

LACMA EVENINGS FOR EDUCATORS



SINCE THE FOUNDING DECADES OF THE COUNTRY, AMERICAN ARTISTS HAVE SOUGHT to create uniquely American art—art that embodied the nation’s pioneering and independent spirit. The artworks highlighted in this resource reflect their times but they also actively produce and shape what we know about the past, as great works of art often do. As you explore this resource, consider the ways these artworks have been used to create many of America’s most enduring images and national myths.

- *Look carefully at each artwork. What do you see?*
- *What details do you notice?*
- *What story might this artwork tell?*
- *How can works of art help to document personal and national stories?*
- *What is the role of personal and national narratives in contemporary society?*

Making a New Nation

Established during the Age of Reason (also referred to as the Enlightenment), the United States was founded on the values of ingenuity, creativity, and collaboration. How do these artworks reflect these values?



JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY, (United States, 1738–1815)

Paul Revere, 1768

Oil on canvas, 35 1/8 x 28 1/2 in.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Gift of Joseph W. Revere, William B. Revere and Edward H. R. Revere

© 2010 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

- Consider the lighting, setting, body language, and facial expression of the sitter. What information does the sitter's clothing, posture, and accessories provide and what do these details tell us about his character?
- In what ways do the style and composition reveal or create a story about the sitter?



PAUL REVERE JR. (1735–1818) and PAUL REVERE SR. (1702–1754)

Cream Pitcher, c. 1750–60

Silver, 3 7/8 x 3 1/2 x 2 3/8 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in memory of David Orgell

Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

This pitcher was made by silversmith Paul Revere who is portrayed in Copley's iconic painting on the previous page.

- *What does this object tell us about the history of American craftsmanship? What types of objects were considered valuable in the developing nation?*



JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY (United States, 1738–1815)

Watson and the Shark, 1778

Oil on canvas, 71 3/4 x 90 1/2 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Ferdinand Lamot Belin Fund

Photo courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

In this dramatic painting called *Watson and the Shark*, a young boy struggles against the dangers of the sea. The boy is fourteen year old Brook Watson who survived a shark attack in 1749. Mr. Watson asked the artist John Singleton Copley to paint this picture, hoping his story of survival and bravery might inspire others. Visit: [nga.gov/feature/watson/watsonhome.shtm](https://www.nga.gov/feature/watson/watsonhome.shtm) for more details.

- *Select an extraordinary event in your life or that of a family or community member. What was remarkable about the event? How might you document that event in one image?*



JOSEPH B. BLACKBURN
(England, c. 1700–after 1765, active United States)
Portrait of Captain John Pigott, c. 1700–63
Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 in.

Purchased with funds provided by the American Art Council
in honor of the Museum's twenty-fifth anniversary
Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA



JOSEPH B. BLACKBURN
(England, c. 1700–after 1765, active United States)
Portrait of Mrs. John Pigott, c. 1700–63
Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 in.

Purchased with funds provided by the American Art Council
in honor of the Museum's twenty-fifth anniversary
Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

- *If you were to create a portrait of yourself, what pose would you take? What would you wear? What attributes, or clues, would you include in order to reveal something about yourself, your interests, and society today?*

A National Identity

In the first half of the nineteenth century, industrialization and immigration defined the national experience. Artists began to render scenes of everyday life, shaping an American identity and documenting the business of forging a new nation. How do these artworks represent the values of labor and community?



GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM (United States, 1811–1879)

The Jolly Flatboatmen, 1846

Oil on canvas, 38 1/8 x 48 1/2 in

Manoogian Collection

Photo courtesy of the Manoogian Collection

- *Create a story for this artwork. What is happening in this work of art? Who are the characters? Where and when does this story take place? What happened before this scene? What happens next?*



WILLIAM SIDNEY MOUNT (United States, 1807–1868)
Eel Spearing at Setauket, 1845
Oil on canvas, 28 1/2 x 36 in.
Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York
Photo courtesy of Fenimore Art Museum, NY

This painting was commissioned by a New York merchant, George Washington Strong, whose family owned the land seen in the painting.

- *In what ways does the artist tell us about the American landscape and our relationship to it?*
- *How could you document or idealize a region today? What story would you communicate about your geographic location or region? Consider the medium you might use to illustrate your narrative such as photography, video, sculpture, or mixed-media.*



ALLEN SMITH JR. (United States, 1810–1890)

The Young Mechanic, 1848

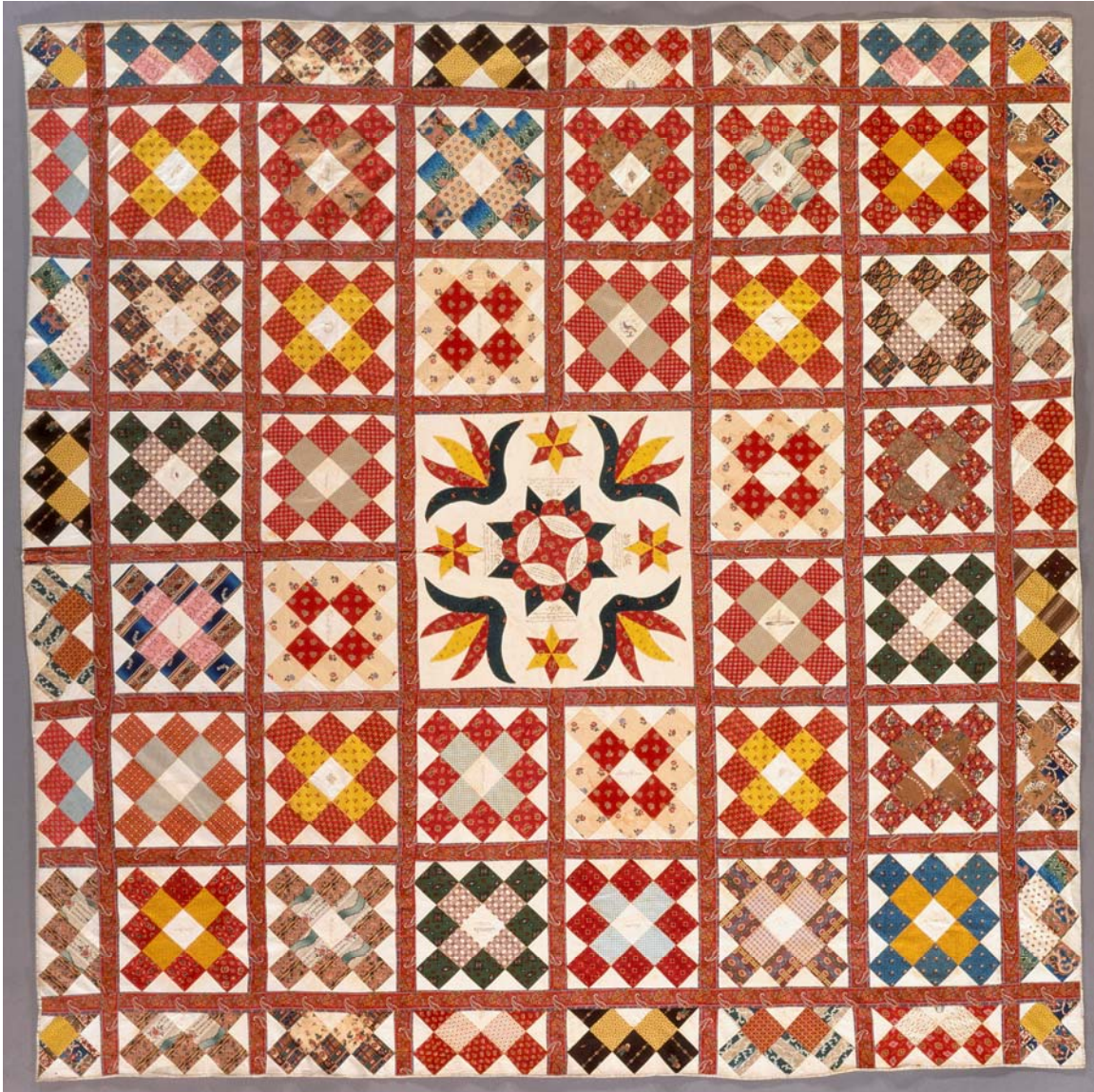
Oil on canvas, 40 5/16 x 32 3/16 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Gift of the American Art Council and Mr. and Mrs. J. Douglas Pardee

Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

- Create a monologue for one of the characters in this work of art or develop a dialogue between characters. What might the characters say to one another? What visual clues does the artist provide that can help to direct the monologue or dialogue?



EMILY SNYDER (United States, b.1804)
Quilt, "Snyder Memorial," c. 1845–1850
Pieced and appliquéd cotton, with inked signatures, 98 1/2 x 98 1/2 in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
American Quilt Research Center Acquisition Fund. Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

Just as genre paintings serve as records of their times, quilts like this signature quilt composed of signed blocks commemorate important historical and personal events. This quilt was created by Emily Snyder as a family register and records the births and deaths of several family members.

- *Consider the composition or design of this quilt. What role does color and shape play in the unity of the design? What is the central focus and how is it emphasized? If you were the quilter, how would you change the design?*

Continuity and Change

The years following the Civil War (1860–65) were a time of rapid cultural and financial growth in America. How do these artworks represent continuity and change?



WINSLOW HOMER (United States, 1836–1910)

The Cotton Pickers, 1876

Oil on canvas, 24 1/16 x 38 1/8 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, acquisition made possible through Museum Trustees: Robert O. Anderson, R. Stanton Avery, B. Gerald Cantor, Edward W. Carter, Justin Dart, Charles E. Ducommun, Camilla Chandler Frost, Julian Ganz, Jr., Dr. Armand Hammer, Harry Lenart, Dr. Franklin D. Murphy, Mrs. Joan Palevsky, Richard E. Sherwood, Maynard J. Toll, and Hal B. Wallis

Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

Winslow Homer's *The Cotton Pickers* shows two young African American women returning home from a day's work in the fields. See the enclosed essay for more information or listen to the multimedia tour for this artwork at: collectionsonline.lacma.org.

- *Imagine if the women were not so prominently depicted, but rather set further back into the middle or background of the painting. How would changing the women's size and scale alter your interpretation of the painting? Or imagine if the horizon line were placed higher in the composition.*



WINSLOW HOMER (United States, 1836–1910)
The Veteran in a New Field, 1865
Oil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 38 1/8 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Bequest of Miss Adelaide Milton de Groot (1876–1967)
Photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

Winslow Homer juxtaposes the tragedy of the Civil War with growing optimism about the future within the newly reunified nation. Learn more about this iconic painting titled *The Veteran in a New Field* by visiting metmuseum.org/toah/hd/homr/ho_67.187.131.htm.

- *Genre paintings can inform us about how people lived and worked long ago. How would you document American workers today? Think about the different kinds of people you encounter daily such as mail carriers, construction workers, bus drivers, bank tellers, and grocery store clerks. What kinds of stories would you like to communicate about these workers? How would you portray them?*



MARY CASSATT (United States, 1844–1926, active France)
Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child, 1880
Oil on canvas, 39 7/16 x 25 7/8 in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Mrs. Fred Hathaway Bixby Bequest
Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

American artists broadened their range of techniques and subject matter after the Civil War. Many studied in Europe, including Germany and France. Mary Cassatt, the only American in the circle of French impressionists, frequently painted women and children in their everyday activities. To learn more about this painting, visit collectionsonline.lacma.org.

- *Do you have a favorite subject you like to draw or photograph?*

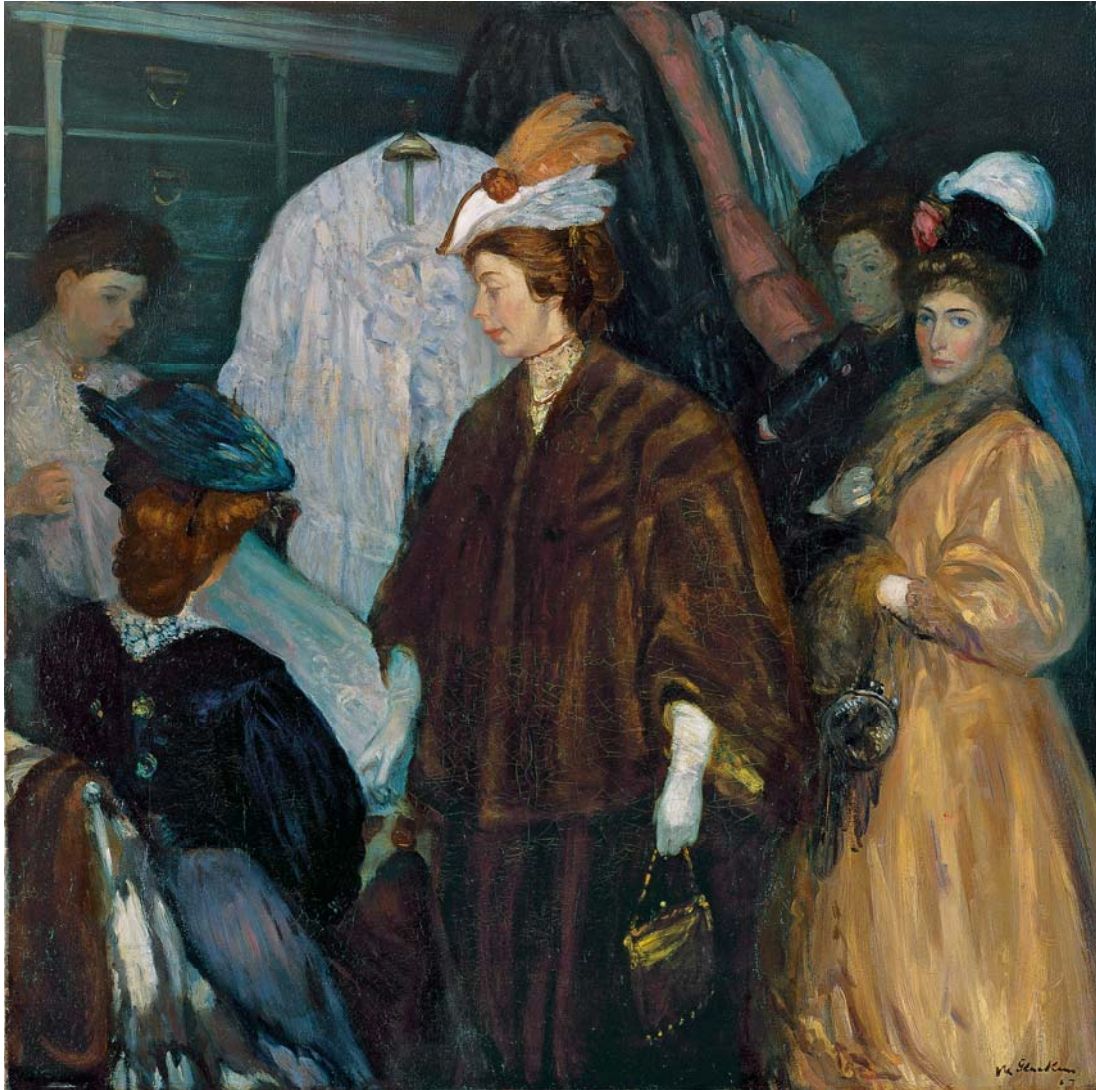
Modern Urban America

The early twentieth century witnessed the transformation of the United States into a modern industrialized society and an international political power. Many of the paintings from this era offer a realist view of the neighborhoods and people that make America unique. Consider how the city is captured in each of these artworks. Note how each artwork documents the shifting role of women in society.



JOHN SLOAN (United States, 1871–1951)
Town Steps, Gloucester, 1916
Oil on canvas, 32 1/16 x 26 1/8 in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Mr. and Mrs. William Preston Harrison Collection
Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

- What are some of the clues in the painting that tell us about life in Gloucester around the time this painting was made? Notice the details of the figures' dress, architectural features, and landscape.



WILLIAM GLACKENS (United States, 1870–1938)

The Shoppers, 1907–8

Oil on canvas, 60 x 60 in.

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia, gift of Walter P. Chrysler Jr.

© The Estate of William Glackens, photo courtesy Kraushaar Galleries Inc., NY

- *Record a realistic view of your neighborhood. Select a subject—architectural or figurative or both—and vantage point and capture the scene using drawing tools or a camera. Consider the type of narrative your composition will tell and adjust the point of view and other compositional details appropriately.*



GEORGE BELLOWS (United States, 1882–1925)

Cliff Dwellers, 1913

Oil on canvas, 40 3/16 x 42 1/16 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Fund

Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

Like John Sloan, George Bellows was a member of the Ashcan School and was known for celebrating the immigrant neighborhoods of the city. Learn more about this painting at collectionsonline.lacma.org.

- *Imagine yourself in this painting or as one of the characters in the painting. What might you see, hear, smell, taste, or feel? Record responses or share with a partner.*

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