



BOULEVARD

GRADES 6-12

A Few Key Points

- The genre of still life painting rose to prominence in the U.S. during the 19th century in tandem with the development of an art-buying audience
- A sense of personhood and/or narrative can be conveyed through objects
- Some American artists felt that art should be literal in its approach and intimately related to life as the democratic masses lived it; others felt that painting should offer an exalted spiritual, if not religious, experience transcending the mundane
- An emphasis on vernacular, everyday objects remains a strong thread in American art from the 19th to 20th centuries

Sparking Discussion

- How does the artist create a sense of illusionism?
- Is art better if it looks real? What value do/should we place on expression or imagination.
- How is virtual reality like trompe l'oeil painting? How is it different?
- Which paintings look modern and which look more old-fashioned? Why?
- What kinds of ideas or messages can be conveyed through a still life arrangement?
- Given the same set of objects, how might students compose them?
- Can painting project a difficult social message while remaining a thing of beauty?
- How might we see the philosophy of Pragmatism tied to aspects of trompe l'oeil painting?
- What still life objects would you associate with American life in the 21st century?

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?

Goals

To get students to look closely at 19th-century American still life painting and be able to have them unpack some of the symbolism and meaning of the works in relation to American culture and history during this time period. Students are also encouraged to relate this to the broader frameworks of art history and/or artistic processes, and to draw connections with aspects of their own lives. (Close Looking, Comparison, Analysis, Interpretation, Reflection)

Activities

1. Who the Heck Is Fred? (Story of a Student)
Make up a 3-5 page story based on John Haberle's *The Slate (Memoranda)* (c. 1895). What was it like to be a 12-year-old student when this painting was made? The story can be told from a first-person or third-person perspective. It can be either imagined or more fully researched (depending upon the level of the class).
2. American Objects from Banjos to Campbell's Soup Cans
One can find an emphasis on vernacular objects (and speech) in 19th-century American still life tradition represented by John Frederick Peto, William Michael Harnett, John Haberle, William Keane, and others. Have students explore the continuation of this theme by looking at a prominent line of 20th-century artists from Stuart Davis, Charles Sheeler, Edward Hopper, and Wayne Thiebaud to Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol, and poets, such as William Carlos Williams.
3. How About Them Apples? (A Study in Contrast)
Have students compare American artist William Rickarby Miller's *Study of Apples* (1862) with one of French artist Paul Cézanne's many still life painting with apples from the 1880s or '90s. Consider why both artists were drawn to the study of apples and how each of their paintings reflects the trends of its time and respective place of origin.
4. How Did I Get Here? (Clues About Agriculture)
William Joseph McCloskey's *Oranges in Tissue Paper* (c. 1890) not only reflects the beauty of the orange, but also the increased availability of the fruit throughout parts of the United States between the 1880s and 1920s. Have students research and write a short research paper on oranges or another fruit conveyed from either Florida or California during these years (how it was transported, packaged, marketed, distributed, and made available for consumers.)