

PRIMARY TEACHERS' NOTES

The Water-Lily Pond
Claude-Oscar Monet

PARADISE

A National Gallery Touring Exhibition in partnership with Bristol Museums & Art Gallery and the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne

Paradise is the second in a series of exhibitions produced in partnership between the National Gallery, Bristol Museums & Art Gallery and the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne. Each exhibition is shown at the three galleries and consists chiefly of paintings from the National Gallery's collection, allowing them to be enjoyed by people across the country. Paradise is touring to:

- Bristol Museums & Art Gallery 18 January–30 March 2003
- Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne 12 April–29 June 2003
- Sunley Room, The National Gallery, London 10 July–28 September 2003

'The Water-Lily Pond' Claude-Oscar Monet (1840–1926)



Oil on canvas in 1899.

Paradise is an imaginary place or condition where, ideally, we would all like to be. The idea of paradise is different for everyone. It might be an unspoilt, beautiful place where food is plentiful and the sun always shines, or somewhere peaceful, where people live in harmony with nature and with each other. Most cultures have stories that describe such a blissful place. Greek mythology tells of a golden age of innocence, which was destroyed when all the miseries of the world were released from Pandora's box. The word 'paradise' derives from the Persian for a royal pleasure garden, and both the Bible and the Koran describe gardens of paradise. In the Bible Adam and Eve lived in heavenly innocence in the Garden of Eden, before eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The Koran speaks of entering the gardens of paradise as a reward for those who believe and do good deeds. Many artists have tried to paint a concept of paradise. Some have used stories, such as these, to inspire them. Others have relied on their imagination alone.

Introducing a picture

A discussion of an image in which students' own perceptions and opinions are encouraged is usually the most effective way of introducing a picture.

- Introduce the concept of the 'original' by discussing the difference between the printed reproduction and the unique painting.
- Students may be unfamiliar with the content of the painting. With the aim of developing their skills of visual literacy, allow them space to try and work out what is happening in the picture. Discussions about who the characters might be, or what significance the objects might have, may be appropriate. There is a lot of room for speculation here.
- Older students could be asked to think about the original context of the painting. For example, what sort of audience the picture was painted for, or where it might have been hung.

About the painting

Monet bought a house at Giverny, north of Paris, in 1893. By this time he was a wealthy, well-respected painter. Shortly after moving in, he designed and built an oriental garden with a water-lily pond and Japanese bridge.

From 1899 until his death Monet spent most of his time painting the garden, sometimes showing the bridge and the vegetation around the pond, and other times just the water-lilies on the water. Monet was particularly interested in exploring the effects of light in different weather conditions, at various times of the day and in all seasons. He would paint many canvases at the same time, waiting for the thickly applied layers of oil paint to dry and then reworking them.

About the artist

Monet was born in France in 1840 and painted from an early age. He was introduced to landscape painting by Eugène Boudin who was a strong advocate of painting out of doors, directly in front of scenery, rather than working from sketches in the studio.

Monet became one of the founding members of the Impressionist movement. This group of artists, which included Renoir and Pissarro, explored painting directly from nature. Even though the Impressionists did not share a single style, one of their main interests was in representing contemporary life and immediate experience.

After the break-up of the Impressionist group in the 1880s, Monet continued to study the effects of light and atmospheric conditions through painting. From 1899 his primary subject was his water garden at Giverny, which he continued to paint until his death.

Activity ideas

Art and Design/Literacy

Make a series of outdoor paintings, pastel or coloured pencil sketches, showing different weather conditions and times of the day. Annotate the paintings with the date, time and observations about colour, shadows and reflections.

DT/Maths

Design your own paradise-garden and make a three-dimensional model of it.

Art/History

Find other painters who have used bridges as subjects in their paintings. For example, Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway* (also in the National Gallery collection). Discuss the differences between ornamental and industrial bridges.

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