



2nd Grade: MARCH

The Gleaners

by Jean Francois Millet

Debra J. Herman, M.F.A., Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois
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Edited by Constance Kamrath, M.A., Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois

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.

Jean Francois Millet

Jean Francois Millet (*Mee-lay*) born on October 4, 1814, was the son of Jean-Louis-Nicolas and Aimée-Henriette-Adélaïde Henry Millet who were moderately successful peasant farmers in the seaside village of Gruchy, in Normandy, France. Millet's parents were Catholic Puritans who had great influence over their son and raised him with a noble character. In addition to farming, Millet's father was a cantor in the village church. Young Millet spent time with local parish priests who taught him to read the Bible in Latin. This religious environment introduced Millet to religious etchings illustrating Bible stories which raised his sensitivity to the potential of art to richly tell a story and impacted his own artwork in the future.

Millet did his share of farm work as a young man. He began as a tiller of the soil on the family farm, which gave him great pleasure and appreciation for the outdoors. After all, he lived in a picturesque part of the France and was moved by the beauty of the landscape. Young Millet often sketched the local scenery when he took a break from his work on the farm. His father noticed his son's talent and granted his son an opportunity to study with a local artist. In 1837, the local community granted Millet a sum of money to study in Paris.

Millet studied in Paris for two years with portrait painter Paul Delaroche, a rather an unpleasant experience for Millet whom teacher Delaroche deemed uncooperative and un-teachable. Urban life also was difficult for Millet, who much preferred the country. To escape the unpleasantness in Paris, Millet found relief in visits to the Louvre where he explored the works of the great masters. He responded most to the paintings featuring simple subject matters. Millet eventually left the tutelage of Delaroche to share a small studio with an artist friend where he began to paint his own subject matter in his own style. The artist spent thirteen years in Paris producing many paintings. Millet no longer received financial support from his childhood community and soon relied on the meager sale of his paintings to pay studio rent and buy food. Millet also painted signs and commissioned portrait requests. Despite the busy schedule, he was also able to squeeze in a few paintings with a mythological theme which were exhibited at the Salon in 1840, a very satisfying.

In 1841, Millet married Pauline-Virginie Ono, but tuberculosis took Pauline's life two years later. Millet eventually met Catherine Lemaire, a domestic servant whom he later married. The new couple settled in Barbizon, France, a small village near the Forest Fontainebleau. The simple life appealed to Millet who embraced the earth and those who worked with it. These years brought Millet into a popular circle of like-minded artists such as Theodore Rousseau who supported the thinking of the Barbizon School, a movement sympathetic to the "hero of the soil." The Industrial Revolution was at hand and the Barbizon School idealized the rural way of life and modest peasants. These years again brought financial struggles for Millet, his wife Catherine, and their nine children. Without a regular paycheck, Millet's family often went hungry. He couldn't pay his bills, and was often humiliated by those seeking payment.

Jean Francois Millet produced his greatest works over the next ten years in Barbizon despite the financial burden he carried. He produced his famous *Haymakers* (1850), *The Sower* (1850), *Harvesters* (1855), *The Gleaners* (1857), and *The Angelus* (1859). Leading critics of the time applauded these works which beautifully captured the simplicity of rural life. The public, however, rejected the paintings as political and repulsive. Millet, who was passionate about the focus of his work, had also invested his religious beliefs in these paintings. As Adam and Eve after the exodus had a harsh life, the fate of all humanity was revealed in his paintings as peasants work hard in the field. Millet considered these peasants heroes and the essence of a lasting way of life.

Despite the positive views of the critics and some exhibitions, Millet worked endlessly with little financial gain. As a slow painter who desired to do quality work, he averaged only two to three paintings a year. He painted *Man with the Hoe* in 1863, a low point because he was physically and emotionally exhausted. The figure in *Man with the Hoe* reflects both the emptied peasant as well as the emptied painter. Millet had reached his limit but found his clearest and most eloquent voice in this painting. From this teetering edge Millet surrendered to paint mere landscapes absent of human figures. He put down his paintbrush and reverted to the simple media of pencil and pastel. These simple sketches are the last works of Jean Francois Millet and are among his finest and most coveted. In time, a dealer paid Millet a monthly sum in exchange for some of his works, pulling Millet out of his poverty. Millet also received a state commission for several paintings later in his life but was unable to complete them due to poor health.

In January, 1875, Catherine and Millet repeated their wedding vows among family and friends in a local church, twenty-two

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's Road* by Linda Altman
- *By the Dawn's Early Light* by Karen Ackerman and Catherine Stock
- *Drawn into the Light: Jean Francois Millet* by Alexandra R. Murphy
- *The Dust Bowl* by David Booth
- *Miss Birdie Chooses a Shovel* by Leslie Conner
- *A Year Down Yonder* by Richard Peck

REFERENCE/BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Janson, H.W. *History of Art*. New York. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1999
- *Jean Francois Millet* by Estelle M. Hurell
- Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History, Volume Two*. New York. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1995

years after their original ceremony. Millet passed away seventeen days later at the age of sixty.

About the Art

The Gleaners was painted, oil on canvas, in 1857 when Jean Francois Millet was forty-three-years old. It is on display at the Musee d'Orsay in Paris, France, and measures 33 x 44 inches. *The Gleaners* depicts three peasant women stooping down to gather grain leftover after the harvest—finding enough grain for possibly one loaf of bread. Millet, in his Bar-bizon style, portrays the women as dignified heroes doing backbreaking work to feed their families. He accomplished this by surrounding these individuals in light in contrast to the peasants in the background. It was a powerful new perspective of the everyday struggles of the working class.

Directed Observation

Show students an image of *The Gleaners* and tell them it was painted, oil on canvas by Jean Francois Millet in 1875. 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. Who are these women and what are they doing? Based on the title, *The Gleaners*, the women are gathering leftover grain from a harvested field. Why?
2. What clues does the artist give that tell you about these people and their job? (landscape, clothes, head cover, sacks)
3. Notice the three varying ages of the workers, left to right: the maiden, matron, and the elder who can't easily bend down.
4. Why would anyone spend time doing this backbreaking work?
5. Describe the season, weather and time of day. What are the clues?
6. Why do you think Millet painted this scene?
7. When you look at this painting, where do your eyes go first, second?
8. What makes your eyes travel around the painting and why is it important to do so? (Follow the lines in the work)
9. Millet paints realistically showing what something looks like as though it might have been photographed. Look at the details in this painting (shadows, proportions, lighting, blades of grass). Explain why you think Millet did a good job.
10. Millet had a real love for the working class, those who were not wealthy. Why do you think Millet chose this scene and how does he show his feelings for these workers?

11. How does Millet make you, the viewer, feel about these people?
12. What do you learn about farming from this painting?
13. Millet, like many artists, creates an image that has something in the foreground, middle ground and background. Identify the things Millet paints in these locations.
14. Do you like this work? Why or why not?
15. If you painted an everyday activity, what would you paint and how would you make it interesting?

Things to Do

1. Make up a story about these three women. Are they friends or sisters? What will they do with the grain they find? What will they do when they finish their work? Where do they live?
2. Have someone offer a sentence or two to introduce a story about the gleaners in the painting. Go around the room and allow each student to add additional lines to further develop the story until everyone has a chance to contribute. Record several versions of the story and have it available for review.
3. Create sketches of the stories developed from #2.
4. Millet appreciated simple jobs done by ordinary people. Make a list of simple everyday activities you view throughout the day. Go on a walk through your community or downtown to observe people doing jobs. Or, consider what you see at home or school, indoors or outdoors. Create some quick sketches. Make multiple sketches to capture the varying phases of a job. Be sure to make note of the season, weather conditions, time of day in your sketches. Create clues for the viewer. From your sketches, create fully resolved drawings of these scenes for a book. Make sure to include something interesting for the foreground, middle ground, and background in your drawings. Attention to details is so important. Be sure to include many as they add interest to your work. Your book can have text or it can be a visual story without text. Create a sample of a book with scrap paper, working through the placement for all the imagery and text. Using the sample book as a guide, execute a final copy of your book. Check the website www.makingbooks.com for great book binding ideas for children.
5. Create a photo gallery. Talk about the basics of good composition. Have students capture others in simple everyday tasks. Photographs can be matted with a clean white mat and placed on the wall.