PATTERNS

Grade Levels: 6–9
Estimated Time: 2 hours

Introduction:
Mary Cassatt’s The Child’s Bath (see page 34) depicts one of Cassatt’s favorite subjects: women involved in everyday activities and interacting with children. It also shows the influence of Japanese art in her work. Japanese art attracted the attention of many in Paris, especially during and after the 1878 Paris World’s Fair. Some artists collected Japanese prints and were inspired by Japanese aesthetics: flattened picture space, a strong palette, and abstract, geometrical forms. Cassatt, an American living in Paris, experimented with Japanism (see page 40), utilizing unusual viewpoints, color, and pattern, which is evident in this work.

Lesson Objectives:
• Critically analyze works of art.
• Learn about perspective and point of view.
• Create an image using patterns.

Key Terms:
• abstract
• Impressionism
• Japanism
• perspective
• point of view
• portrait
• woodblock prints

Instructional Materials:
• pen/pencil
• drawing paper
• various patterned cloth scraps and paper, such as wallpaper or scrapbook paper
• black marker
• construction paper
• access to the Internet, or books with images of Japanese woodblock prints (e.g., Richard Lane, Images from the Floating World: Japanese Prints)

Procedures:
Discussion:
• Using image 8 or the enclosed CD, have students examine the painting. Have students describe what they see. Ask:
  — What do you think is happening in this painting? Who are the people in this painting?
  — If the image depicts more than one person, examine the relationship between the figures. Are they linked together by pose, gesture, clothing, or setting? Are they presented as separate or divided? How does the artist convey this relationship and how does it affect our understanding of the people in the painting?
  — What is their relationship? What makes you say that?
— Where do you think this is taking place? How do you know that? Describe the colors and patterns that define the room.
— Describe the figures’ pose and gestures. What attitudes do they project to the viewer? Are the figures engaged in an activity or are they posing for the portrait? What is the woman wearing? Are the clothes formal or casual? What are the colors and patterns on the clothes? Are there any patterns or colors repeated throughout the painting?
— Consider the point of view from which the artist has depicted the figures. Do they look directly at the viewer? Are they seen from above or below? How do these choices affect our understanding of the person/subject?
— Does the painting feature an equal balance between the figures and the setting? Is one element more prominent? If so, what might the artist be saying about the subject?

• Tell students to look at patterns in the painting and tell them that Japanese art was very popular at this time in Paris, where Cassatt painted it.
  — Define Japanism (see page 40).
  — Show examples of Japanese woodblock prints from books or the Internet (e.g., www.artic.edu/aic; click Collections and enter “Utamaro” in the Artist or Keyword search box.)
  — Have students compare the similarity of Cassatt’s works to Japanese prints in relation to color, pattern, and point of view.

Activity:
• Have students sketch a scene either from their imagination or from real life, depicting one or two figures engaged in an everyday activity. Have them think about the perspective and vantage point of the image—will they depict their image from above, below, or straight on?
• After students have sketched an image, have them use patterned paper, cloth, and construction paper to create the image, defining the image using black marker. Tell students to think about repeating patterns throughout their work.

Evaluation:
Base students’ evaluations on their participation in class discussion, their ability to understand perspective and point of view, their ability to describe and analyze a work of art, and the completion of the final artwork.

Illinois Learning Standards:
Fine Arts 25, 27

For more detailed information on the Illinois Learning Standards, see http://www.isbe.state.il.us/lis/.