Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (ā-day-la-ee-d lā-bee-y gee-yar)
Adélaïde Labille was born in Paris on April 11, 1749, the youngest of eight children, to Marie-Anne Saint-Martin and Claude-Edme Labille. Her father earned a good living as clothing merchant and owner of his own elegant clothing shop, La Toilette, known for outfitting the most elite clients. She developed a very keen eye for expensive textiles and embellishments of fashion such as lace, bows, buttons and ribbons. Despite her wealthy upbringing, Labille-Guiard faced difficult times in her early years. Her seven siblings had passed away by the time she was a teenager and when Labille-Guiard was nineteen, her mother died.

Labille-Guiard’s older sister, Félicité, was married, prior to her untimely death, to Jean Antoine Gros, a respected miniaturist who made an impression on the then young Labille-Guiard. Her father thought art was a splendid pastime for his daughter who could use her skill to decorate household items for pleasure; however, Labille-Guiard had goals beyond the decorative arts. She desired much more but at this time in history, it was uncommon for master painters to teach female students who were thought to be intellectually incapable of developing fully as a painter. Fortunately, Labille-Guiard was welcomed to study under a family friend, François Elie Vincent, where she developed into a fine miniature painter. She later studied pastels with the preeminent pastel portraitist of the time, Maurice Quentin de La Tour. Later she acquired oil painting skills under the tutelage of François Elie Vincent’s oldest son, François André Vincent.

At age twenty, Labille-Guiard married Louis-Nicolas Guiard, a financial clerk. They were married for ten years, but separated in 1779. Divorce laws did not exist until 1792 when they officially divorced and she assumed all responsibility for her own earnings.

Labille-Guiard became very concerned about women who wished to study painting seriously with the goal of becoming professional artists. She began to publically advocate for education of women artists and by 1783, she took women artists into her studio and trained them as painters.

In the early 1780’s, Labille-Guiard opened her own portrait studio business and struggled to find clientele. A few patrons were among the local royalty and aristocracy. The sheen of fine fabric and details of lace worn by wealthy women were beautifully documented in Labille-Guiard’s portraits. The outbreak of the French Revolution brought a significant decline in the portraiture business, but Labille-Guiard was a resourceful woman who merely shifted her portraiture clientele to military leaders.

As Labille-Guiard’s artistic reputation grew, her desire to submit art to the Royal Academy in Paris increased. She proceeded wisely and with a plan. First she created some pastel portraits of Academy members to get their attention and prove her ability to them. Next, she formally submitted two of the pastel portraits to the Academy as a test run. Her portraits were well-received and won her election into the Academy in 1783. She joined the Academy ranks with three other noted women artists including painter Anne Vallayer-Coster (Grade 7, November). With a total of four women as members of the Academy in Paris, its members voted to limit female membership to four women despite its large male membership. In 1793, the Academy reorganized under the post-revolutionary academy leader and decided to exclude any woman from membership in the future. This was a setback for Labille-Guiard and the other three female members.

Labille-Guiard kept busy with many exhibitions, portrait work and her advocacy for women’s rights. She often spent time in a small village outside of Paris painting miniatures. She reconnected with her former teacher, François André Vincent, and married him in 1800.

Labille-Guiard’s reputation grew as a prominent portrait painter of the era and her work was easily identified by her usual style of capturing a half-length of the sitter whose posture and expression were more casual. She captured details in clothing such as patterns in lace, stitching, wrinkles and shadows of textiles as well as the inclusion of embellishments such as jewelry and buttons. In contrast, she left the backgrounds quite simple.

She died on April 24, 1803, three years after her marriage. While Labille-Guiard did not gain the same level of prestige as other female artists of the era, her advocacy for women artists and women’s rights set her apart.

About the Art
Self-Portrait with Two Pupils, Mlle. Marie Gabrielle Capet (1761–1818) and Mlle. Marguerite Carreaux de Rosemond (died 1788) was painted by Adélaïde Labille-Guiard in 1785, oil on canvas, 83 inches high and 59.5 inches wide. It is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.
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/minimialism
• 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 relates to this lesson due to elements of art or story content are:
• Painting Miniatures by Elizabeth Woods
• Pastel Painting, Step-by-Step by Margaret Evans, Paul Hardy and Peter Coombs.
• Miniature Painting: A Complete Guide to Techniques, Medium, and Surfaces by Joan Cornish Willies

REFERENCE/BIBLIOGRAPHY
• Mancoff, Debra N. Fashion in Impressionistic Paris. Merrell Publisher. 2012

This large painting first made its appearance at the 1785 Paris Salon. Labille-Guiard captured herself a bit out of character, as a well-dressed aristocrat, to promote herself to potential wealthy clients. Her fashion choice included a low-cut blue satin dress with stylish hat and powered hair.

Compositionally, Labille-Guiard positioned herself full-length, in the center of the canvas and therefore, as the subject. She makes eye contact with viewers, bringing them into her studio space. Also capturing the viewers’ attention is the brilliant reflective quality of the satin dress that transitions from light and mid-tones to dark crevasses where the fabric folds inward. The seamlessly blended paint creates smooth folds. Lines made by these folds create eye movement, circling around and upward towards Labille-Guiard’s face. She effectively captured the details of her dress, included seams, using her knowledge and sensitivity of expensive textiles from her father’s clothing store. Note that the two young female students who stand behind Labille-Guiard are contrastingly dressed in working clothes. One of the students also makes eye contact with the viewer. To the left of Labille-Guiard are two statues, her father and the Virgin Mary.

The painting received rave reviews and praise that positioned Labille-Guiard as a master oil painter, although some thought it was so superior and masculine in genre that it was painted by Labille-Guiard’s lover, François André Vincent. Gossip and even pamphlets surfaced with these accusations, prompting Labille-Guiard to ask a friend to intervene; eventually the false accusations subsided.

One impressed viewer, King Louis XVI, awarded Labille-Guiard a sizable government stipend to continue her portraiture business. In addition to the stipend, Labille-Guiard wanted studio space in the Louvre, as had many of her male contemporaries in the Academy. They denied her space not because she was a woman, but because she would have female students assist her, which the authorities thought would distract the other artists. Nonetheless, the king’s endorsement encouraged future portrait commissions from members of the royal family, among them the King’s aunts, sister and brother and later, King Louis XVIII.

Things to Do
1. Labille-Guiard was primarily a portrait artist. Research additional images of her work, especially her portraits.
2. Visit various artists’ studios. Interview the artists as to their work environments.
3. Drape satin fabric behind a still life or on a model and use colored pencils or pastels to capture the sheen by blending white with the colors (tints) or black (shades).
4. To fully appreciate the element of space, render a drawing or painting from life, memory or imagination that includes objects placed in the foreground, mid-ground and background. Be sure to “push back” and “pull up” objects figuratively to distinguish objects’ placement.
5. Using pastels or colored pencils, create miniature portraits of family or friends.