



2nd Grade: DECEMBER

Sir William Pepperrell and His Family by John Singleton Copley

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About the Artist

The following information is provided to give classroom teachers a comprehensive understanding of the artist and artwork. Use your judgment on what to share with your students based on their level of curiosity, observation/inquiry skills, comprehension and age-appropriateness.

John Singleton Copley

John Singleton Copley was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1738 to Richard and Mary Copley, poor Irish immigrants who had come to America two years before. His father, in ill health, left for the West Indies around the time of Copley's birth with the hope of restoring his health. Unfortunately, his father's condition worsened and he died while still in the West Indies. Copley's widowed mother operated a tobacco shop to generate income. She married Peter Pelham in 1748 when Copley was ten years old.

Peter Pelham was responsible for teaching young Copley since he operated an evening school for writing and arithmetic in addition to running the family tobacco shop. Pelham dabbled in painting and engraving and shared those skills with his stepson. Young John Copley developed and advanced his natural skills under the tutelage of his stepfather. Once again, at fourteen, Copley experienced sadness when his beloved stepfather fell ill and passed away.

Within a year of his stepfather's death, Copley created a small portrait of his stepbrother, Charles Pelham. The drawing was considered remarkable for such a young artist. Copley continued to paint and create engravings over time, building his reputation as a fine artist. His skills spoke for themselves and soon countless individuals sought him as their portraitist, establishing a regular and impressive income for Copley.

Among his portrait sitters was Suzanne Farnum Clark, an affluent patron. Copley eventually married Suzanne and moved into a grand home on Beacon Hill in Boston. They had six children and lived in elegance as people of wealth. Copley's humble beginnings were replaced with his new life as an aristocrat.

John Copley's attention shifted to England after he painted his other stepbrother, Henry Pelham, playing with a squirrel. Copley sent *The Boy with Squirrel* to established painter Benjamin West who entered it into the London exhibition of 1766. Well known painter Sir Joshua Reynolds suggested Copley come to England for a few years to improve his work. Copley had become discouraged with the limited fine art in colonial America and seriously considered the invitation. His biggest worry was the potential

drop in income. After all, he was making a decent living in America and was responsible for the care of his immediate family, his mother and stepbrothers. West was quick to assure Copley that his potential for income was very high in England. This and the increasingly turbulent political and economic conditions in Boston convinced Copley it was time to move. Copley sailed from Boston in 1774, leaving wife, mother, and children behind while he established his reputation as a painter in Europe. He spent a year traveling throughout the continent taking advantage of the new sights and inspirations. His family finally set sail for London in 1775. Once united, they moved into a beautiful house with plenty of space for Copley's studio.

In England, Copley used his traditional techniques and quality work ethic to maintain his reputation as a fine portrait and landscape painter. He quickly joined the top ranks of the elite painters in London, was elected into membership at the Royal Academy in London, and captured the patronage of many socially and politically privileged people. In both colonial America and England, Copley's reputation was built upon his ability to capture photographic likenesses in his portraits and his social insight using choice props to support the prominence of his subjects. While he was successful in England, he was considered a far greater and a more influential painter in colonial America, where he created some three hundred fifty works of art in both oil and pastels.

Copley was, using today's terms, a workaholic. He painted from early morning to twilight and in time, this overwork took its toll. He experienced depression from both his workload and his accumulating debt. The expenses of maintaining his large home and lavish lifestyle exceeded the income generated by his paintings. Deteriorating physical health and anxiety affected his ability to produce quality work. He suffered a paralytic stroke during a London dinner party but recovered. A second stroke took his life on September 9, 1815, at age seventy-seven. His family buried him in a London cemetery. Copley's estate was settled by his son who eventually sold his father's paintings at auction in London to help pay his debts.

About the Art

Sir William Pepperrell and His Family was painted in 1778, oil on canvas, 90" x 108." The subjects are Sir William, his wife Lady Elizabeth, their son William IV, daughters Elizabeth, Harriot and Mary, and their family dog. The scale is almost life-size.

Sir William Pepperrell lived in prominence in Boston, however, his loyalty was to the British Crown, not a good position during the American Revolution. Concerned for his safety and that of his family, the Pepperrells moved to England. Soon after their arrival

Discipline-Based Art Education

The following components are integral to students having a complete, well rounded art experience.

Art Aesthetics

Providing opportunities to develop perception and appreciation of visually expressed ideas and experiences.

Art Production

Providing opportunities to develop skills and techniques for creative visual expressions of emotions and ideas.

Art History

Providing opportunities to develop an understanding of the visual arts as a basic component of personal heritage.

Art Criticism

Providing an opportunity to develop an intellectual basis for analyzing and making aesthetic judgments based on an understanding of visual ideas and experiences.

ELEMENTS OF ART

- Line: A continuous mark
- Shape: Area enclosed by a line
- Color: Hue, reflection of light.
- Texture: Surface quality, real or implied
- Form: 3D shape or illusion of 3D
- Value: Graduated areas of light/dark
- Space: Illusion of depth

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- Repetition: Imagery repeating pattern
- Variety: Contrast/variation
- Rhythm: Issues of eye movement
- Balance: Even visual weight
- Emphasis/Economy: Dominance/minimalism
- Proportion: Compare size relationships

COMPOSITION

- Symmetrical: Mirrored imagery
- Asymmetrical: Random placement
- Radial: Mirror image from center point
- Repetition: Repeating pattern, motif

ARTISTIC STYLES

- Realism: Realistic representation
- Abstraction: Personal interpretation
- Non-Objective: No recognizable depiction

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN IN PICTURE BOOKS

Children's literature that relate to this lesson due to elements of art or story content are:

- *Amelia Bedelia's Family Album* by Peggy Parish
- *Bigmama's* by Donald Crews
- *Houses and Homes (Around the World Series)* by Ann Morris
- *Material World—A Global Family* by Peter Menzel, Charles C. Mann, Paul Kennedy
- *The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant
- *The Table Where Rich People Sit* by Byrd Baylor

REFERENCE/BIBLIOGRAPHY

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in London, Pepperrell commissioned Copley to paint a portrait of his family.

Copley planned the composition for the portrait to create a visual image of wealth; therefore it was staged with props that speak of wealth. The fluted column, the array of textiles, the lush carpet and the park in the distance all supported an aristocratic lifestyle, as Pepperrell wished.

The family members were arranged strategically. Because he is heir to the family fortune and the embodiment of their future, the infant William captures the viewers attention first. His light skin and elongated body encourage eye movement. Others revolve around this figure. He is supported by his mother while his oldest sister embraces him. Young William's right arm directs the view to his father who returns a loving glance. The two younger Pepperrell daughters are absorbed in a game to the side.

In the center of the painting as in the center of the family is Lady Elizabeth. While others in the composition are relaxed and in motion, Lady Elizabeth is a solid or grounded figure consistent with her matronly role. In recognition of her role, Copley paints her larger in proportion to others.

While this painting portrays a loving family enjoying time together, it is fiction. The Pepperrells were in reality, exiles, without country and fortune. Additionally, since Lady Elizabeth passed away before the family left Boston, Sir William had brought his children to England without their mother. The portrait painted two years after her passing used Copley's wife Suzanne as the model for Lady Elizabeth.

Directed Observation

Show students an image of *Sir William Pepperrell* and tell them it was painted with oil paint on canvas by John Singleton Copley in 1778. Invite students to quietly study the work. After some time for thinking, encourage students to share what they see. Welcome all comments. The following questions are provided to help students use art vocabulary to talk about the work.

1. What is the first thing you notice? What does this say about the importance of the individual or object?
2. Describe what everyone is looking at. Who is making eye contact with the viewer? Why is this important?
3. Describe the clothing. What does the use of fancy fabrics tell you? Describe how Copley paints fabric to show different

types of fabric—velvet curtains, silk ribbons, or organza dresses.

4. How does Copley use color and light in this painting?
5. Describe the father figure. What does his posture say about him?
6. What clues indicate this family is wealthy?
7. How is this family portrait different from family portraits you see today?
8. Why is it important to study family portraits made a long time ago?

Things to Do

1. Look at group portraits painted by other artists and discuss their different styles. Bring in old photos (or copies) of relatives from different eras. Discuss the styles of clothing and the way the portraits were staged. Invite students to give an oral presentation about an ancestor who is pictured.
2. Pretend you are a portrait painter. Plan a portrait of your family and sketch it on paper. Be sure to capture the personalities of individuals in your family. How will they be dressed? In what setting will you place them? Will you include family pets? Once you've made a sketch, transfer your ideas to a larger piece of paper or board and develop your work in paint or dry drawing material. If possible, place your finished work in a nice frame.
3. Or, create a photographic portrait of your family. First, choose the room and furniture you wish to use. Position family members in the space and use props to indicate personalities. Snap the photo and frame it.
4. Portrait painters in Copley's day often painted miniature portraits. Today's version of a miniature painted portrait is a small wallet size photo meant to be carried by a loved one. Create a portrait of yourself in a 2"x3" rectangle.
5. Before color film was invented, photographs were in black and white. Artists often painted transparent color over the black and white imagery. Show examples of this type of photography. Copy photos of your students in black and white. Invite students to add their own color using crayons, color pencils or diluted paint.
6. If John Copley were to paint a group portrait of your second grade class, describe how he would arrange everyone.
7. Invite a photographer to your class for an interview and a group photograph. Prepare questions in advance for the interview. Consider location options for the photograph and whether you want a more formal or informal shot.