Lesson Plan: Pros and Cons: A Childcare Debate
Provided by the Art Institute of Chicago Department of Museum Education

Suggested Grade Level: 7–8
Estimated Time: two hours, plus one homework assignment

Introduction
In his portrait of Madame de Pastoret, Jacques David carefully constructs an image of a devoted mother. Madame de Pastoret was known for her philanthropy and her interest in providing affordable childcare, though such an interest was unusual. Her determination to establish a day nursery followed an incident in which she rescued a two-year-old boy, who had broken his arm, and his five-year-old sister from a locked apartment. The nursery she founded in Paris eventually expanded into a nationalized system, and it provided the model for childcare in England. Madame de Pastoret continued her charitable work in this field by restoring the Société de Charité Maternelle (Society for Maternal Charity) founded in 1784, serving as secretary and then vice president.

Madame de Pastoret embodied the new theory on child rearing and education expounded by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his novel Émile. Rousseau suggested that mothers breastfeed their infants rather than send them off to a wet nurse and encouraged parents to provide a natural and less formal education for their children, one based upon experiences rather than scholarly texts, in order that they mature into social, moral, and rational adults.

In this lesson plan, students will determine which details in the painting convey Madame de Pastoret’s interest in and position on motherhood and childcare. They will research prevailing attitudes and Rousseau’s position on child rearing in the 18th century and then consider attitudes toward motherhood and childcare in our own culture through interviews with peers and family members and a class debate.

Lesson Objectives
• Describe and analyze a work of art.
• Discuss how an artist uses attributes to communicate ideas about a sitter.
• Discuss how David’s image communicates ideas about motherhood and childcare.
• Research historical and current ideas and attitudes about motherhood and childcare.
• Use research findings to construct and defend a position in a class debate.
Key Terms
• portrait
• attribute
• wet nurse

Instructional Materials
• pens or pencils
• notebook paper

Procedures
Discussion
Look:
• A painter includes attributes to tell the viewer specific things about his or her sitter. We know that David included details to tell us about Madame de Pastoret's personality and interest in childcare.
  o What do you see?
  o What is the woman wearing?
  o What is she doing?
  o Where is she?
  o Who is with her?
• Explain or reinforce how these elements convey the sitter's position on child rearing. (Click here for assistance, if needed.)

Reflect:
• Discuss what qualities students think a woman like Madame de Pastoret might possess.
• How do they see her qualities expressed in the image?
• Ask students what they might say if they could talk to her. How do they think she might reply?
• Ask students to describe this woman in one word. (If there is a diverse range of terms used to describe her, discuss why there are differences of interpretation.)
Read:
• Have students read chapter one of Rousseau’s Émile.
• Ask students what are the main points of Rousseau’s argument? What are the faults of the current convention of childhood education, and what are Rousseau’s suggestions to correct them?

Debate:
• Have students discuss how the educational and childcare situations in 18th-century France, as critiqued by Rousseau, compare to those of our own times. Is it fair to make an analogy between these two situations?
• Ask students if the remedies that Rousseau suggests would work today.

Activity
Exploring contemporary childcare issues.
• For homework, have students answer and discuss the following questions with family members:
  o What childcare options exist in your community?
  o What do you think are the positive aspects of each option? What are the negative aspects?
  o What do you think is the best childcare option? Why?
• In class, divide the students into groups according to the best childcare option they chose in the homework assignment (daycare center, babysitter, parent, or other options). Ask each group to make a brief presentation to the class about why its option is the best.

Evaluation
Base students’ evaluations on their ability to participate in class discussion, describe and analyze a work of art, complete a writing assignment succinctly and coherently, and contribute appropriately to a group position and presentation.

Illinois Learning Standards
Social Science: 14, 16, 18
English Language Arts: 4, 5
Fine Arts: 25, 27