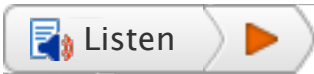




## 6-3 Realism and Impressionism



### Overview: Realism and Impressionism

Realism, Impressionism, and post-Impressionism are cultural eras that took place largely in Europe, Great Britain, and the United States. In the mid-nineteenth century, social attitudes were changing. Self-indulgence and exoticism were replaced by reverence for everyday life and images such as a seat by the fire with a loving family, including children and pets. This cozy scene was even reflected in the snug apartment of one Mr. Sherlock Holmes at 221B Baker St., the imaginary creation of a British doctor, Arthur Conan Doyle.

During this period of transition, the simple pleasures of life were celebrated. In the United States, the New England author Henry David Thoreau built a cabin with his own hands and lived there for two years, eventually writing the bestseller *Walden*. As the century drew on, reform was in the air. Thoreau, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and other writers fearlessly opposed slavery in the United States, while in Great Britain, the author Charles Dickens decried child labor and the lot of the poor.

Artists began selecting simple subjects for their art, rather than emotional battle scenes or dreamy landscapes filled with desolation. Realism was a widespread movement in Europe and the United States in

which the common things of daily life were considered worthy of consideration on their own terms. For example, a pot of milk and a cow would be considered worthy objects for a painting. In the United States, Winslow Homer painted pictures of fishermen at sea. In France, Gustave Courbet painted poor workers in a stone quarry or on the farm, often using dull earth tones to emphasize the actual appearance of the land.

From Realism, it was a small step to Impressionism. While Realism attempted to portray objects and activities as seen by the human eye in almost a clinical, scientific manner, Impressionism attempted to capture life's fleeting impressions, with feelings, images, and sensations, rather than the harsh lines of Realism. Impressionism also influenced music and literature. The impressionist composer Debussy wrote haunting music that seemed to drift around notions of tonality, such as the song "Clair de Lune" (moonlight). The American composer Amy Beach wove late-Romantic and impressionist tone clusters into her many works, especially notable in songs about birds and flowers.

Authors such as the novelists Émile Zola (French) and Virginia Woolf (British) began to break the rules that had governed fiction writing for centuries, abandoning strict chronology and moving seamlessly in and out of time. Once the great artists, writers, composers, and other thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began to demolish the old ways of creating, there was no turning back. It was just a matter of time before great originals like Picasso in art, Stravinsky in music, and Joyce in fiction were to build a new modern consciousness out of the ashes of polite Victorian society.



[Article: A Beginner's Guide to Realism](#)

This link provides an overview of Realism including examples of artifacts from the time period.



[Article: A Beginner's Guide to Impressionism](#)



This link provides an overview of impressionist art with several excellent examples.



## 6-3-1 Worksheet: Realism, Impressionism, and Modern World, Part 1

Download the worksheet and save it to your local files on your computer. Then, in the first table, complete the following:

1. For each era, identify an artifact that depicts one of the characteristics provided.
2. Explain which characteristic you think it represents, and why.

Once your work is complete, save the file again. You will complete the second table later this week. **You will submit your worksheet at the end of this week.**

To complete this assignment, review the following documents:

- [Worksheet Realism, Impressionism, and the Modern World](#)
- [Worksheet Realism, Impressionism, and the Modern World Rubric](#)

















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## Activity Details

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This learning block explores a cultural trend toward more realistic depictions of human experience. Realism in turn led to Impressionism and post-Impressionism from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. This was a cultural perspective in which creative innovators depicted the impressions made upon the senses. After participating in this learning block, you will be able to:

- Explore the dramatic shifts in cultural mood as the decline of Romanticism led to Realism, Impressionism, and the dawn of the modern world

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