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.

George Inness
George Inness was born on May 1, 1825, the fifth of thirteen children, on a farm near Newburg, New York, to parents of Scottish decent. The Inness family moved around in the first few years of his life, finally settling in the small county town of Newark, New Jersey, in 1830. His health was considered fragile and research indicates it was due to epilepsy. His early education was at the local academy until it became clear that he was making little academic progress. Like many a young boy he enjoyed shenanigans, such as using a self-built battery to literally shock a few of his friends as well as the family cat. There was also the handmade snake strategically placed in the kitchen cabinet to frighten the maids. While a rather intelligent boy and deep thinker, he preferred to use his brain to daydream and imagine things.

Religion was a major topic in the Inness childhood home often resulting in passionate conversations, especially when extended Methodist, Baptist, and Universalist family members were present. As a result, Inness absorbed a broad and deep religious base, a fervent desire for introspection, and a search for truth and enlightenment that stayed with him throughout his adult life and played a major role in his career.

One day, Inness noticed a man standing in the middle of a field painting the landscape onto a canvas. Stirred at the thought of capturing images from nature on a canvas, he knew immediately his career path had been revealed. The young and naïve Inness had some misconceptions about landscape painting as his first thought was that he’d have to get an enormous paper or canvas to actually capture an entire landscape!

Being a painter in early America was not regarded as an “real job” with a steady income, prompting his older brothers to ridicule Inness for his lack of ambition. After many attempts to teach him a real trade, at the point of exasperation his father conceded to his son’s wishes and placed young Inness in the studio of a man named Barker hoping to make him as good of a painter as possible. Any slacker behavior in the family was prohibited, even for an artist. It wasn’t long before Inness surpassed Baker’s ability and was sent on to the studio of Regis Gignoux, a French artist who taught Inness color theory and composition. Inness was a very teachable student and learned much but he longed to develop his own style rather than follow the style of his teachers. More than anything, Inness wanted to capture the grandeur and spirituality of nature, including the emotion that he felt when viewing nature. The paintings of Thomas Cole and Asher Brown Durand greatly inspired Inness due to their intimate renderings of nature. Both these artists were part of the Hudson River School which included realism and ideal portrayal of nature. In particular, Inness tried to combine the best of Cole and Durand’s style but added an emotional quality of the spiritual. In other words, Inness sought to represent both the external image, what he saw, as well as the emotional image, what he felt.

The teenage Inness married Delia Miller, who died within two months of their wedding. The grieving Inness turned his attention to opening his first studio in New York. His new style violated the prescribed painting techniques of the times so business was basically non-existent and only survived with the generous financial support of his brothers. One day, a successful New York auctioneer, Ogden Haggerty, publically deemed Inness’ work genius and encouraged the public to reconsidering Inness’ ability.

Seventeen year old Elizabeth Hart grabbed the attention of widower Inness one day in church, resulting in his immediate realization that she would be his future wife. The couple married in 1850 and were sent to Italy for two years, thanks to the generosity of Ogden Haggerty, with the intention Inness would fine tune his skills. Two years later they traveled to Paris, again with Haggerty footing the bill. Studying the works of the masters had an extreme impact on Inness. It was not a matter of simply reflecting styles of the masters, rather, it was an awakening, pulling from within his spirit to create art and opening his mind to new ideas. In 1853, Inness abilities earned him an associate membership in the Academy.

Upon their return to America, the family settled in Brooklyn, New York, where Inness worked with New York dealers. Once again, it was a financial struggle, especially now that the family had grown to include children Elizabeth, Rosa, George Jr., Louise, Helen, and a sixth child who died in infancy. In 1859, Inness relocated the family to the Medfield suburb of Boston, Massachusetts, to ease the financial burden and where he could paint without the traditional constraints of the New York art community. These were the good years, full of artistic achievements despite the crude studio in the barn. It was in this studio Inness painted some of his famous works, including a landscape called Peace and Plenty. Painting was always preceded by weeks outdoors observing natural compositions and details including trees, clouds, light, and vegetation. Sketching was his way of recording his observations. When he had the inspiration, he moved into the
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

Literature that relate to this lesson due to elements of art or story content are:

LANDSCAPE/ATMOSPHERE/LIGHT

- Land and Light Workshop—Painting Mood and Atmosphere in Oils by Carol Lewis
- Painting Landscapes with Atmosphere by Ray Balkwill
- Painting Landscapes and Atmosphere by Jose M. Parramon
- Light, Shade and Shadow by E. L. Koller

REFERENCE/BIBLIOGRAPHY


Art History
Inness experienced great success nationally and internationally in the late 1800’s. He continued to paint, taking on students including his son, George Inness Jr. He also ventured into poetry and continued his travels.

Inness’ health began to deteriorate in 1894 and with his doctor’s approval, he and his wife set sail for one last trip abroad to the Scottish town of Bridge-of-Allen. The couple planned to take a drive one evening and, while Elizabeth was preparing for the drive, Inness went outdoors to observe the early evening sky ablaze in red tones. Inness loved sunsets and found this one extremely beautiful. His fragile body was overwhelmed with the beauty he saw that all strength left him and he fell to the ground acknowledging God’s gift of the sunset. He was taken immediately into the house where he died in the arms of his beloved wife on August 3. His body was brought back to America where it laid in state in the National Academy of Design. His funeral service, held in the same location, was on August 23, 1894.

About the Art
Peace and Plenty is known as one of the finest landscape paintings by Inness and completed in 1865, oil on canvas measuring 77 5/8 by 112 3/8 inches. The Civil War had just come to an end and Inness’ Peace and Plenty, became a post-war American image, often reproduced as a postcard. Peace and Plenty was originally given to the builder, Marcus Spring, in partial payment for a house in Eagleswood, New Jersey. Today Peace and Plenty hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Directed Observation
Show students an image of Peace and Plenty. Tell them it was painted, oil on canvas, in 1865 by George Inness. Offer students biographical information about Inness. 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. To fully understand the painting, it must be placed in context of history. Discuss the Civil War and its outcome on many levels: political, economical, environmental, social and religious. How does the imagery in Peace and Plenty, painted at the conclusion of the war, relate to the war? What was Inness saying to the viewers and to himself? Is the work and its message applicable to current times? What does this say about art?
2. What does the theme of “harvest” conjure and how does it relate to the Civil War?
3. Describe how Inness’ religious beliefs and love of nature play out in this image. (Inness usually included several people in his work to address relationships among both people and nature.)
4. As a religious person, where/how does Inness include the presence of a God?
5. Debate if this is the end of the day or the beginning? Does it matter? How might this (sunrise/sunset) tie to post-Civil War?
6. From a compositional perspective, describe the sense of space (foreground, mid-ground, background). Describe the composition as having a diagonal dividing line. How does this support compositional balance and use emphasis and economy?
7. Discuss the image from an emotional perspective. Discuss how this image involves your senses.

Things to Do

1. Inness painted Peace and Plenty in the aftermath of the ugliness of the Civil War. The war, and all it entailed, contrasted with beautiful pastures, and the harvest emphasizes the peace. Design a landscape where a portion of the composition is dedicated to the “point of tension” and the other portion is dedicated to the “resolve” - the peaceful end. You decide the breakdown of the proportion of the two entities. You’ll notice your work will be more powerful because of the contrasting components, but make sure to really develop both areas.

In your work above, allow light to play a key role as Inness did in Peace and Plenty. Use light as a symbol for hope and new beginnings. Consider strategically placing light behind objects with an intermittent shift of slight and full exposure. Consider how light appears on objects based on the source of light and its location. Include some area of darkness as that will contrast with the light.