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.

William Turner
William Turner was born Joseph Mallard William Turner in London, England on April 23, 1775, and used his father’s name; William. Born to “common people,” Turner’s life was destined to be one of destitution. His father was a wig maker who later became a barber and his mother, Mary Marshall, was a homemaker who spent much of her adult life on the edge of mental instability. In 1786, Turner’s younger sister, Mary Ann, died, pushing his mother over the edge of insanity as the anxiety and grief were too much to bear. She often spent days and nights in alleyways crying with a shrill voice.

Due to the stressful home situation, Turner was sent to live on the west side of London with his uncle, Joseph Mallord William Marshall, who quickly noticed Turner’s interest in painting. His uncle eventually sent Turner off to school to develop his artistic skills. Three years later, Turner attended the Royal Academy, receiving instruction in architectural perspective, as well as traditional instruction. It was common for Turner to go on sketching tours throughout England, Scotland and Wales. His travels by stagecoach, horseback or on foot provided opportunity for quick sketching. Capturing the romantic views of the countryside was his goal as this was the image his patrons loved. Sketches later were made into watercolor paintings, some of which earned Turner approval and election into Royal Academy membership at age twenty-seven.

In economic terms, Turner was a wise businessman. He understood all too well that the market was ripe for images of beautiful landscapes and so he focused on this genre, putting tireless effort into what served him with the most financial gain. Commissions by locals and aristocrats came quickly. He was passionate about his ability for self-expression but was even more intent on his art as a business venture. Work produced for reproductions as etchings was gaining popularity in magazines and in the form of collections of reproductions sold as a folio. The world of mass-production furthered his fame as well as his earnings, unusual given his young age. At one point in his career, Turner had nine-hundred original images mass-produced selling thousands of copies. One of his major ventures into printmaking was a collection of seventy prints (etched with mezzotints) called the Liber Studiorum (Book of Studies 1807-1819) based on six categories of landscapes: pastoral, marine, mountainous, historical, architectural and epic pastoral.

Sketching and watercolor were Turner’s choice of media, but he gradually shifted to oils around 1796. His growing confidence with oil paints led him to introduce one oil painting among ten watercolor paintings at the Royal Academy exhibition. The oil painting, *Fishermen at Sea* (1796), won the acclaim of critics and formally introduced Turner as a gifted oil painter. His previous success in watercolor consistently used romantic countryside as the subject matter. *Fishermen at Sea* noted Turner’s new fascination with the powerful elemental forces of nature; wind, waves, squalls, rain, and fog. This shift in subject matter bolstered Turner’s imagination and granted him confidence to compose dramatic stories or historical accounts rather than replicating what he saw first hand in the calm English countryside. This study of the vulnerability of human life amidst the forces of nature was an emerging theme shared by poets as well. He was so interested in the force and drama of nature that, although not confirmed by art historians, he once tied himself to the mast of a ship during a storm to experience the wrath of the storm. Turner is known for the release of brilliant light breaking through layers of clouds in his dramatic oil paintings. This was his visual depiction of God’s presence following great danger.

Britain was at war with France at the turn of the century, and suffered many losses to Napoleon, leading to a sense of political defeat. As with political climate, Turner’s personal life was in turmoil. His mother’s increasing instability and constant prying into his life became the impetus to rent his own home. Within a few years, his mother’s mental condition required commitment in an asylum and she died in 1804. During this period, Turner began a long relationship with Sarah Danby, a young widow, and her four small children. The couple, who never married, had two additional daughters. Turner thought marriage and art didn’t go together. The relationship and children were kept a secret with the relationship eventually dissolving.

Turner’s submission to the 1813 Royal Academy exhibition was *Frosty Morning*, which critics thought was his finest work yet. The painting features an adult and child on a country road on a cold morning. Two other adults are shown digging in the frozen earth, possibly a grave. The natural environment overwhelms the scene and offers a glimpse into the harsh reality of life. In this painting and those to come, Turner’s critics had one complaint with his technique. Instead of applying paint smoothly with a brush, he used his fingers to apply the paint. One fingernail was often untrimmed to cut into the paint and spit was used to moisten the canvas. His dirty fingers were his badge of honor and
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 relates to this lesson due to elements of art or story content are:
- The Complete Guide to Painting Water by Bert N. Petri
- Painting Surf and Sea by Harry R. Ballinger
- Start to Learn Seascapes and Landscapes Techniques by Josep Casals
- Watercolor: Seascapes by Frank German

REFERENCE/BIBLIOGRAPHY

he turned away prospective students if they came to him for instruction without similar hands. One voice of support came from art critic of the time, John Ruskin, who praised Turner for his profound love of nature and her mysteries.

In the early 1830’s, Turner began an eighteen year relationship with a Mrs. Sophia Caroline Booth, a widow with small children. Never married, Turner spent much time at her home in Chelsea and took on the assumed name of Admiral Booth.

Around 1840, when Turner realized his time was running out due to poor health, he summoned a surge of energy to produce a large quantity of works, many exhibited at the Academy in subsequent years. Among the paintings was Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying. Typhoon Coming On (1840) based on an incident of England’s colonial slave trade. It is one of his most powerful historical images.

By December of 1845, Turner’s health had failed and a physician was summoned to Sophia’s home where Turner was staying. He died, due to natural causes, on December 19th. His body was taken to his Queen Anne Street home where it was placed in his gallery for viewing. His final resting place is in the crypt at St. Paul’s Cathedral and at his request, his body was placed by the side of two respected artists: Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sir Thomas Lawrence.

About the Art
The Slave Ship, originally titled Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On, was painted in 1840, oil on canvas, and is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts. This painting, inspired by reading Thomas Clarkson’s The History of Abolition and the Slave Trade, portrays the realities of the British slave trade. Many slaves became ill on the trip and the insurance policy dictated the “cargo” would not cover illness, only loss. The captain ordered the sick and near-death men, women and children to jump or be thrown into the raging and shark infested sea, handcuffed with legs tied together in order to claim compensation.

Directed Observation
Show students an image of The Slave Ship by William Turner. Tell them it was painted, oil on canvas, in 1840. Offer students biographical information about Turner. 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. Obviously, this is an emotional piece. Share how/why you react to such imagery. Discuss the purpose of this painting. Do you respect Turner for “telling the story” through this imagery? Do artists, in general, have a responsibility to reflect who we are as a society?
2. The work is also intellectual, political and social. How so? How important is it to have a multi-layered appeal?
3. In terms of execution, discuss Turner’s painting style. How do his chaotic brushstrokes and smears support the emotional quality of the imagery? When is it acceptable for a artist to paint in a non-traditional manner? How would the message of this painting change if it were painted clearly and precisely?
4. Discuss how the sea and sky support the emotional quality of this work. He also was a master at using the elements of art to support the message. How so?
5. When viewing art, how do you determine when the artist really is committed and invested in the work? What are you committed to that could motivate you to render a great work of art?

Things to Do
1. View many of Turner’s works, especially his earlier paintings, to gain an appreciation for his shifts of subject matter.
2. Turner had a strong reputation as a romantic landscape painter but was willing to shift his attention from the beautiful English countryside to the realities of human behavior, quite a risk. Step out of your comfort zone and create a work of art very different from your norm, such as trying a new media, increasing the scale, shifting from 2D to 3D or figure drawing.
3. Select a topic about which you are passionate. Increase your intellectual understanding about the subject through research, conversations and debate. Understand the historical context of your subject. Consider your execution options (media, size, 2D, 3D, realism, abstraction) and create a passionate work of art with your head (intellect), hand (skill) and heart (emotion).
4. Creating art is like writing a story. Every good story has characters, setting, plot, conflict, climax and a resolution. Develop these parts in writing with your partner. Then, create a work of art with your partner. Share the responsibility of conveying these components visually in a work of art. Give a title to your completed work and display it.