

This is one of the paintings chosen:

Present laminated picture #5 "On the Balcony". Once again, point out how realistic this painting is. This type of painting is what people at that time were used to seeing. This was the only style of painting people liked.

Then something happened that changed Cassatt's life as an artist. She met an artist who painted in a new way. His name was Edgar Degas. He was an "Impressionist" artist. "Impressionism" means that the focus of the painting is the mood or feeling the artist is trying to create, not an exact duplication of a setting that might look like a photo. Cassatt loved Degas' paintings. Here is one of his most famous pictures:

Present laminated picture #6 "Ballerinas". Discuss with the students how different this type of art is from the earlier paintings done by Cassatt (which were representative of the times). Point out the dreamlike quality of his paintings and the soft pastel colors he used.

Cassatt loved the bright and beautiful colors that Degas used. She loved everything about this new kind of art. Cassatt began to change the way she had been painting. She started using the soft, dreamy brushstrokes and the bright colors. Here is one of her new paintings:

Present laminated picture #7 "Little Girl in a Blue Armchair."

Here is one of her old paintings.

Present picture #8 “La Jeune Mariee”. Talk about the different styles of painting she used in these paintings. Point out the softness of the new painting and the crispness of the old one. Also, discuss the difference in the colors she used. Ask the students which one they like better. Take a vote by raising their hands.

Cassatt had been painting the way most of the best artists painted. They usually painted very elegant or important people with dark backgrounds. Now Cassatt was using the bright, beautiful colors like the new “Impressionist” painters. She said that she felt like she had been set free! She once said, “When I rejected conventional art, I began to live.” Soon Cassatt began to paint lots of pictures of mothers and their children. This is the art Mary Cassatt is most remembered for.

Present laminated pictures #9-14 (all pictures of mothers and children). Talk once again about the colors and softness of these paintings. Remind the students that this was a new kind of art. People were used to seeing the old way of painting. Talk about the love you can see between the mothers and their children. Talk about how gently they are holding the children, etc.

Even though Cassatt never had her own children, she could paint beautiful pictures of mothers and their children that made you feel you were right there. She seemed to understand the love between mothers and children better than any artist ever had. Cassatt painted with love and tenderness in a very special way.

PROJECT:

Display laminates #9-13 to assist with art project. While many of Cassatt's works were done in oil paint, these are examples of Cassatt's work using oil pastels, which are more like a crayon or colored chalk. Today we are going to make a picture using oil pastels!

IMPORTANT: Students will find pastels very different from crayons! Please take time to carefully explain the proper blending technique

so that students do not become frustrated. Remember, a few lines of color can be blended together to fill in a larger space.

Show the sample art project. Just like Mary Cassatt, you are going to make a portrait of an adult and child. Your subjects, however, will be yourself and someone special to you. This can be your mother, grandmother or even your teacher!

**** Pass out the matted mother child templates and pastels. Students will need to share pastels.***

**** Demonstrate on a piece of paper taped to the chalkboard how pastels work a little differently than crayons. Use a yellow pastel to make a line, then draw a blue pastel line next to it. Rub the colors together with your thumb or finger to show how the colors blend to create a subtle shade of green. This blending technique works well for the hair, clothing and background - don't try to blend the face (usually messes up everything)!***

**** Let the children draw their names on the bottom of the paper in pastels to get a feel for them.***

**** Then, have them begin to draw themselves and their special person. (Use laminate #14 as an example). Ask them to think about whether the adult and child are looking at each other or straight ahead. Remind them about using skin tone pastels.***

**** Remember, Mary Cassatt is most famous for her paintings using bright colors so we are going to make these picture bright and colorful. She is also known for her use of patterns in her pictures, so feel free to add patterns to the clothes of the adult and child.***

**** Have them fill in the background with color when they are finished.***

FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES

Cassatt

Today in class a volunteer parent presented the works of American Impressionist artist Mary Cassatt to your child's class. They learned about her life and works. They made an art project in the style of her work.

The Art Institute of Chicago owns a work by Cassatt, "After the Bullfight". The Terra Museum of American Art, also in Chicago, offers a large collection of her works. In addition, there is a wonderful children's book entitled Suzette and the Puppy: A Story About Mary Cassatt by J. Sweeney

Sincerely yours,

Art Volunteer