



# BOULEVARD

## GRADES 6-12

### A Few Key Points

- The Royal Academy of Arts was established in 1768 to create systematic professional artistic training, criteria for critical review, and an exhibition space to display the best work by contemporary artists
- During the 18th and early 19th centuries, an idealized style of painting, known as the “Grand Manner”—elevated pictures depicting historic events, biblical scenes of ancient myths, and touted them as the most noble
- A new war with France from 1793 on gave added importance to the subject of the sea for British artists and their public because the nation wanted to signal its naval superiority
- Landscape painting became a more valued category in England during the early 19th century, coinciding with a fresh wave of British nationalism
- 19th-century England saw massive transformations in regards to economic growth and lifestyle; despite this, some artists, including John Constable, created nostalgically idyllic scenes devoid of signs of encroaching industrialization and urbanization
- Animal paintings were a particularly popular subject for representation in England during the 19th century
- Many 19th-century British artists started out as sign or coach painters; others began their career as apprentices to engravers, making prints after other artists’ work
- J.M.W. Turner and John Constable were rivals within the Royal Academy of Arts
- J.M.W. Turner was deeply inspired by, and drew upon, the signature light saturated vistas of the 17th-century French landscape artist Claude Lorrain
- Other British landscape artists looked to 17th-century Dutch and Flemish landscapes for inspiration
- Science and art merge in the directly observed studies of painters, like Constable, who were known to note specific details, such as cloud type, wind direction, and time of day, on the backs of their drawings

- While John Constable expressed personal feelings through the nostalgically tinged specifics of locality, J.M.W. Turner drew upon imagination and dramatic atmospheric effects to stir a sense of emotion
- Romanticism was a movement in literature, as well as the visual arts, that began in the late 18th century and reached its peak between 1800 and 1850. In contrast to the Neoclassical tradition that prized the idealization of history and a signatureless academic style, Romanticism promoted subjectivity, imagination, and individuality in both subject and style.
- Romantic painters frequently explored the elemental forces of nature: sky, sea, light, weather, season, time of day, and ever-changing atmospheric conditions.

### Sparking Discussion

- How do J.M.W. Turner and John Constable's landscapes differ?
- In what ways do Turner and Constable's art embody Romanticism?
- Why do you think that the Royal Academy of Arts condemned John Constable's *Watermeadows near Salisbury*? How is it different from his other works in this gallery?
- Why do you think that Constable painted six-footers (monumental landscape paintings)?
- What effect does this scale have?
- How might (some of) these paintings speak to Britain's sense of nationalism?
- Can you determine what kinds of clouds Constable has represented in the paintings in Gallery 87?
- How does Constable use trees within his compositions?
- What is the focus of each of Turner's four maritime pictures?
- What can we tell about what life was like for people living in the 19th century from pictures in the gallery?
- What information do Constable's *The Hay Wain* and *The Leaping Horse* offer us about agriculture and commerce around 1820 in England?
- What do these pictures seem to ignore from this time period?
- Why do you think the French Impressionists in the 1860s and 1870s were so impressed with Constable's landscapes? What do you think they felt was relevant to their own artistic aims and interests?

### Other General Questions

What do you notice about the artwork? What is emphasized or glossed over? What do you think the artist was trying to communicate through his picture? What visually suggests this

interpretation? How is this painting similar or different from other work(s) the class has looked at? What does it remind you of?

### Activities

1. The Story of the Sea

Have students consider and look closely at both J.M.W. *Turner's Life-Boat and Manby Apparatus Going off to a Stranded Vessel Making Signal (Blue Lights) of Distress* and his *St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall*. Students should research the history of Captain George William Manby's life-saving device, adopted in 1814, and that of St. Michael's Mount, a medieval monastery on a tidal island in Cornwall. Have them select 1 of the pictures and write a 1-page description and analysis of what it represents.

For a further exercise, have students write a 5-page story based on the painting selected.

2. Ode to a Location

Around 1820, the area of Hampstead, England became a writer's enclave, attracting some of Britain's leading literary figures, including the essayist James Leigh Hunt and poets John Keats, Lord Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

The ode—a lyric poem in the form of an address to a particular subject, often elevated in style or manner and written in varied or irregular meter—was a favorite of many Romantic poets. Have students select and read an ode written by either John Keats (suggested: “Ode to Autumn”) or Percy Bysshe Shelley (“The Cloud”). There are many other odes to choose from. Students should analyze the poem. Then, they can be asked to create their own 1-page ode addressed to a place, a season, or an aspect of nature.

3. The Mind of an Inventor

Spurred by a devastating shipwreck he witnessed in which 214 people died, Captain George William Manby invented a maritime life-saving device. Known as the Manby apparatus, it consisted of a mortar-fired rope attached from the shore to the distressed ship. Officially adopted in 1814, the apparatus was used by the waterguard and HM Coastguard for many years. By the time of Manby's death in 1854, it was estimated that 1,000 people had been rescued from stranded ships using the device. Manby also invented the portable fire extinguisher.

Exercise: Have students select, research, and write a 3-to-5-page paper about a 19th-century inventor.

Alternatively, have students (individually or in pairs) come up with their own invention. They need to give it a name, design, and describe what it would look like and what materials it would be made of, and list what its capabilities are/why it is needed.

4. What Home Means

John Constable's *The Hay Wain* and *The Leaping Horse* depict the countryside around the artist's boyhood home in East Bergholt, England. While the artistic style of these ambitiously large landscape paintings was deemed progressive in its sketchiness, the subject is nonetheless represented nostalgically as idyllic and timeless, devoid of signs of encroaching industrialization. Have students analyze how Constable's pictures fit into and helped spur British interest in a homegrown genre of landscape painting, which rejected both the themes of elevated history painting and the "grand tour" scenes of Europe: Italy, Greece, the Alps, etc., that had typified British art (and collecting practices) of the previous century. Historical research topics should include an examination of increased British nationalism resulting from the wars with France, as well as the effects of industrialization and urbanization in England from the late 18th century through the late 19th century. This project can manifest as a class discussion or a written paper.