

Here's Lookin' At You, Kid

Growing Up in America Through Art and Literature

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Overview

This interdisciplinary unit for 5th grade is designed to be taught over the course of approximately three to four weeks with time at the end to complete a culminating project. Students will examine art and literature from the colonial period through the late 19th century to learn what it was like to be a child during this time of great change in America's history. They will study paintings for their functional, historical, and artistic content, and create their own works of art using several of the media studied. Students will read selections from a variety of literary genres of the period, including poetry, personal narratives, and fiction, and respond through journals, narrative and expository writing. As a culminating activity, students will contribute to the historical record of childhood by creating a visual and literary document of their own place in the history of childhood in America.

Rationale

In constructing a unit on growing up in America, the underlying question has to be: whose childhood will be represented? It's impossible to define the "typical" American child. From its beginnings, America has been a place comprised of people from many cultures, living in varied social settings and spread across a country with numerous and varied geographical regions. Children throughout our history have been numerous and ubiquitous. "Through much of our history, children under 16 made up between one third and one half of the population. They were everywhere - in fields, churches, schools, prisons, workhouses, ships, streets and battlefields."(Hiner) So, which children are we talking about? The possibilities are...well, you do the math.

This unit is not intended as a comprehensive study of childhood in America. Rather, it is intended to help students from this age catch a glimpse of what children of the past and their world were like. Because artists seem to be particularly attuned to the subtleties of their culture and appear to be able to express their vision of the society in which they lived through their work, students will study the works of artists and writers to learn about the past. The art and literature children will study encompasses the years from the 1670s through the 1870s, for it is during this period that our country's beliefs about childhood and its attitude towards children underwent its most dramatic transformation.

Background

Finding history written through a child's point of view is rare, and if you page through any art history book, you will notice that images of children are also scarce. Artists were generally not interested in depicting children as the subject of their works. The most highly regarded subjects were pictures depicting historical, religious, and mythological themes. A well-executed picture in this genre would get an artist noticed and perhaps earn him a reputation as a major painter. As Joshua Reynolds remarked, "Art exists to teach and to inspire.. to provide enlightenment."(qtd.in Dearinger)

If people were to learn "edifying lessons" from a piece of art, then the art must take its inspiration from great events and ideas. This is not meant to suggest that children did not appear in art. They did, but their function was largely symbolic. Their presence was meant to enliven a piece, or to remind viewers of the importance of family, ancestors and the continuity of tradition. In Benjamin West's 1768 painting, *Agrippina With the Ashes of Germanicus*, we see the children of the dead Germanicus clinging to their mother, looking sorrowfully into the distance. They are real historical people, but here they perform what art historian David Dearinger refers to as an "iconographical function" – portraying innocence, family devotion, and evoking sympathy. They are "unwitting participants in an adult world."

There isn't much early American art. Settlers were understandably preoccupied with more pressing matters – obtaining food, shelter being the primary considerations. For them, the arts seemed dangerously irrelevant, a distraction from the serious tasks at hand. "The plowman that raiseth grain is more serviceable to Mankind, than the Painter who draws only to please the eye. The hungry man would count fine Pictures but a mean entertainment...This condemns not Painting, or carving, but only shows, that what's more substantially serviceable to Mankind is much preferable to what is less necessary." (Prown) This is a very practical attitude toward art. It is this pragmatic approach Prown goes on to say, that has characterized American culture from its inception to the present day and has profoundly affected the trajectory of American art. This innate practicality led to portraiture becoming the dominant genre of early American painting from the 1660s to the period just after the Revolutionary war.

There was very little money for decorative arts, but portraits were something else. They served a number of very important functions. Before photography, they were the only way to record a person's appearance. In a time when people died young and a great

number of children did not survive infancy, a portrait served as a reminder of the loved one as well as a family record. When Charles Wilson Peale's daughter, Margaret, died, his wife asked him to paint a portrait of her. He chose to depict Baby Margaret in death, with all the useless medicines around her deathbed. For Mrs. Peale, though, the image was "too gruesome" and Peale softened the image by adding a portrait of her weeping over her baby to the original canvas.

In addition to their function as family records, portraits became statements about the sitters. They conveyed the education, character, and social standing of the people who commissioned these works. Through their dress, and the objects displayed, the portrait conveyed how the sitter wanted to be remembered through the generations – providing a "material immortality" and allowing us a rare glimpse into their lives.

One of the earliest depictions of children in American art is baby Mary in the 1674 painting, *Mrs. Elizabeth Freake and Daughter Mary* by the painter known to us only as, the Freake limner. This painting is considered by many art historians to be a masterpiece. "Not only is it one of the most outstanding works of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it is one of the great American portraits of any time." (Dresser)

It is a beautiful portrait. Formally posed, Mrs. Freake sits on a lavishly upholstered chair with baby Mary, dressed as a miniature adult, standing in her lap. Their features are small, with almond shaped eyes, high foreheads and wide cheekbones and there is very little illusion of them occupying three-dimensional space – typical features of portraits done by the early limners. The painting was commissioned by John Freake, a Puritan who had migrated to New England and become a prosperous merchant and ship owner. Their prosperity is obvious as depicted in the rich colors, the laces, embroidered petticoats, ribbons and jewelry. This painting was done, as so many were in the earliest history of painting in America, to convey the social position and wealth of the family who commissioned it.

In this painting as well as in others of its era – for example, *The Mason Children: David, Joanna, and Abigail* we see how the Puritans regarded children. This little trio stands very stiff, their faces very serious. Although they are only four, six, and eight, they are dressed like miniature men and women. David holds a pair of leather gloves and silver headed walking stick and his sisters both wear coral beads (thought to ward off illness), heavy green dresses covered by lace pinafores and the middle child holds a fan of carved ivory. They were dressed as adults because they were expected to behave as adults. According to Calvinist doctrine, children were believed to have been born in original sin.

Expected to work toward salvation from infancy, Puritan youngsters were compelled to follow the same strictures as adults (Brant and Cullman). Though their sumptuous clothes and accoutrements seem inconsistent with stereotypes of Puritan austerity, we see in these portraits a "Powerful ode to the value that found approval in Calvinist writings – the doctrine of prosperity." (Craven) Puritans believed that the hard work and diligence they applied to earning salvation from eternal damnation in the afterlife couldn't help but

have economic and social rewards in this life. It followed that prosperity was equated with moral virtue and indicated that a person was one of the “elect” – those foreordained to be saved.

Mary Freake and the Mason children may have been the earliest children in American art, but the paintings are not really about them. Their function seems more symbolic than anything else. They are there to suggest the social position and status of their respective families and to proclaim to the ages that they were among the “elect.”

A child growing up in the period between the late 1700s and early 1800s most likely grew up on a farm in a family of many siblings. At this point in its history, America was largely an agrarian society, with the family as the “basic unit of production.” It made simple economic sense to have large families – you needed the workers. Boys worked in the fields with their fathers, plowing, sowing, and planting. Girls did the homely chores under their mothers’ tutelage. They cooked, carded wool, churned, and made clothes from scratch, all the while looking after their younger siblings.

Children worked along with adults and also accompanied them in the social activities such as church and bees and were also dressed like miniature adults. The boys, after age seven, exchanged their long gowns for breeches and homespun shirts. The girls, like their mothers, wore long dresses embedded with stays to encourage good posture and the ever-present apron and cap.

Children worked hard and there was little spare time. But, children being children, always found time for play. Leisure activities were generally divided along gender lines. Girls made and played with dolls, and developed their sewing skills. Outdoors, they rode on swings and jumped rope. Boys, typically, played active games and explored the great outdoors.

Puritans insisted that children be taught literacy in order to read the Bible. They believed this task was the responsibility of the parents. Parents unwilling or unable to attend to their children’s education looked for a local woman – usually a widow who would teach children in her home. These became the dame schools. For most of the 1700s, any schools that existed were locally run. There were no laws requiring children to attend school, nor were there any established curricula or minimum requirements for teachers. As a result, the quality of schools differed dramatically, depending upon the wealth of the community and their willingness to fund the school and the teachers’ salaries. Attendance was often spotty and depended in large part on what work was required at home. This state of educational affairs would continue until the late 18th century when it was decided that a centralized educational system would/could be a unifying force for the new country. It was then, in light of the writings of Locke and Rousseau, that what and how children should be taught was reexamined and debated.

Families had many children in hopes that at least a few would survive into adulthood. Infant mortality rates were high. Statistics show that approximately twenty to thirty percent of children died before their first birthday. Children succumbed to any number of

contagious diseases from smallpox to yellow fever. Measles, whooping cough, and scarlet fever along with epidemics of typhus carried by fleas and lice and typhoid fever, a result of contaminated water, killed many in these early years of the Republic. Medical treatment was hazardous – bloodletting and purging being popular, but often lethal “cures.” During this time, adults and children usually died at home. As a result, youngsters were not strangers to death and dying. Parents felt this was a natural part of the cycle of life and, rather than shield children from this intensely emotional experience, encouraged their exposure, often making sure that children were there to witness the final moments of a brother or sister.

There is almost complete agreement among scholars that a profound change occurred in adult attitudes toward children during the course of the nineteenth century. The Calvinist belief that the child was innately depraved, still strong in the early part of the century, was gradually replaced by a more benign view, which by the end of the century had been transformed into the modern cult of childhood, at least among the well-educated classes. (Hiner)

The years after the American Revolution marked a significant departure from pre-revolution attitudes regarding social/historical thought and artistic endeavors. People began to re-examine their long held ideas about many aspects of their lives. Chief among these was what they believed about raising children. Puritan belief held that children were born “depraved”- tainted by original sin. As explained in *The New England Primer*, the most popular schoolbook of the time, “In Adam’s Fall, We sinned All.” Consequently, if children were unruly, they were to be severely punished – physically as well as psychologically. The American Revolution gave political freedom to adults and it liberated American children as well. “This revolution was accomplished as a direct result of the teachings of the Enlightenment philosophers, Locke and Rousseau, both of whom had been influential in spurring the colonists to revolt. Locke’s theory refuted the Puritan credo of a child’s innate depravity. He insisted, rather, that the child was a *tabula rasa* - clean slate – to be filled in by observation and reasoning. Rousseau went even further in his assertion that a child’s nature was not blank, but innately good.” Both writers established a new appreciation of childhood that is reflected in the portraits of the post-Revolutionary period. (Brant and Cullman) Through their writings, people were inspired to reevaluate their beliefs about the inherent nature of children. This re-envisioning of childhood was seen in the portraits done in the years between 1790 and 1860.

Based on the number of portraits surviving, children in post Revolutionary American had achieved real status. Until this time, a tradition of childhood portraiture did not exist. Brant and Cullman cite Phillippe Aries’s study, *Centuries of Childhood*, wherein he notes: “No one thought of keeping a picture of a child, if that child had either lived to grow to manhood, or had died in infancy. In the first case, childhood was simply and unimportant phase of which there was no need to keep any record; in the second case, that of the dead child, it was thought that the little thing which had disappeared so soon in life was not worthy of remembrance.”

As the eighteenth century waned, portraiture had become accessible to much of the middle class who commissioned likenesses of themselves and their children. “America was engulfed in a rage for portraits,” wrote Aaron Burr in a letter to a friend. In describing the situation, America’s first art critic, John Neal wrote: Pictures will soon become not merely an article for the rich, a luxury for the few, but things for everybody, familiar household furniture. Already they are quite as necessary as the chief part of what goes to the embellishment of a house....You can hardly open the door of a best room anywhere without surprising or being surprised, by the picture of somebody, plastered to the wall and staring at you with both eyes and a bunch of flowers. (Flexner) To meet growing need for portraiture, folk artists took to the road, moving from town to town and staying with the rural families from whom they had obtained commissions.

There are a great number of these portraits that have survived and they provide us with an extensive record of American childhood during this time. Most of these paintings were done by talented folk artists. They were self-taught limners as opposed to academically trained artists. They often began as craftsmen who painted signs and other ornamentation and turned to portrait painting as a way of making additional income. They looked to England as a source of artistic ideas and styles. But they were frustrated in determining what those styles were. Short of taking a trip to study abroad, they had to rely on books, illustrations and rare engravings. American painters, therefore, had to rely on themselves – their own visions and abilities. As a result, they developed a particularly American style, freeing themselves and American art from the strictures of the academic tradition. Some folk artists struggled to depict human features as realistically as they hoped to. Others achieved simple effects by use of bold geometric patterns and color for decoration. Unable to achieve the “exactness of the image” they would often surround the sitter with a variety of personal references, which effectively provided a visual biography of their subject. The stylistic qualities of folk art were not always the result of lack of skill. Some were a conscious choice. One such advertisement for a portrait by William Matthew Prior stated: “persons wishing for a flat picture can have a likeness without a shade of shadow for one quarter price.” In their honesty, lack of pretension, and directness, they reflect the democratic spirit that pervaded the colonies even before the English yoke was thrown off. (Frankenstein)

One indicator that nineteenth century Americans’ attitudes toward childhood was changing can be seen in the type of clothing in the pictures. Children in portraits of this time were no longer wearing miniature versions of their parents’ clothes. Instead, they wore clothing that was more casual and allowed for a greater degree of activity. Infants and toddlers wore dresses – regardless of their sex up to the age of six. *Two Little Boys in a Garden* by John Durand, c.1765 shows one boy who has been “breeched” wearing trousers instead of skirts like the boy on the right. *Church Sampson*, by Dr. Rufus Hathaway c.1793 shows a boy feeding cherries to a parrot. The boy, however, is wearing a necklace and wearing a dress.

Another indicator of the interest in childhood is the inclusion in portraits of actual pets, playthings, and belongings of the child. In John Singleton Copley’s *Boy With a Squirrel*, 1765, we see his portrait of his half brother, Henry Pelham, sitting at a table

while his pet squirrel, held on a gold chain, nibbles a nut. (Squirrels were popular pets in colonial households.) *Elizabeth and Mary Daggett*, by Reuben Moulthrop, 1794 depicts two very real children playing with their doll. Eight-year-old Elizabeth proudly displays the toy, while two-year-old Mary is on the verge of poking its eye out. Charles Wilson Peale's *Staircase Group*, 1795 is a painting about children that uses the portrait format. In this picture, the artist has given us a portrait of his two sons, Titian and Raphaele. (He named his children after famous artists) Raphaele holds a palette and brushes as he climbs the stairs – a possible allusion to him beginning his career as an artist.

As the country moved into the nineteenth century and ushered in the era of the common man, there was a feeling among many Americans, Claire Perry notes, that this new republic was a fragile thing and might not survive the transition to the “radical egalitarianism” of the age. What was needed was an identifiable American culture, what Emerson referred to as a cultural nationalism, a sentiment expressed by politicians, writers, clergy, and artists. The question became, how could this be accomplished? Remarkably, the great minds of the time settled upon the idea of universal education as the panacea. The survival of the republic would depend, in large part, upon educated citizens who would be ready and able to assume the reins of self-government.

America had had such a group in the old guard revolutionaries. But these patriarchs were dying off and many in the country were asking themselves to whom could they turn to take up the responsibilities not only of holding the republic together, but of taking it into the new century. Educators, ministers, newspaper editors, politicians, business leaders, and parents began to engage in heated debates about the special requirements of children growing up in a democratic society and the kind of training their unique circumstances entailed. Ultimately, afflicted by a chronic uneasiness about the health of their government, Americans set forth an entirely new range of definitions and expectations for the youngest republicans on whom the nation's future was thought to depend.” (Perry)

Taking to heart the teachings of Locke and Rousseau that a child's mind was a tabula rasa and essentially malleable by the environment, Americans at this point in its history projected upon its children its hopes and dreams. It was understood that the nation's children would take on the responsibilities of the new republic and so assure the nation's continued existence as a democracy. They would, however, have to be carefully and systematically educated and prepared to take on the mantle of government. To this end, throughout the nineteenth century, pictures of children – in paintings, engravings, advertisements, and photography became part of a larger cultural network that included novels, sermons, advice to parents manuals, and songs by which the country worked to define itself and assure its continuity.

Noah Webster was the first to create a set of instructional works for children. He believed that America must be as independent in literature as she is in politics, as famous for arts as for arms. (Murray). So, in 1783 he created a series of progressive textbooks that became known as *The American Spelling Book*. The books began with letters and sounds and progressed through to classical works and writings by contemporary authors

and statesmen. He introduced students to American history, standardized spelling, and proper behavior. He dropped references to the Bible, substituting instead, his own personal brand of evangelical Christianity. His books reflected the perfect combination of rational, evenhanded thought combined with moderate Christian belief systems.

In the early 1800s William McGuffey, a teacher in Ohio, was asked to create a reader for use by students that would be free of British/New England bias. As an educator in the rural areas of Ohio, he understood that attendance would depend on what children needed to do at home. He realized that if children, especially those who lived on farms were to be taught to read, they'd have to be taught quickly. With this in mind, he developed a system that went straight from the alphabet to short sentences – no drilling with lists of short words to be spelled and memorized before reading. He introduced short, but interesting stories. Students gradually progressed through the readers, and by the fourth reader, they were introduced to poetry and essays on a wide range of subjects.

Between 1790 and the first half of the nineteenth century, America changed dramatically. The population increased by six hundred percent and the economy diversified. More and more families left the farm for work in the towns and cities. For some, this meant that children went to work in factories along with their parents. For others, this meant that families had more leisure time and so more time for education and reading. It was during this period that writers began to write specifically for children. In the late 1830s, Jacob Abbott, a New England clergyman and math professor created a series of books featuring a boy named Rollo. Rollo, considered by many scholars to be the first truly American child character in literature, progresses through a series of developmental changes learning to talk and to read, as well as through various physical and moral challenges. Never lecturing, Abbott lets the reader draw his or her own conclusions about what was morally right. The Rollo stories were the most popular children's books for much of the mid nineteenth century.

In general, children's literature in the first two thirds of the nineteenth century combined in story form a generic Christianity along with lessons on how to behave in a moral way. "Good behavior received just rewards; naughty children got lost in the woods, drowned, were attacked by animals, or fell ill. This literature served to allay fears that the Republic might disintegrate because of moral laxity or simple ineptitude and confirmed for parents that the moral backbone of American culture remained firm." (Murray)

The interest in the culture of childhood grew more intense as the century progressed and the nation grappled with a host of unsettling problems such as slavery, immigration, industrialization, urbanization, and westward expansion. Children, it was felt, were soothing subjects and held out hope for the future. Advances in printing and technology made the prints of Currier and Ives that depicted happy scenes of country boys and adorable toddlers, childcare manuals, ABC books, and the McGuffey readers affordable and easily attainable. It is Dr. Perry's theory that this shared interest centering on the child transcended the partisan, regional, and economic barriers that impeded the growth of a sense of national identity and became an important process through which the

political union of states that existed before the Civil War became the singular United States. The youngest generation became the icon of America's grand destiny. (Perry)

The American Revolution separated the United States from England and its old world ideas. The dependence on Europe for an artistic vision had been acceptable when America had been a colony and most people called England "home." It was quite unacceptable in an independent country, determined to stand on its own feet culturally as well as politically. As a result, the history of American art during the years of nationhood was in essence a quest for an art expressive of American identity. (Prown) What should American art look like? What would be worthy subjects for the art of this new democracy?

As the century progressed, American art seemed to find its vision through genre painting- the representation of scenes from everyday life. It became very popular and remained so into the early twentieth century. Through the paintings of children in this century it is possible to see the growth of the new republic and its increased emphasis on the importance of children. This art of the people and for the people coincided with the rise of Jacksonian democracy. Paintings of children proliferated. It was as though they had been awaiting the arrival of genre painting. The majority of these paintings were of idealized children – country boys in rural settings, demure girls reading or attending to other domestic chores. They had a stabilizing and reassuring effect on the tenor of the country and provided the citizenry with a sense that there was indeed an underlying and natural order to American society, despite the sense of upheaval at that time.

One of the most prevalent themes was that of the country boy. He came to symbolize what Americans believed about themselves and embodied the image they wished to convey to the world at large. Henry Inmans' *The Young Fisherman*, 1830, Eastman Johnson's *Barefoot Boy*, 1860, and John George Brown's *The Berry Boy*, 1875 are three excellent examples of this genre. In each, we see a young boy, on his own, in an idyllic wilderness setting. Healthy and tan, in their homespun shirts and rolled up pants they represent the image of the common people and reflect the spirit of the times- a people free and independent of European influence, living on a continent of vast open spaces and limitless possibilities.

Genre painting is essentially story telling. Many artists chose to temper the sometimes over sentimentalized and nostalgic representations of children with paintings of children behaving badly. William Sidney Mount's *Boys Caught Napping in a Field*, *School Boys Quarreling* and *Truant Gamblers* explore this theme.

The literary corollary to these paintings was the writing of Samuel Clemens. In a satirical essay written in 1865 titled, "The Story of the Bad Little Boy That Bore a Charmed Life, Clemens turned the previously moralistic children's literature genre on its head. He portrayed a mischievous child who lied to his mother, hectored adults and other children. He wasn't punished, didn't suddenly get religion or die. Clemens created a new model of boyhood – tough, manly, adventuresome, disobedient, and free-spirited. He was the lovable bad boy, described by Aunt Polly in Tom Sawyer: "He warn't bad so to

say – only mischievous...He never meant any harm, and he was the best hearted boy that ever was.” He was the Good Bad Boy who, Leslie Fielder notes, is, of course, America’s vision of itself, crude and unruly in its beginnings, but endowed by its creator with an instinctive sense of what is right. (Murray)

Shortly after the Civil War, Winslow Homer completed a series of eight paintings showing country children at school. Though completed in the 1870s when a system of centralized public education had been legislated by most states, and the benches of the schoolroom in *Country School* would have been replaced by rows of desks facing forward, Homer’s paintings were evocative for his contemporaries of school days past, but for children today provide interesting insights and opportunities for comparison. The most famous of these is *Snap the Whip*, 1872, in which a group of boys, freed from the confines of school, play a very wild, physical game. This painting embodies so many of the themes that run through the art of the nineteenth century-farm life, freedom, school, reminiscence of and idealization of childhood, incipient adulthood and its attendant responsibilities, it is no wonder that a critic from the *New York Commercial Advertiser* was moved to write: “We know of no work as thoroughly and distinctively American as this.”

After the Revolution, many women believed they would share in the country’s hard won liberty. They expected a greater degree of freedom and a more expanded role in the larger world. But they were disappointed. Throughout the nineteenth century, there were clearly delineated “separate spheres” for the sexes. This was evident in all facets of life, and promulgated by editors, clerics, educators, poets, medical authorities, and artists. When Myra C. Bradwell challenged the Illinois Supreme Court’s refusal to allow her to practice law after she had passed the Illinois bar, the United States Supreme Court’s 1873 decision sided with the lower court. Their verdict: The paramount destiny and mission of women are to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother. This is the law of the Creator.” (Hakim) Women’s roles became even more rigidly defined. Placed on a pedestal in the center of domestic life, women were assigned the task of moral compass and guardians of democracy. This was a sacred trust that involved nurturing future citizens, providing moral encouragement for husbands, and the usual panoply of household chores. (Perry)

But American women struggled against this limited role. During the nineteenth century women and girls did things most American women had never done before. They worked long hours in factories, spoke out in public, went to war, got an education, graduated from college and agitated vociferously for the right to vote. Despite all this, the depictions of girls in paintings, engravings, and advertisements were relegated to a narrow range of subjects. There was no female counterpart of the dynamic, free-wheeling “country boy.” Girls were usually shown in quiet, thoughtful poses, gathering flowers, sewing or interacting with clothing or playing with pets.

The combination of girls with flowers was an old image in Western art, but it was particularly significant in American culture at this time. Identifying girls with flowers implied young women were “rooted” and therefore stable. This was in contrast to the

hyper-mobility of the country at large and it provided a very reassuring image. “As men, dreaming of the future bought and sold, invented and explored, the vision of female stability served as a check and balance to the expansive energies of liberty.” (Perry) Jacob Eichholtz’s 1818 painting entitled *The Ragan Sisters* is an early example of the American girls with flowers motif/theme. In it we see two, clearly well to do young sisters standing in an outdoor setting. They appear to have been gathering flowers – roses are pictured. In the vocabulary of flowers popular at this time, roses represented purity and grace- attributes young women should possess. The flowers also refer to the expectation that the girls will marry and have many children. The girls are embracing, showing great affection for one another, but also symbolizing the whole range of ties that connect and bind them in love and duty to their family.

The May Queen, by Jacob Marling, 1816 is another of these flower/girl pieces. This crowning of the May Queen takes place outside, in a lovely garden with a school building in the background. At the time this was painted, there was an increasing interest in educating girls. But the curricula offered them was relatively limited. Their courses of study would train them to be good managers of their households as well as able tutors for their sons. The flower image, rooting girls to limiting, pre-ordained roles, surfaces again.

Thirty years later in *Little Girl With Slate* c. 1845, we see things had not changed much even though increasing opportunities through education were much touted. A little girl sits with a slate in her lap. She has copied onto it a passage from the New Testament: “Suffer the little children to come unto me for such is the Kingdom of Heaven.” The text on the slate is turned towards her, symbolic of the disparity in education of boys and girls. Boys were encouraged to look beyond the classroom and use their education for furthering careers. Girls on the other hand, were directed to the confines of the home, where, as mothers and teachers, they would prepare the future generation.

Images showing girls sewing was a favorite theme. In a country mad for progress, rushing headlong toward the future, this simple image seemed to reassure the country that the virtues of the past were still to be found. A corollary of the sewing image was that of girls interacting with clothing – play acting, picking an outfit, or dressing up for a special occasion. Clothing often served in these pictures as a symbol of the girl’s transition into adulthood. Perry slyly notes that at a time when boys began their encounters with the outside world by joining the army or heading west, girls were often given their first corsets to wear.

Eastman Johnson’s *The Party Dress*, 1872 shows a girl being helped by a younger girl, possibly her sister as she prepares to go out for a party. The room is dim and the central figure has a distant gaze that seems to express she may not be looking forward to this occasion. On a chair to the right is a crumpled doll, a symbol of the passing of childhood. This image is counterbalanced on the right by a pair of fireplace tongs – an indicator of the adult responsibilities she will, in the near future, have to assume.

In a motif that harkens back to colonial paintings, girls were often pictured with animals – usually in the act of training them. These images were intended to convey their

self-discipline and patience as well as their perceived ability to train future generations in the accepted ways of society. Seymour Guy's *Girl with Canary*, 1860 and Thomas Eakins' *Elizabeth with a Dog*, 1871 are excellent examples of this theme.

Louisa May Alcott's work captures many of the themes that appear in paintings of girls during this period. The March girls of *Little Women* seem to reinforce the gender roles and expectations assigned to girls. For the most part, they portray models of serenity, self-sacrifice and tranquil domesticity. A closer reading, however, reveals characters that do misbehave, feel resentment and jealousy and exhibit a marked degree of assertiveness. Her writing does serve to remind us "Victorian domesticity and the separate-sphere ideology were not monolithic constructs encompassing all middle class American women all the time. (Murray).

It is difficult to reconstruct the experience of American childhood in this period. The children themselves are strangely silent. There are few letters, diaries or school papers in existence. Accounts by adults of their childhood experiences are often unreliable. Memories fade with time. Details can be omitted or exaggerated and experiences can be filtered through and altered by present day values. So it is through the paintings and the literature that we can hope to help our students catch a glimpse of what children of the past and their world were like.

Objectives

This unit encompasses several curricular areas. The lessons are aligned with the School District of Philadelphia's Core curriculum for visual arts, literacy, and social studies. Through this unit, students will come to an understanding of what life was like for children and how our culture's attitude toward children and childhood changed over the course of the first two hundred years of our history. The students will view paintings from this period and understand and appreciate the artistic elements of the piece. They will learn about the artist, his techniques, and milieu. They will be able to describe the "story" the painting tells about the children /events pictured.

Students will read a variety of literature from the time, discussing it in terms of genre, narrative elements, and how it elucidates the themes and activities portrayed in the paintings. Students will write in a variety of genres in response to the paintings, the literature, and to what they have learned.

Strategies

This unit incorporates several curricular areas and will use a number of strategies in order to accomplish the objectives. Because this unit encompasses a wide band of history, students will begin by making a time line in order to provide a historical touchstone to which they can refer as the unit progresses. They will learn about artists, study paintings and learn to "read" them for their artistic elements. Throughout the unit they will keep a journal to record information about the art and artists, jot down their comments, questions and observations of the works studied, as well as their reflections on the lives of the

children they are “meeting.” In addition to journal writing, they will create short stories as well as expository essays.

Students will study and learn their lessons from 200 year old textbooks, they will read and find relevance in novels written a century and a half apart, analyze poetry and personal narratives. Students will also incorporate the arts in their study through a variety of media.

Classroom Activities

Introductory Lesson

In this lesson, the students will be introduced to the unit – its subject, goals and scope. They will create a time line that will include the events and ideas covered by the time frame of the unit.

Materials needed:

Prepared time line marked off in increments of 10 years

To be added later: reproductions of paintings or engravings (if possible or practical) depicting events to be included on the timeline. (Symbolic icons can be substituted for the actual paintings.)

This unit spans approximately 200 years of American history. That’s a lot of information! To help students keep things in order and to create a touchstone reference, students will make a time line for the years 1600-1900 that will remain in the classroom throughout the unit.

Begin by brainstorming with the students what events and ideas they already know and record on chart paper. Have students look up dates if they can’t remember or are unsure.

Distribute the events they have come up with to pairs or small groups and have students write a brief description for each event using whatever resources they choose.

Since it would be impossible to include all important dates and ideas, decide which would be most meaningful/memorable for students. Write these down on 3x5 cards, include a brief description, and then attach the pictures.

Ask students to try to place these items on the time line. Make corrections if needed and briefly discuss the events. During the course of the unit, students should be encouraged to add to the time line.

The time line should be placed where students can easily see it and should be referred to frequently throughout the unit.

Lesson Two – Portraits

Part 1

Prior to beginning this lesson, ask students to bring in pictures of themselves, or of friends or relatives. Pictures can also be culled from magazines.

In this lesson, students will examine pictures of today's children and discuss the part photographs play in their lives. They will determine what pictures might be able to tell an observer about childhood in 21st century America.

Materials:

Journals

Photographs or copies of photos, informal snapshots, school pictures

Photos from magazines

Chart paper

If possible or practicable, scan photos onto the computer and project them in scrapbook form so all students can see at once. If this format is not possible, have pictures displayed in some way so that students can look at and pass pictures along to their classmates during the beginning of this lesson.

Ask students to look carefully at the pictures. Have them think about the clothes, the setting, the poses, the objects around the people, and the purpose of the picture. What is happening in the pictures? What is the demeanor of each of the people in the picture? Think about how these pictures were made. Where are they kept? Who keeps them? Students should record their observations in their journals.

After students have had a chance to look closely at all the pictures and note their responses, ask for their observations and record these on chart paper. Ask students to develop categories for their observations and record discuss these.

Finally, ask students what these pictures could tell someone about childhood in America in the 21st century. For example, what are our clothes like and what does that say about our lifestyle? Where do we live? What's important to us? Reference the pictures for supporting evidence.

Sufficient time should be provided for students to write and reflect about what they have observed and discussed. Pictures should be displayed so that students can refer to them as they write.

At the close of the lesson, give students an opportunity to share their thoughts. Record their observations.

Portraits

Part 2 – Looking at the art

Materials needed:

Reproductions of the following paintings and projector:

Mrs. Elizabeth Freake and Baby Mary by the Freake limner. C.1674

The Mason Children: David, Joanna, and Abigail by and unidentified artist.C. 1670

Boy With a Squirrel, by John Singleton Copley, 1765

The Staircase Group (Portrait of Raphaelle Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale), by Charles Wilson Peale, 1795

Elizabeth and Mary Daggett, by Reuben Moulthrop, 1794

Church Sampson, by Dr. Rufus Hathaway, 1793

Alexander Spotswood Payne and his Brother John Robert Dandridge Payne, with their Nurse, by the Payne limner, c.1790

Student journals

Chart paper

In this lesson, the students will learn the artistic definition of a portrait. They will look closely at a number of portraits for the functional, artistic, and historical content. They will also learn about the artists and discuss what these portraits can tell us about children in this era.

Begin by asking students to define the word portrait – especially as it applies to painting
Record the definition in journals

Tell students they will be looking at two portraits from the late 1600s – (reference historical information – what was going on in the country at that time – see timeline)
Explain that we don't know the names of the artists and explain about limners

Ask why might a person have had his/her portrait painted?

Look closely at *Mrs. Elizabeth Freake and Baby Mary* and ask students for their observations. Jot down in their journals - What's going on in the pictures? What kind of expression do you see on the faces of the children? What are they wearing? What is the setting? What objects do they have with them? What comments or questions do students have? Follow this up with the painting of the Mason children and a similar observe/write format.

Have students write in their journals what they think life was like for kids in this time period and what in the pictures would lead them to this conclusion.

Follow with a discussion of their observations – noting their comments on chart paper. Include in the discussion the artistic elements in the paintings – light, color, line, design, brush strokes, medium, etc.

Students should understand that children were not only dressed like miniature adults, but they were expected to act that way as well. Also, paintings did not give us much information about the children or their lives – more about the status of the family.

Moving ahead about 100 years, students will look at *Boy with a Squirrel* by Copely and Peale's *Staircase Group*.

Show each painting and give students a short biographical sketch about each artist.

Lead the discussion of these paintings in the same way as the first two paintings. Ask students to determine in what ways these are different from the first two. Is there any difference in the depiction of childhood? What evidence is there?

Discuss with students that children themselves and what they are doing seem to be more important in the paintings of this period.

Look closely at Mary Daggett, Church Sampson, and the Payne Brothers. Have students create a short narrative for each painting that explains what's going on. Explain that towards the end of the 1700s children were shown doing things that children do and were often pictured with toys and pets.

Portraits

Part 3

The Art (Based on a lesson suggested by Marianne Saccardi)

In this lesson, students will create portraits of each other using a variety of media

Materials:

Pencils - #2 and colored

Markers

Crayons

Tempera

Brushes

(Optional – photos of classmates)

Black construction paper for framing

Pair students. One will be the limner, the other the person commissioning the portrait

Have each one interview the other to determine what is important in his/her life

Have students create portraits of one another that include the important items discussed (Note: tracing black and white photos can sometime help students overcome their “I’m really not that good at drawing” hesitation, so offer this as an alternative to a drawing from life.)

Frame completed portraits and display.

Literacy Lesson

Learning the ABCs

In this lesson, students will compare and contrast how children were taught to read in the late 1600s with how we are taught today. They will also discern the author's purpose in each text.

Materials:

Copy of the ABC section from the New England Primer
 Download from Googlebooks.com

Copy of a favorite ABC book from school library or a favorite of some of the students

Begin by giving students some background information about the primer.

Read through the lessons. Discuss what the book is like and what things are being taught.
 (Author's purpose)

Read through the modern ABC book. Discuss what things are being taught.

Ask students to reflect on the differences between the two texts. Why did books written to teach children change? Can they figure out what the early authors thought about children? What attitudes to children do modern authors have.

Lesson Two

Boys and Girls

In these two lessons, students will learn the characteristics of genre painting in the 1800s. Through the paintings viewed, as well as reading the literature of the period, they will understand that boys and girls were treated very differently. Students will assume the persona of one of the children in the paintings and create an imaginative narrative.

Materials:

Reproductions of the following paintings and a projector:

The Young Fisherman, by Henry Inman, 1830

Barefoot Boy, by Eastman Johnson, 1860

The Berry Boy, John George Brown, 1875

School Boys Quarreling, by William Sidney Mount, 1830

Boys Caught Napping, by William Sidney Mount, 1845

The Ragan Sisters, by Jacob Eichholtz, 1818

The May Queen, by Jacob Marling, 1845

Little Girl With a Slate, artist unknown, c.1840

Resting in the Woods (Girl Under a Tree) John George Brown, 1866

The Party Dress, by Eastman Johnson, 1872

Girl With a Canary, Seymour Gut, 1860

Elizabeth With a Dog, by Thomas Eakins, 1871

Copies of selections from

Tom Sawyer, by Mark Twain

Little Women, by Louisa May Alcott

“Suds,” poem by Louisa May Alcott

“Barefoot Boy,” poem by John Greenleaf Whittier

Part 1

Begin by introducing students to genre painting – painting that tells about everyday life. Explain that this type of painting became very popular in the 1800s – the period after the American Revolution (historical reference) and that it was in these paintings that we really see children doing things that children were doing.

Display John George Brown’s *The Berry Boy*. Allow students time to look closely and to record their observations in their journals. Ask what is going on in the painting? What is the setting? Who is in the painting? Who isn’t in the painting? What is this boy’s life like? How might it be different from a boy in our time? In what ways could it be the same? What do they see that the artist has done with light, color, line, and composition?

Once students have had an opportunity to reflect, discuss their reactions and observations. Begin the discussion by explaining that this was a favorite subject of genre painters – it was known as ‘the country boy’ and that it was intended to show how healthy and strong the new country was after parting from England. Show other examples of the genre from the above selection and extend the discussion with these paintings.

Have students read Whittier’s “Barefoot Boy” and discuss it as a work of poetry and consider how the poem and the paintings compare in terms of theme and mood. What is the poet’s vision of childhood? Do you think he is writing about an actual experience or is he idealizing his boyhood?

Part 2

The Girls

Begin by taking an informal poll of students’ beliefs about the equality between boys and girls. Do they believe there are no set gender roles? Are there still some things that boys can do that girls can’t and vice versa? Discuss.

With the poll results in mind, begin this section showing the *Ragan Sisters*. Have students look closely at this painting for clues as to what it tells about the two girls. What do you notice about setting, subject, and expression of the girls? What is going on in this picture? What are they wearing? What have they been doing? How do they relate to each other? What has the artist done in terms of color, line, light, and design. Once students have had an opportunity to respond in their journals, open the discussion. Follow this painting with others depicting girls.

After viewing a series of paintings, have students write about what life was like for girls in this period. In what ways is it similar to girls’ lives today? In what ways is it different? Have students read Louisa May Alcott’s poem, “Suds.” Discuss it as a poem. What is she saying? What is she feeling? What can you say about her choice of subject? Compare it to the pictures students have just analyzed.

Do students see differences in how the boys and the girls are depicted? What are those differences- what evidence is there in the paintings to support the ideas? What does that say about how society felt towards girls and boys?

Give students some historical perspective on the concept of “separate spheres” for men and women and how this was enforced in life and reinforced in literature and art.

Extension activity:

Read selections from Twain’s *Tom Sawyer* and Alcott’s *Little Women*.

Have students do a character analysis on a main character from each of the selections.

Compare the characters from the novels to the characters in the paintings – how do they complement and elaborate upon on another.

Part 3

Writing Activity

Have students chose a painting and use it to inspire an imaginative narrative.

Students will write a story from the point of view of one of the characters in the painting. It can begin at any point – events leading up to the picture, events following the picture etc.

Students will review the elements of story, create histories for the characters, and outline the plot as they craft their stories.

They will take their piece through the writing process and publish the work.

Students will narrate their stories into a format such as garage band. The story will be played as the painting is projected

Lesson 3

Schools

In these lessons, students will view a variety of paintings depicting school in the 1800s, learn about Winslow Homer, study a lesson using a 150 year old text book and compare and contrast literary representations of children from the 1800s and present day characters.

Materials:

Biographical information about Winslow Homer

Reproductions of Winslow Homer’s School Days series:

School Time, c.1874, *Homework*, 1874, *The Noon Recess* (wood engraving), 1873,

Country School, 1873, *Snap the Whip*, 1872

Little Girl with Slate, artist unknown, c.1845

Boy With Dog, by William Bartoll, 1840-1850

New England School, by Charles Frederick Bosworth, 1852

Copy of "The Fun They Had," by Isaac Asimov

Copy of a lesson from *McGuffey's Fourth Reader* (William H. McGuffey)

Copy of a "Rollo," story for each student (Jacob Abbott)

Copy of *Maniac Magee*, by Jerry Spinelli for each student, or copies of several chapters

Camera (If Available)

Paper

Pencils

Watercolor paints and brushes

Begin by reading aloud and briefly discuss the short story, "The Fun They Had," by I. Asimov.

(Children in the distant future discover a book showing a school from the late 20th century. They're amazed, not only by the book itself, they have no books, only screens, but by the description of schooling. Teachers are humans, not robots, children learn together, not in isolated rooms at their home.)

Have students write down what they think school was like 150 years in the past. What might be different? What might be the same?

Ask students how they think society feels about schools. Is it important in our culture? Why? How do you know?

Provide students with a brief history of the public schools.

Introduce the art by explaining that students will be looking at pictures of schools and children in schools from 1870 by Winslow Homer.

Provide biographical information on Homer and have students take notes in their journals

View the paintings with students

Have them write down their observations, thoughts, comparisons with today's school

Discuss Homer's use of line, perspective, composition, color, lighting, and design.

Note: The Bartoll painting and that of the Little Girl are useful in elucidating the disparity in education between boys and girls.

The Literature

Discuss what and how the students are learning

Provide students with a lesson from the *McGuffey Reader* on a topic they have recently studied

Discuss the differences in approach towards education and what this says about how people then felt children could learn

Realistic Fiction and Author's purpose

Have students read a Rollo story by Jacob Abbott. In their journals, they should summarize, identify the narrative elements, and describe Rollo's character. What kind of a boy is he? What do people think of him? What's his view of the world?

Have students read portions of "Manic Magee" and proceed as with the Rollo story.

Discuss both selections. Compare and contrast how these two children are portrayed. Focus the discussion on author's purpose.

The Art

Have students take photos of anything in and around the school that they find interesting.

Before students set out to take their pictures, have on hand watercolor materials and briefly explain how different these are from tempera and how water is used to create different effects.

Students will use the photos to sketch the scene and then paint it in watercolors. Paintings will be mounted and displayed.

Culminating Activity

Students will create a primary document about their lives in the 20th century using both art and literature. Their point of view is to provide information about childhood in this century for a time traveling child from the 19th century.

Students will choose one aspect of their lives on which to focus. Possible topics could include, but are not limited to: school, home life, entertainment, boys and girls, clothes.

Students will:

Research their topic

Decide on a genre through which to represent their ideas

(Poetry, expository text, skit, interview, etc) and then write it.

Students will then choose a medium for their presentation

(Pod cast, iphoto scrapbook, painting, mixed media) and share with classmates.

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Written by a teacher for teachers, this book contains not only lesson plans but valuable insights about artists, styles, and periods and hands on activities.

West, Elliott and Petrik, Paula,ed. *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850 to 1950*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992.

A collection of essays about children from people in various fields that provides insights into the lives and experiences of children.

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On-line lecture “Seen But Not Heard: Images of Children I American Art”, 2007

<http://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu>

interactive resource for teaching with visual evidence

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/66.126>

Chronological, geographical, and thematic exploration of art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s collection

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpcoop/moahtml/mnchomehtml>

The 19th century in print – The Making of America in books and periodicals digitized by the University of Michigan

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/alcott/lwtext.html>

Downloadable version of Louisa May Alcott’s, *Little Women*

<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Twa2Tom.html>

Downloadable version of Mark Twain’s, *Tom Sawyer*

artstor.org

An online database of high resolution art images. For a free subscription to ARTstor email resourcecenter@philamuseum.org

philamuseum.org/education/33-132-200.html

This website provides links to Philadelphia Museum of Art’s collection resources, teaching posters and kits.

Googlebooks.com

Contains thousands of complete books, in original format, digitized by the good folks at Google

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Download thousands of free books

Student Resources

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A mock autobiography in which the artists talks about his life and work as if entertaining a guest for the weekend.

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Venezia, Mike. *Getting to Know the World's Great Artists: Winslow Homer*. Danbury: Children's Press(CT), 2004.

Biographical information, and more than 20 reproductions give students a feel for Homer's unique style.

Appendix-Standards:

Pennsylvania State Standards

Literacy

1.1 Learning to Read Independently

1.1A Establish the purpose for reading a type of text before reading

1.1B Select texts for a particular purpose

1.1G Demonstrate after reading understanding and interpretation of text

1.2 Reading Critically in All Areas

1.2C Produce work in at least one literary genre that follows the conventions of the genre

1.3 Reading, Analyzing & Interpreting Literature

1.3A Read and understand works of literature

1.3C Describe how the author uses literary devices to convey meaning

1.4 Types of Writing

1.4A Write poems, plays, and multi paragraph stories including narrative and memoir

1.5 Quality of Writing

1.5A Write with sharp, distinct focus, identifying topic, task and audience

1.5B Use well developed content appropriate for the topic

1.5C Write with controlled and/or subtle organization

1.5E Revise writing to improve organization, word choice, order and precision of vocabulary

1.5F Edit writing using the conventions of language

Social Studies

8.3 United States History

A.1 Primary Documents, Materials, and Historical Places

B.1 Political and Cultural Contributions of Individuals and Groups

C.2 How Continuity and Change has Influenced United States History