Casper David Friedrich

Casper David Friedrich was born in Griefswald, Germany, just north of Berlin, on September 5, 1774. He was the sixth of ten children born to Adolf Gottlieb Friedrich, a soap and candle maker, and Sophie Dorothea Bechly from Neubrandenburg. Friedrich and his siblings were raised under the strict Protestant faith, a foundation that influenced Friedrich throughout his life.

Friedrich’s childhood was traumatic. His mother died when he was just seven years old. His sister, Elizabeth, died from smallpox one year later. However, his most traumatic experience came at thirteen years old when he fell through a thin layer of ice on a frozen lake. His brother, Johann Christoffer, tried to save him and in doing so, Johann drowned. Five years after his brother passed away his second sister, Maria, died from typhus. The surviving Friedrich children were cared for by the housekeeper, Mother Heide, who developed a loving relationship with the children in contrast with the rigid and tense relationship they had with their father who was known as an upright moralist. For Friedrich, his personal experiences with a strict father and with death at such an early age gave him an intense sense of guilt, personal loss and loneliness which he carried into adulthood.

The small town of Greifswald had scarcely changed in two hundred years and was void of the intellectual and artistic stimulus that influenced Friedrich throughout his life.

Friedrich moved on to Dresden, Germany, which was considered the hub for the newly formed German Romantic movement. Friedrich fell in love with the buildings, the art, and the surrounding beautiful nature. Soon he began an intensive study capturing scenes of nature in sketchbooks but, revealing a less than ideal drawing ability. He gradually pulled away from his former teachers’ styles to develop his own, unique style, all the while improving his drawing ability.

Portraiture was his first effort in Dresden and Friedrich made improvements, largely due to the influence of one of the most famous portrait painters, Anton Graff. Friedrich preferred to draw with pencil or chalk and occasionally used a brown ink called sepia. He moved on to draw other objects, such as boats and eventually landscapes, adding his sepia washes. His work improved with greater detail and finally, in 1807, Friedrich gained enough confidence to pick up a paintbrush for his first oil painting. Friedrich’s advancing skills became apparent in his allegorical landscapes; objects in his art symbolized concepts such as a snake signifying evil or a sun signifying the presence of God.

Friedrich decided to focus his paintings on landscapes. His formula included an outdoor environment that held vast, open spaces with a sun or moon illuminating the clouds or seascape. Usually he added an isolated figure placed before ancient ruins. It was also common for Friedrich to use a landscape allegory to reference a religious concept. Sometimes he even placed a cross in his landscape. While wealthy patrons enjoyed Friedrich’s work, it did receive some negative criticism. Noted critic F.W.B. van Ramdohr did not appreciate Friedrich’s placement of religious symbolism in his landscapes. The debates on this issue in social settings among the wealthy and intelligent only increased Friedrich’s notoriety and reputation. Friedrich was intentional about adding a theme of faith and hope to his work, most likely a theme which helped him through his difficult childhood years. Light penetrating the darkness, temples ruins of the past making way for the future, contemplation of nature, the insignificance of the human amidst expansive space are some of the messages included in his landscapes.

Friedrich’s reputation grew especially when he won recognition...
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:
- Casper Friedrich by Werner Hofmann and Mary Whitall
- Casper David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape: Second Edition by Kate DiCamillo
- German Romantic Painting: Second Edition by Joseph Leo Koerner

REFERENCE/BIBLIOGRAPHY

at the Weimar competition. He worked especially hard during his time in Dresden and advanced his skill level to the point that he sold his own works of paintings, drawings and engravings. He supplemented his income by giving art lessons to children and guiding tours throughout Saxony. Friedrich’s name eventually became well-known throughout Saxony as the most important German Romantic painter. He gained membership in the Berlin Academy in 1810.

In 1818, Friedrich married Carolina Bommer, daughter of a dyer from Dresden. Three children were born to the couple. After the marriage, color tones became brighter, symmetry was less rigid and the first female figure appeared on the canvas.

Friedrich suffered a stroke in 1835, leaving some paralysis in his limbs and causing his career to come to a gradual end. By 1838, he lost any capacity to work, leaving him supported by the charity of his friends. He eventually died in 1840 at the age of sixty-six.

About the Art
*Chalk Cliffs on Rügen* was painted in oil on canvas by Casper David Friedrich in 1818 and is 35.6 by 27.9 inches. It is in the collection of the Museum Osker Reinhart am Stadtgarten in Zurich, Switzerland.

Friedrich and his new wife honeymooned on the island of Rügen in 1818. This painting depicts the view of the Baltic Sea from the famous lookout points from the chalk cliffs. The composition of the painting is a compilation of various areas of the island.

**Directed Observation**
Show students an image of *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen* and tell them it was painted in oil by Casper David Friedrich in 1818. Invite students to quietly study the work. After some time for thinking, encourage students to share what they see. Welcome all comments. The following are suggested questions to help students use art vocabulary to talk about the work.

1. Friedrich was a very disciplined artist who worked with imagery placed in the foreground, mid-ground and background. Identify those items placed in the foreground, those placed in the mid-ground and what makes up the background of the painting. How does this approach create depth?
2. How is the scene framed?
3. Symbolism was also a theme in Friedrich’s painting. The figure in the middle is Friedrich with his hat on the ground as a symbol of humility. He is dressed in blue, the color of faith. He gazes into the opening before him and seeks footing for fear of slipping off into death. The other figure is Friedrich’s brother, dressed in green, symbolic of hope. The female figure, dressed in red symbolic of love, is Friedrich’s wife. She sits beside a bare, dried bush which has leaves only near her face. Faith, hope and love are the three Christian virtues. Respond to this use of symbolism.
4. Friedrich believed God was present in all of nature and desired to paint in such a way as to portray God’s presence.
5. This particular painting used the element of space—the illusion of depth. How does he achieve this and how does it enrich the scene?
6. If you were to make a symbolic drawing or painting, what message would it have and how would you symbolize it?

**Things to Do**
1. Friedrich sketched and created sepia paintings of his subject matter. The sepia paint allowed him to plan for the depth of light and dark tones. Identify a landscape near you and make a sketch which has a heightened sensitivity to light and dark tones.
2. Use your imagination or draw from nature (or a cityscape) a scene which has a distinctive foreground, mid-ground and background. Consider the same scene in different seasons.
3. Using a 3 x 5 inch index card, vertically or horizontally, create a drawing or painting which features the element of space—the illusion of depth. This could be an landscape or cityscape, an interior space with a window that offers a view of a distant lake and hills. It could be an outdoor scene which features pasture close and continuing far into the distance. Key techniques for creating depth: items in the distance are smaller, lighter in color and “behind” items in the foreground which are bolder in color and larger. When completed, exhibit the “miniature” collection. See whose work “traveled” the farthest distance.
4. Choose a movie you enjoyed and identify a particular scene or two in the movie and re-design the set. Sketch out new possibilities for the set and improve upon the element of depth.
5. Imagine a special outdoor setting that you’d love to visit. Draw it in a very appealing manner to entice others to visit. Appeal to their senses and emotions by including aspects that make it special.