

# Lights! Cameras! Action!

## Creating a Drama About the Lyme Art Colony

**Grades:** 5-8

**Time:** over the course of a week

**Grouping:** whole class, small groups, individual

**Materials:** access to Museum's website, writing paper, craft supplies, video recorder, blank DVDs

### Description

---

The Lyme Art Colony was a group of artists who were drawn to Old Lyme, Connecticut, as early as 1900. They stayed at the Griswold boardinghouse that was owned and operated by Florence Griswold. The house was filled with activity from May to October each year when the artists were coming and going. However, the artists were not the only people connected to the house. The house was occupied by Miss Florence's domestic help (to clean, cook, and garden), the wives of the artists, the female art students (who were not allowed to stay at the house), the tourists, and on occasion, a VIP like President Woodrow Wilson. This cast of characters came together and helped shape an interesting chapter in Connecticut art and history.

This lesson introduces students to the personalities of the Lyme Art Colony by having them write and perform a short scene incorporating the various characters who were a part of the Griswold boardinghouse. Students use the Museum's on-line resources to gather information (both in words and pictures) about the people of the art colony before creating a scene that incorporates the material. A series of scenarios are included below, however, some students may wish to develop their own.

### Objectives

---

- To learn about the personalities associated with the Lyme Art Colony
- To read a short scene from a new play about a historic subject
- To use the Museum's website as a source of information
- To work as a group to plot out a scene following a suggested scenario
- To view historic photographs and paintings of people
- To work as a group to write a scene for multiple characters using a variety of historic voices
- To work as a group to perform a scene in front of the class

## Curriculum Connections

---

### **Social Studies educational experiences in Grades 5-8 will ensure that students:**

- Be active learners at cultural institutions such as museums and historical exhibitions
- Display empathy for people who have lived in the past
- Describe relationships between historical subject matter and other subjects they study, current issues, and personal concerns

### **Visual Art educational experiences in Grades 5-8 will ensure that students:**

- Know and compare the characteristics and purposes of works of art representing various cultures, historical periods and artists
- Describe and place a variety of specific significant art objects by artist, style and historical and cultural context
- Analyze, describe and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, natural resources, ideas and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art

### **Language Arts educational experiences in Grades 5-8 will ensure that students:**

- Determine purpose, point of view and audience, then use the appropriate features of persuasive, narrative, expository, and poetic writing to achieve desired results
- Plan, organize, create and revise visual, written and oral pieces at a level of elaboration appropriate for middle school
- Identify and use primary and secondary sources to paraphrase, elaborate on, and integrate information into a final product, (e.g. historical fiction, news article, research paper, documentary)
- Use and examine the effectiveness of multiple ways of generating ideas (brainstorming, listing, writing, talking, webbing, drawing), then compose, revise, edit, and present a variety of products
- Analyze, describe and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, natural resources, ideas and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art

The above goals align with this lesson and were selected from *The Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards* (adopted in March 1998, published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, Division of Teaching and Learning). Go to: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/site/default.asp> to download a copy of the entire publication *The Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards*.

### **Inclusion Activity (Engaging Prior Knowledge)**

---

Begin the lesson with a grouping activity that places students into unique pairs or trios to discuss a series of questions designed to stimulate prior knowledge on a subject or idea related to the lesson. Several activities that will help organize students into unexpected groupings are listed below. Of course, other methods of pairing up students may be substituted for these activities.

## **Student Grouping Activities**

### ***Musical Pairs***

---

Use a portable CD player or simple instrument to play music/sound. Explain to the students that when the music/sound starts they are to walk around the room silently in a safe but random pattern (nodding friendly hellos to their fellow students). When the music stops, the students should pair up with the nearest person to discuss the question read aloud. After each question is discussed, start the music again. Repeat until all three questions have been discussed.

### ***A Circle of Friends***

---

Ask your students to get into a circle facing the center. Ask every other student to step into the circle facing out. Have the inner circle rotate to the right until they are face to face with a partner. Ask the first question. After the question is discussed, have the outer circle move three or four people to the right to line up with a new partner. After the question is discussed, have both the inner circle and outer circle move three to four people to the right to line up with a final partner.

### ***Enjoying a Little Tete-A-Tete***

---

The term “tete-a-tete” refers to a private conversation between two people (as well as a short sofa intended to accommodate two persons). Ask your students to put their chairs into pairs (side by side, but facing in opposite directions) and take a seat. After each question is discussed, have students move to another seat and partner up with a new person.

### *Find Two Like You*

---

Ask your students to find two other students who match a certain criterion like: *Find two other students with your hair color*; or *Find two other students with birthdays close to yours*; or *Find two other students who have same kinds of pets*; or *Find two other students who like your favorite ice cream flavor*. Students usually begin to call out their answers and cluster with those whose answers match. Once they have three people, their group is complete. Teachers may have to make a cluster of non-matching students.

Once the students are in their pairs or trios, have them discuss one of the following questions read aloud by the teacher. After a minute of discussion passes, remix the groups and continue with next question. Repeat until all questions have been discussed.

### *Discussion Questions*

---

- Share a favorite line from a movie. Explain why the line is so memorable to you.
- Discuss how a movie is different from a stage play. In your opinion, which one is better and why?
- How would your life be different if you were born 100 years ago?

### **Instructions**

---

1. Introduce the assignment of writing a short (10-minute) dramatic scene of a day at the Griswold boardinghouse for artists in 1910. Have students use the Museum's on-line learning site to gather background information for their scenes. They have the option of coming up with their own storyline or using one of the suggested scenarios outlined below. The final product will be their script and a performance for the class.
2. Begin by reading aloud *The Story of Miss Florence and the Lyme Art Colony* to introduce students to the Lyme Art Colony.
3. Divide the class into working groups of 4-5 students and distribute copies of the following excerpt from *Hassam in the Garden*, the one-act play commissioned by the Museum and performed in the garden in 2004. Ask the groups to read and discuss the scene. What questions do they have now? What more would they like to know? What did the writer make them think about? Do they have any pictures in their heads after reading the piece? How would they finish the piece? Have the groups report out their discussion.

**An Excerpt from *Hassam in the Garden* by Jeffrey Benoit**

WHISTLING MARY: Of course, the artists sometimes stirred up more trouble than they were worth.

BAILY: What do you mean?

WHISTLING MARY: Well, like the time they were playing catch in the dining room and tossed an orange through the window.

BAILY: Through the window?

CHILDE HASSAM: It was an accident.

BAILY: I bet Miss Florence was very upset.

WHISTLING MARY: Actually, she didn't mind at all, said it would let in some much needed fresh air. She was like that, you know.

CHILDE HASSAM: Oh Mary, what about the *ring*?

WHISTLING MARY: Oh, Mr. Hassam, the story about the *ring*!

CHILDE HASSAM: Yes, tell Miss Baily about the ring!

WHISTLING MARY: Alright, if you insist. Well, it all happened one day when all the artists decided to go out to the aunt's place for an afternoon swim.

CHILDE HASSAM: They were relatives of Miss Florence, who had a house down at Griswold Point.

WHISTLING MARY: Now, on this particular day, included in the bunch was the artist William Henry Howe.

CHILDE HASSAM: Who we all called *Uncle*.

BAILY: Was he your uncle?

CHILDE HASSAM: No, no, we just called him that.

WHISTLING MARY: Now, it just so happened that Mr. Howe, after some time swimming, had lost his ring in the surf, a ring he fancied quite a bit. Well, of course, everybody there joined in to look to see if they could help him find it – but to no avail. Now, what Mr. Howe didn't know is that one of the artists actually *did*

find the ring but didn't fess up to it then and there and kept it a secret. Well, later on that evening, back here at the house, the group sat down for dinner. Now, of course, Mr. Howe, being *Uncle* and all, was *always* the one to carve at table.

CHILDE HASSAM: Always.

WHISTLING MARY: So, when the meal was brought in – which happened to be fish that night – salmon, I believe – he began slicing and serving portions to everyone there. Well, after a few moments or so, he heard a light clink against his knife. Of course, he assumed it was a bone or something, so began diggin' in there to remove whatever it was. Well, wouldn't you know, when he pulled out the knife and held it up, there on the very tip of it was his ring – the very one he'd lost earlier that day! Well, for a few moments, he just stared at it in disbelief while all the other artists tried their best to contain their giggles. Of course, the secret was soon let out as laughter poured out round and round the table – and in the kitchen as well! Oh, it was the funniest, I tell ya! The funniest!

(Childe Hassam and Whistling Mary laugh heartily.)

4. Have the working groups review the suggested scenarios. Ask them to select one or come up with their own idea (this will help them to begin to search the website for content). The groups should divide up the various tasks and plan what they will bring back to the working group.
  
5. Have students use a computer to explore *The Fox Chase and In Situ: The Painted Panels*. They should surf the pages looking for interesting facts and personality traits that can be incorporated into their scene. To get to know the range of characters, the students should visit *Who's Who in the Boardinghouse* from *The Griswold House* Icon. Each of the suggested scenarios has links to relevant information within the on-line sites.

# Suggested Scenarios

## **Scenario One**

---

There's been a mix up with Miss Florence's reservations. She and her staff have to convince one messy artist who doesn't want to give up the best bedroom to a very neat artist who reserved it and is waiting to move in. To complicate matters, the two artists refuse to speak to one another.

**For information related to Scenario One, go to:**

*Who's Who in the Boardinghouse from The Griswold House Icon*

*Inside the House (Art Colony Bedroom) from The Griswold House Icon*

*Imagine Yourself as an Artist from The Griswold House Icon*

*Cluster of Artists Icon*

## **Scenario Two**

---

Miss Florence is giving a tour to a rich Boston couple (who are both allergic to cats) who want to buy a painting from the center hall. They can't decide between a work of Tonalism (which the husband likes) or American Impressionism (which the wife likes). Artists from both stylistic camps are in the hall cheering on their favorite style. Meanwhile, Miss Florence's domestic staff are busy catching the many cats that run up and down the hall.

**For information related to Scenario Two, go to:**

*Who's Who in the Boardinghouse from The Griswold House Icon*

*Inside the House (Center Hall) from The Griswold House Icon*

*Imagine Yourself as an Artist from The Griswold House Icon*

*Cluster of Artists Icon*

*Tonalism from Henry Ward Ranger Icon*

American Impressionism (Characteristics of American Impressionism) from *Childe Hassam* Icon

*The Cat* Icon

### **Scenario Three**

---

Two artists arrive with their finished painted panels to be installed in the dining room. One painted a landscape in a Tonalist style and the other a landscape in an American Impressionistic style. Both want the empty spot next to the window but there's only room for one panel. Miss Florence and her domestic staff play judge and jury as the artists debate over which panel should get the spot.

**For information related to Scenario Three, go to:**

*Who's Who in the Boardinghouse* from *The Griswold House* Icon

*Inside the House (Dining Room)* from *The Griswold House* Icon

*Imagine Yourself as an Artist* from *The Griswold House* Icon

*The Painted Panels* from *The Griswold House* Icon

*Cluster of Artists* Icon

*Tonalism* from *Henry Ward Ranger* Icon

American Impressionism (Characteristics of American Impressionism) from *Childe Hassam* Icon

*Whipoorwill Road* by *Clark Voorhees* (for Tonalism)

*Country Road in Summer* by *William Chadwick* (for American Impressionism)



## **Scenario Four**

---

A freshly completed panel hangs in the dining room and three artists sit on chairs nearby. When Miss Florence and her domestic staff want to know who painted it, the artists make them guess based on the style, colors, and subject matter of the painting. In the end, it turns out to be a collaboration by all three.

**For information related to Scenario Four, go to:**

*Who's Who in the Boardinghouse from The Griswold House Icon*

*Inside the House (Dining Room) from The Griswold House Icon*

*Imagine Yourself as an Artist from The Griswold House Icon*

*The Painted Panels from The Griswold House Icon*

*Childe Hassam Icon*

*Henry Rankin Poore Icon*

*Walter Griffin Icon*

*Tonalism from Henry Ward Ranger Icon*

*American Impressionism (Characteristics of American Impressionism) from Childe Hassam Icon*

*Landscape with Cow by Childe Hassam, Henry Rankin Poore, and Walter Griffin*

*Floral Still Life by Childe Hassam*

*Ladies in the Woods by Walter Griffin*

*The Fox Chase by Henry Rankin Poore*

## **Scenario Five**

---

A bachelor artist who has just moved into the attic comes down to the parlor to complain about the accommodations. He interrupts a boisterous gathering of artists singing at the piano and another holding a spelling bee. An older married artist challenges him to the wiggle game and asks Miss Florence to be the judge. If the younger artist wins, he gets the good room. If he loses, he has to carry the older artists art materials down to the river and back each day.

**For information related to Scenario Five, go to:**

*Who's Who in the Boardinghouse from The Griswold House Icon*

*Inside the House (Art Colony Parlor) from The Griswold House Icon*

*Imagine Yourself as an Artist from The Griswold House Icon*

*Bottle of Rye – Artists at Play from School of Lyme Icon*

*Cluster of Artists Icon*

*Painting Tools Icon*

*Wiggle Drawings*

## **Scenerio Six**

---

After waiting all day for a Hartford collector to come and buy his latest painting, the artist and his wife decide to go canoeing. When the collector does arrive, two of Miss Florence's domestics decide to pretend to be the artist and his wife in order to make the sale. Unfortunately for them, the collector asks many questions about the style, color, and subject matter of the painting. Miss Florence discovers the charade, but decides to play along. Moments later, the real husband and wife return unexpectedly.

**For information related to Scenario Six, go to:**

*Who's Who in the Boardinghouse from The Griswold House Icon*

*Inside the House (Center Hall) from The Griswold House Icon*

*Imagine Yourself as an Artist from The Griswold House Icon*

*The Cow Icon*

Tonalism from Henry Ward Ranger Icon

American Impressionism (Characteristics of American Impressionism) from Childe Hassam Icon

**A Time for Reflection**

---

Have students reflect on the following questions in their own journals.

**Content/Thinking:**

- How did your scene capture the personalities of the people of the boardinghouse?
- What was the most important information you included in your scene?

**Social:**

- How did your group decide who would play each part?
- Was your group good at working on the scene together?

**Personal:**

- Which character in your scene did you like the best?
- Do you think it would be fun to write scenes as a career? Why or why not?

**Appreciations**

---

Before concluding the lesson, be sure to invite appreciations from the group (i.e. thank group partners for good brainstorming or suggestions for better writing). To help students begin making statements of appreciation, use such sentence starters as these:

- I liked it when ... (describe the situation)
- I was amazed when ...
- I was proud when ...

**Follow-Up Activity**

---

Consider planning a field trip to the Museum in Old Lyme with your students. Information about a visit can be found on the [Planning A Visit](#) page.

## **Feedback**

---

Please share your suggestions for making the lesson better. Let the Museum know how this lesson worked for you and your students by sending your comments and suggestions to [david@flogris.org](mailto:david@flogris.org). Educators are encouraged to submit copies of final products and/or digital images to be shared on our website.