When Morisot was nearly five, her mother gave birth to a son Pierre. Home of a poor tailor where she befriended his son, the young time. An occasional escape brought the young Morisot near the esting encounters, but were restricted to their home much of the lightened childhood for her three daughters. They were brought It was Madame Morisot who is credited with providing an en-
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dad, an administrative department located in the center of 
the very center of France, beautiful Bourges, to Edmé-Tiburce Morisot and Marie Corneille Thomas. Marie, an accomplished singer and pianist, had now given birth to three daughters in under three years.

The proud father went to register his newborn daughter’s birth in the town hall the day after her birth. Unfortunately, the town’s mayor forgot to sign the document that day but did so three weeks later when it was finally brought to his attention. In addition to this oversight, Morisot had not been baptized within two days of birth which was practice of devoted Catholics. Two weeks later, Morisot became so ill that she required the care of a nurse. Fearing premature death of an unbaptized infant in a sinful state, the nurse took matters into her own hands and brought Morisot, without her parents’ knowledge or permission, to the cathedral for baptism. Here, in the rushed state, the infant received the mixed-up name of Marie Pauline Berthe. Fortunately, this shift of name was never recorded as Monsieur Morisot’s three-week delay in recording the infant’s name finally put the matter to rest. The entire incident predisposed her mother to be very anxious throughout Morisot’s early years.

Monsieur Morisot served as the Prefect of the Department of Cher, an administrative department located in the center of France during the French Revolution. His income level provided a very comfortable home in which to raise his daughters but his demanding job took valuable time away from his three young daughters. When Morisot was six months old, the family moved to Limoges, where her father continued in a high paying government job.

It was Madame Morisot who is credited with providing an enlightened childhood for her three daughters. They were brought up in a home filled with visiting dignitaries who provided interesting encounters, but were restricted to their home much of the time. An occasional escape brought the young Morisot near the home of a poor tailor where she befriended his son, the young Pierre-August Renoir. In time, the Renoir family moved to Paris.

When Morisot was nearly five, her mother gave birth to a son who drastically shifted the attention of her parents away from her. She was placed in the care of her governess, Louisa, a no-nonsense, take charge, unloving English woman. Morisot felt alone due to the absence of her parents affection.

The Morisot family moved to Paris in 1848 and eventually on to a Parisian suburban home in Passy that featured a lake and park like paradise. These scenes remained with Morisot throughout her life. Morisot was enrolled in a private school to prepare her to be a wife and mother by becoming well-read, well-informed, and accomplished in knitting, sewing, painting, piano. Women who received an education in this era were limited to instruction in pastels and watercolor, as well as to certain domestic objects in their still lifes such as flowers or fruit, as these were considered the female genre. Their education was not for intellectual development but to give them joy in the roles of wife and mother.

Morisot and her sister Edma enthusiastically began taking formal drawing lessons in 1858, three times a week for four hours each day. Artist Joseph Guichard, their second teacher, developed the sisters’ observation skills along with a sharp memory. Within a year, they both were granted permission to begin copying the masters at the Louvre Museum in Paris, using oil paint which had been limited only to male students. Based on the quality art executed by the Morisot sisters, Guichard informed the Morisots that their daughters’ impact in the art world would become revolutionary. The sisters, now studying plein air painting under landscape artist Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, traveled to ideal locations with full approval of their parents. Later, a grand painting studio was built in the garden by their parents where Morisot and her sister continued painting until 1869 when Edma met and married Adolphe Pontillon.

One day while painting in the Louvre Museum, Morisot was introduced to an older painter, Édouard Manet (8th Grade OCTO-BER) by another artist, Fantin-Latour. (7th Grade, FEBRUARY) Morisot and the married Manet immediately struck up a mentorship relationship. He was a key player in the shift from Realism to Impressionism. He and Morisot inspired each other to feature light in their work as other avant-guard painters did. In time, Morisot was considered among the founding members of the Impressionism movement. It was a perfect movement for a woman as its focus was capturing a moment in time, an impression of light rather than just a subject. Mary Cassatt (1st Grade, APRIL) was another Impressionist painter.

Morisot went on to develop portraits of wealthy women in domestic roles, often using her mother and sister, Edma, as her primary models. Some of these well-known portraits include Mother...
and Sister of the Artist (1869-70), Portrait of Edma Pontillon (1872-75) and her most famous domestic painting, The Cradle (1872). Landscapes were also among Morisot’s interests, many of which were painted in open air. Some outdoor paintings had visual boundaries such as balconies and focused on the spaces of everyday life, such as On the Balcony (1872).

Watercolor painting was at the height of interest during the Impressionism movement in the nineteenth century. Morisot built her reputation as a master watercolorist around 1870. Some of her most famous watercolors include Woman and Child Seated in the Meadow (1871), and two she painted in watercolor as a study for later oil paintings, On the Balcony (1872) and Woman and Child on a Beach. In 1873, she completed another series of watercolors, began to use pastels and created engravings of some of her paintings.

Morisot married Manet’s younger brother, Eugène, who also was a painter and father of their only child, Julie. They lived the bourgeois life, giving Morisot the financial support and time to paint. Morisot went on to participate almost every year in the Impressionist exhibitions until she fell ill with the flu. The subsequent pneumonia suffered in the early winter of 1895 caused her death in early March at the age of fifty-five. Her artistic production included more than four hundred oil paintings, three hundred drawings, two hundred watercolor paintings, two hundred pastels, and a handful of engravings and sculptures with the majority of her works in art museum collections around the world. Her death certificate, like her marriage certificate, stated she was a woman with no profession.

**Directed Observation**

Show students an image of The Cradle by Berthe Morisot. Tell them it was painted, oil on canvas, in 1873. Offer students biographical information about Morisot. 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. How does Morisot set up the painting compositionally? What color scheme does she use? How does she use value? How does she encourage eye movement?
2. The image captures a tender moment between mother and child. From an emotional perspective, how does Morisot portray tenderness? (eyes on infant’s face, hand on cradle, hand on cheek, protective drape, peaceful sleep)
3. Many painters depict the activities of male figures. Discuss the importance of telling the visual stories of women’s work. Research indicates women artists existed throughout time but biographical information about these artists is significantly lacking in recorded history. The same is true for minority artists. Why?
4. Consider the women in your family and their contributions to the workplace or home—on intellectually or emotional levels. If you were to create art based on these contributions, what image would you capture? What would your message be and how would you tell it?

**Things to Do**

1. Research other female Impressionists such as Marie Bracquemond or Eva Gonzales and determine their contributions.
2. Learn how to draw figures: portraits and full figure, still or in action.
3. Invite women of various ages to serve as models in various traditional and contemporary roles such as a mother with infant, grandmother knitting, woman working on computer or leading a meeting.
4. Consider the men in your life and the jobs they do for your family or home. Create art depicting these domestic roles.
5. Create a painting with tempera or acrylic paint using an Impressionist approach. Remember to create the image with heavy brushstrokes and careful attention to the light source and how it hits the subject.