

Exploring Impressionist Artists' Use of Shadow and Light

Time: 1 hour

Difficulty level: Medium

Messy level: Medium



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Woman with Parasol and Small Child on a Sunlit Hill*, 1874–76, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of John T. Spaulding, © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston / All Rights Reserved

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To view hi-res images from the exhibition *Incomparable Impressionism from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, visit the [MFAH website](#).

Inspired by an Impressionist painting by the artist Pierre-Auguste Renoir, this activity will guide you in exploring how artists use light and shadows to create depth and highlights in their paintings, which they often create outside.

Investigate the Work of Art!

1. Impressionist painters mastered the use of light to create shadows and highlights in their paintings. Look at this painting. What is the light source? Which direction is it coming from?
2. Impressionist artists did not paint every detail but rather gave the overall impression of their subjects. What details can you see clearly in this painting? What details are more vague?
3. Look closely at the parasol the woman is holding. What colors did the artist use to create the shadows in the darker areas of the parasol?

Let's Make Some Art! Gather These Art Materials

- 11 x 17 in. canvas sheet
- Acrylic paints
- Paintbrushes
- Umbrella
- Paper towel
- Palette
- Cup for water
- Pencil



1. Set up an umbrella outside, preferably opened on the grass.
2. Draw your umbrella in pencil lightly on the canvas.
3. Observe the light on the umbrella. The light will be brightest on the outside and darkest underneath where the shadows are.
4. Using large brushstrokes, paint the background first. If you set your umbrella on the grass, then paint the darkest and lightest areas of grass without including details.
5. Paint your umbrella by starting with the lightest areas, then the darker areas.
6. Use Impressionist techniques: use brushstrokes that you can see instead of blending them, capture the light and shadows, and don't paint every detail.
7. Use two paintbrushes, one for the lighter areas and one for the darker areas.
8. When you are finished, you should be able to see the brushstrokes that you made in your beautiful umbrella still life!