

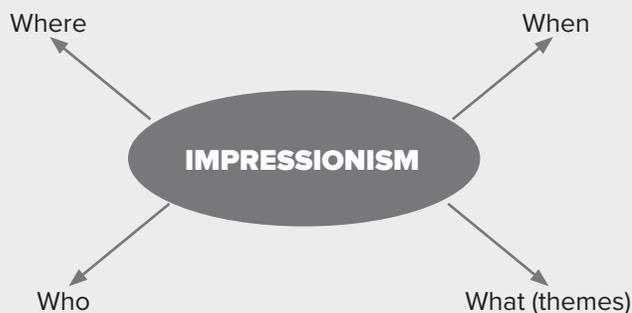


■ IMPRESSIONISM

Claude Monet,
Sunset in Venice, 1908.

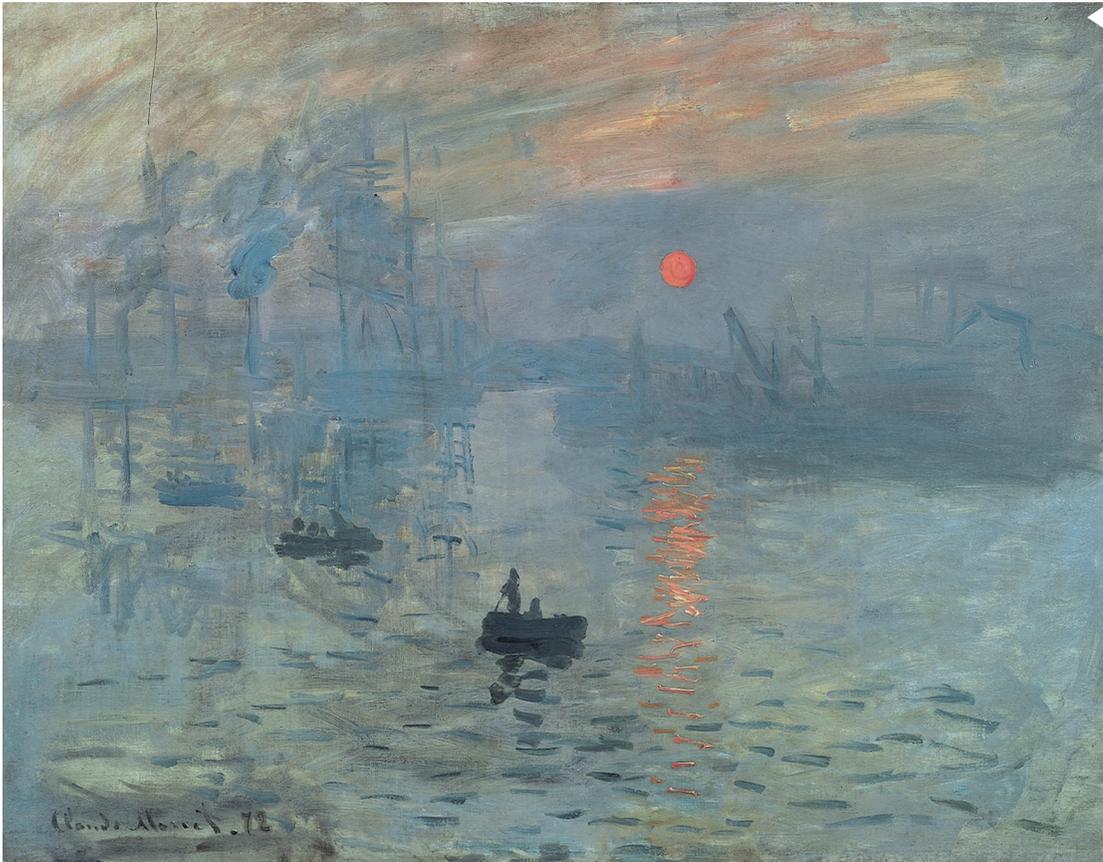
- 1. INTRODUCTION** | Read this short text introducing the Impressionist painters, who were active in France in the second half of the 19th century. Then develop the mind map below.

Impressionism was a style of painting which developed in France between 1867 and 1880. The group of Impressionist painters originally consisted of Monet, Pissarro, Cézanne, Degas, Sisley and Renoir. They shared a common interest in anti-academic painting, preferred to paint outdoors - 'en plein air' - choosing landscapes and street scenes, as well as figures from everyday life. The Impressionist painters organized their first independent exhibition in 1874. The term 'impressionist' was first used by the journalist Leroy to characterize derisively a painting by Claude Monet entitled *Impression: Sunrise*. The term was officially adopted for the Impressionists' third exhibition in 1877.

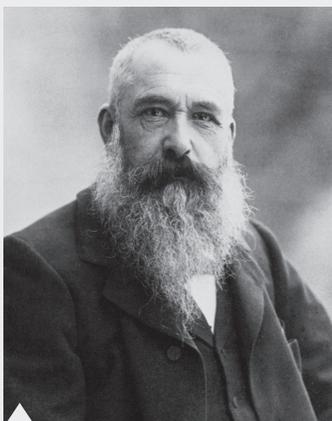


■ Claude Monet

2. **READING** | Look at the picture, read the comment and say if the statements below are true or false. Then correct the false ones.



Claude Monet (1840-1926), *Impression: Sunrise* (1872), Musée Marmottan, Paris.



Claude Monet, photo by Nadar, 1899.

Monet initially showed this view of the outer harbour at Le Havre at the first exhibition in 1874. When Edmond Renoir, the painter's brother, insisted on having a title for the catalogue, Monet is said to have replied, "Call it impression." The painters participating in the exhibition were Boudin, Degas, Cézanne, Guillaumin, Monet, Berthe Morisot, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley. The opening took place on 15 April 1874 in the former studio of the photographer Nadar, at 25 Boulevard des Capucines.

Except for a small number of loyal art-lovers, the public came mainly for a laugh. However, this first show had quite an impact, even though the conservative press ignored it. Only a few articles were quite favourable, while other reviews were more critical and often ironic. But when Louis Leroy, in an

attempt at a sarcastic play on the title of this picture, headed his 25 April piece “The Impressionists’ Exhibition”, he unintentionally baptised a movement that was to radically change established artistic notions in the second half of the 19th century.

From the first landscapes painted at Argenteuil on the banks of the Seine through to the waterlilies of his last years, Monet was fascinated by the changing sky, shimmering water and anything that lacked a fixed shape. He spent his life trying to catch the ceaseless dialog between water and light. As Zola noted as early as 1896, “In Monet’s work water is alive, deep - and above all, real.” With *Impression: Sunrise* Monet may have been influenced by the memory of the Turners he had seen in London in 1871.

- a. The title of this picture was given by the journalist Leroy. T F
- b. Berthe Morisot was the only woman participating in the first exhibition in 1874. T F
- c. The first exhibition was held at Nadar’s studio. T F
- d. This exhibition was an instant success, followed by enthusiastic reviews. T F
- e. The Impressionist movement marked a turning point in 19th century art history. T F
- f. Monet has always been fascinated by the interplay between water and light. T F
- g. A few months before doing this picture Monet had just seen Turner’s paintings. T F

3. READING | Read the text and complete it with the words from the box.

complementary | brushstrokes | details | distance | primary | light | form

The Impressionists were concerned more with the effects of on an object than with exact depiction of form. They eliminated minor and suggested rather than defined They preferred the colours—red, yellow and blue—and the complementaries—green, purple, and orange. They achieved effects of naturalness and immediacy by placing short of these colours side by side, juxtaposing primary colours so that they would blend when viewed at a and contrasting a primary colour (such as red) with its colour (green) to bring out the vivid quality of each.

4. SPEAKING | Using the information you have gathered so far, make a short oral presentation of the Impressionist movement. You can follow these guidelines.

- a. When and where the movement developed
- b. When and where the first exhibition was held
- c. Who were the first exhibitors
- d. Where the movement got its name from
- e. Which subjects these painters preferred
- f. Which technique they used

5. SPEAKING | Look at the painting *Poppy Field* and discuss the following points with a partner:

- Location
- Season
- How many figures are present in the scene and which class they belong to (working class, middle class, aristocracy)
- If brushstrokes define lines and contours or not
- Which colours are used: primary colours or blended colours?
- If this painting follows the Academy conventions or reflects the new style recently introduced by Monet



Claude Monet, *Poppy Field*, 1873, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

6. READING | Read the text and complete it with the adjectives in the box.

rapid | wispy | irregular | thick | direct | even | transient | intense | bluish

Monet settled in Argenteuil in 1871 and lived there until 1878. These years were a time of **1** fulfilment for him. Monet found in the region around his home the bright landscapes, which enabled him to explore the potential of *plein-air* painting.

This beautifully depicted summer day is captured in all its glory with the bright poppies complementing the **2** clouds in a clear blue sky. A woman and a child (probably Monet's wife, Camille, and their son Jean) walk through a field of **3** grass; red poppies cloak the bank that rises to the left; while another woman and child appear at the top of this bank. There is no sign of any link between the two pairs of figures, and no obvious reason why the woman in the foreground has lowered her parasol.

On the horizon an **4** line of trees closes off the field, with, at the centre, a single red-roofed house. Although it is a fine day, there are some clouds in the sky, which temporarily mask the sun. As a result, an **5** light is spread over the whole landscape. The composition is structured on a diagonal line: the mother and child in the foreground pair the other couple in the background, balanced by two separate colour zones, one dominated by red, the other by a **6** green.

Monet showed *Poppy Field* to the public at the first Impressionist exhibition in the photographer Nadar's studio in 1874. This painting was a **7** challenge to the conventions upheld by the French Academy. Landscapes were usually painted in a studio, with careful attention to subjects and details. Here Monet offers a new type of modern art: the brushwork is informal, as if the scene were caught by a **8** glance, and the view simply depicts the middle class at leisure in a natural setting, without anything heroic or spectacular. By exhibiting *Poppy Field*, Monet was presenting a new vision of landscape: an art of immediacy and movement, of informal poses and composition, which wanted to capture the momentary and **9** effects of light *en plein air*.

7. SPEAKING | Without looking at the text, ask and answer these questions with a partner.

- a. Where did Monet settle in the 1970s? Was he satisfied with his new home? Why?
- b. What scene did Monet depict in this painting?
- c. How did he structure the composition?
- d. Why was this painting anti-academic and unconventional at the time it was painted?
- e. What kind of landscape did the Academy painters depict?
- f. When and where was *Poppy Field* exhibited for the first time?
- g. Why did this painting show a new vision of landscape?

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *La Loge* (1874), Oil on canvas, Courtauld Collection, London.

■ Pierre-Auguste Renoir

8. READING | Read the commentary on this painting by Renoir and match the words in column A with their Italian equivalents in column B.

The artist's brother Edmond and a model, Nini from Montmartre, posed for this painting, which appeared at the first group exhibition in Paris in 1874. The subject of the theatre box was a popular one among painters of modern Parisian life during the 1870s. In *La Loge* Renoir makes a play on the contrast between the poses of the two figures: the woman looks out with a half smile on her face and her opera glasses beside her, in her hand, as if to receive the gaze of other members of the audience, while her male companion looks through his opera glasses out of the box and upwards, and thus implicitly at another box, not down at the stage.



The woman's face is clearly the focus of the composition, while her companion is relegated to the half shadow behind her. Her figure is further enhanced by the bold stripes of her gown.

The black and white stripes are often mixed with blue to suggest the play of light and shade across it. Around its strong pattern, touches of yellows, greens and blues recur in the white materials, set against the soft warm hues of her flesh and the pinks and reds of the flowers.

In his treatment of Nini, Renoir left her exact social and sexual status ambiguous: one of the reviewers of the first group exhibition described her as a typical cocotte, and another ‘a figure from the world of elegance’. To avoid signs of difference was very characteristic of Renoir: unlike Manet, he never painted images which suggested any social division, but, in his paintings of modern Parisian life of the 1870s, he presented all aspects of it as if they were equally harmonious and untroubled.

A	B
1. opera glasses	a. palcoscenico
2. gaze	b. abito
3. stage	c. tonalità
4. stripes	d. carnagione
5. gown	e. sereno/a
6. hues	f. binocoli da teatro
7. flesh	g. strisce
8. untroubled	h. sguardo

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.

9. SPEAKING | Read the comment again and, looking at the painting, describe it following these points.

- a. Say when it first appeared
- b. Explain the title of the painting
- c. Say who the two figures are
- d. Describe what they are doing and why Renoir chose to represent them like that
- e. Talk about the focus of the composition
- f. Talk about the social status of the female figure and explain Renoir’s choice, as opposed to Manet’s