

The Biggs Museum of American Art Junior Docent Program

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Program Description

The Junior Docent Program provides students with a unique opportunity to learn about the visual arts, apply their knowledge and research skills to specific works of art from the Biggs' collection, develop public speaking skills, and create art in response to historical art movements. The program runs in three stages, each of which can be executed solely by an art teacher, or the program can be run in cooperation with instructors from other areas, including history and writing. Each stage is listed in detail in the following pages, but below is a brief overview of each stage.

1. Students acquaint themselves with the Biggs' collection through close observation and free writing
2. Students utilize these observation skills in the second part of the program by selecting works of art from the Biggs collection, researching these pieces and artists, and then presenting their findings
3. Students apply their observation skills and thorough knowledge of the Biggs collection to create works of art inspired by what they've seen in the Biggs' collection

Educational Principles Addressed

This program develops and highlights several areas of educational principals and lifelong skills

Analytical Skills

Students in this program are able to learn the value of research, clear writing, and careful analysis. They are also able to begin to make connections across disciplines like writing and history through art.

Public Speaking

The level of comfort that these students feel with the objects they present and their confidence in their own abilities to present information is a life-long and invaluable skill.

Art Appreciation

The Junior Docents develop deep connections art institutions like the Biggs and bring this appreciation with them through the rest of their life.

Support from the Biggs

We offer free, staff-led tours schools to acquaint students with the collection and each school is welcomed back, free of charge, to present their research in front of their chosen objects. If either of these trips is time or cost prohibitive, the tour or presentations can be led by the teacher in the classroom through a PowerPoint created with assistance from the Biggs' staff. The Biggs Curatorial and Educational staff members are also at the disposal of educators and students participating in the

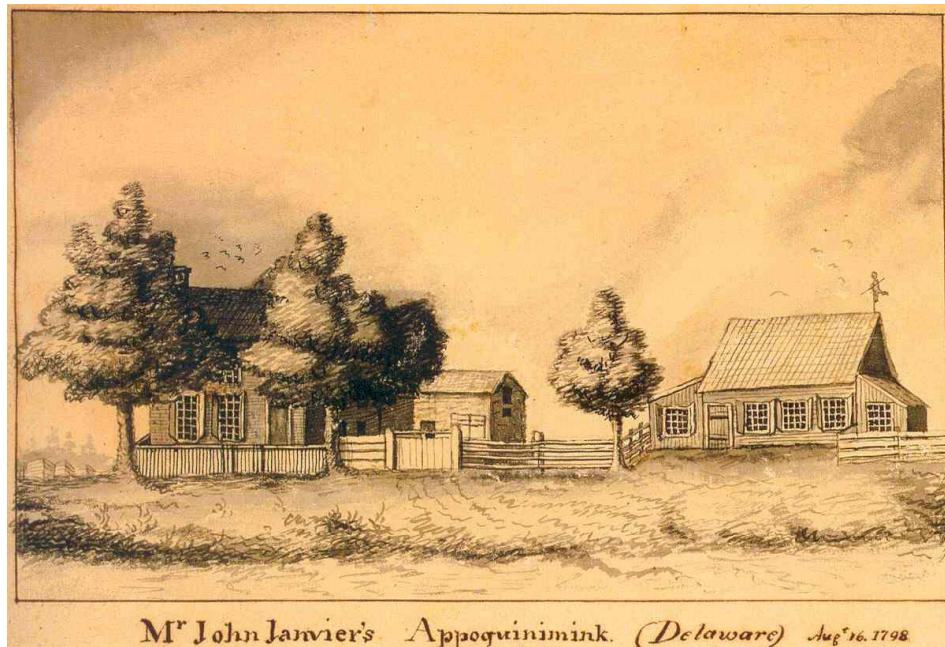
program. We are happy to help with lesson plans and speak with students about the collection and museum careers.

Part I: Introduction to the Biggs' Collection and Close Observation

The first part of the Junior Docent program is dedicated to an exploration of the Biggs' collection through close observation and interpretation. It is meant to introduce students to the collection, while encouraging careful examination – or “long looking” - with each piece of art they encounter. The purpose of this part of Junior Docent Program is to orient students both to the Biggs collection and to the different ways that art can be approached. Their observations here can feed into the more extensive write-ups they create for their presentations in Part II.

Lessons can be broken down into three sections addressing drawing, painting, and sculpture. Students should be introduced to the works by the instructor or Biggs staff and then encouraged to use prompt questions and art terms to write and think about their initial reactions to the works. The introduction, prompt questions, and use of art terms should be adjusted to suit the needs and learning level of the group.

The following pages include sample object observations activities that were created for use with students in Grades 6-8.



John Janvier's house, 1798

Francis De Haes Janvier

Ink Wash on paper

This is a landscape drawing of a house and workshop that belonged to a family named the Janviers. The Janviers were an important family of furniture makers in Delaware over 300 years ago and this scene shows us that they wanted their house and work spaces to be near one another.

Art Terms

Using your knowledge of art terms, use the word "shape" when you write or talk about this drawing.

Prompt Questions

Why do you think someone in the Janvier family wanted to draw their house? If you drew your house or a place you cared about, what would it look like? What kind of shapes would you use? What would you include in your drawing to tell people years from now about the way you played, worked, or lived in this place?



Hillside Saranac, 1924

Jonas Lie

Oil on canvas

In his paintings, Jonas Lie put special emphasis on light and the way it changed the colors of objects and scenes. His interest in light and color aligns him with the work of the American Impressionists.

Art Terms:

Research the term “American Impressionist” and compare the works you find in your research to this work. In your writing or thinking about this piece, reflect on what this painting shares in common with those and what is different between the two works.

Prompt Questions:

By looking closely at the direction the light and shadows are going, where do you think the sun is shining from? How would the scene look if the sun were in a different place? There are a lot of shadows and bright spots in this painting. Look closely at those spots and list how many colors you can find in each shadow and bright spot. Then, try to cast your own shadow and observe all the colors you see there. How can these observations be applied to your own art work?



Frank E. Schoonover, 1960
Katherine Dietz
Bronze

This is a sculpture showing the artist Frank E. Schoonover. He was an important artist who painted and drew illustrations for magazines and books during the Golden Age of Illustration. The artist who made this sculpture, Katherine Dietz, was taught by Frank E. Schoonover and she chose to show him wearing a bowtie, which he wore when he taught his art classes.

Art Terms:

Think about some of the qualities that bronze, as an art material, might have and incorporate these observations in your writing.

Prompt Questions:

If you were going to make a sculpture of a person you cared about, how would you dress them or what would they be doing so that everyone could recognize them? Do they have a favorite piece of clothing that they could wear, the way that Frank E. Schoonover liked bowties, or do they like an activity that you could show them doing? What medium would you use to represent them? Why do you think Katherine Dietz chose to use bronze for this portrait?

Part II: The Three Pronged Analysis to Art History

Part two of the Junior Docent Program is where students truly begin to take ownership of the collection through increasingly intensive research and examination. This section provides an example of a “three-pronged” analysis of a work of art. These three analyses are: biography, historical context, and artistic production. All are based on current art historical approaches used in museums and universities and help students make connections across multiple subject areas through their research. Students should analyze their works from each angle, but are free to pick and choose which pieces of research to share for their presentation.

Research can be conducted using the Biggs’ library, catalogues of the permanent collection, and the online timeline of the Biggs’ permanent collection. Access and use of more general resources can be left up to the educator’s discretion and some of the following can be of great help:

- The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/>
- Art History Resources on the Web: <http://arthistoryresources.net/ARTHLinks.html>
- MoMA Online: <http://www.moma.org/learn/activities/>

The audience and location for the presentations can be adjusted to suit each school’s needs. Some may opt to give the presentations in front of the art work at the Biggs, others may choose to do them in class using reproductions of the images. Regardless of the method of delivery or audience, it is important that students at least have access to an image of the work while presenting in order to familiarize themselves with this type of presentation. These presentations should also remain under three minutes, as this is standard for docent led tours at the Biggs.

The next pages provide an example of the three-pronged analysis taken by a Biggs’ staff member to study a painting in our collection. It could be used on its own for older students, or broken down by the educator for younger students. Following the write ups are some prompt questions to get students thinking about these approaches.



Cape Henlopen Lighthouse, Far View
Ethel Pennewill Brown Leach
Oil on canvas

Three Pronged Analysis

Biographical Analysis:

Ethel Pennewill Brown Leach was a Delaware artist who was active in the early to mid-1900s. She studied at the Clawson S. Hammitt School of Art in Wilmington, the Art Students League in New York, and with the renowned illustrator Howard Pyle in Chadds Ford, PA and Wilmington. Later in life she trained in Europe, where she observed and adapted post-Impressionist ideas of color, light, and landscape. Much of her life's work, including this representation of the former lighthouse at Cape Henlopen, reflects this era of painting with heartfelt representations of Delaware landscapes through the lens of these European art concepts. This lighthouse, in particular, held particular personal significance for Leach and she painted it multiple times, both before and after its destruction in 1926.

Historical Context:

This painting serves as a visual record of a lighthouse that fell into the sea in 1926. Through this painting and several others done by Leach and her artistic peers, future generations have and will have a visual representation of the former appearance of this particular location.

The era in which the work was painted – the 1920s – was a particularly prosperous time in America. The surge and accessibility of auto-manufacturing during this time meant that more people than ever before had access to idyllic spots like the beach portrayed in this scene. As a result beach scenes became increasingly popular. The 1920s also saw the birth “the New Woman,” who, like Leach, was unabashedly venturing into endeavors typically reserved for men, including the bold task of executing such a large-scale, landscape painting.

Artistic Production:

This painting was created using oil paint and is done on canvas. Given the era in which the painting was created, it is likely that Leach was purchasing mass produced paints and pre-stretch canvases. These were probably acquired from a local art supply store in Delaware. Leach frequently worked in oil, which allows for the kind of impasto – or raised paint – that was typical of the work of the Impressionist and post-Impressionist artists that Leach observed and learned from. It is likely that Leach would have used both brushes and palette knives to apply the paint thickly and directly on the canvas. This application added both expression and texture to her scenes.

Prompt Questions for the Three-Pronged Analysis

These questions can help guide students' research and writing about their pieces

Biographical Analysis:

- When and where did this artist live?
- What cities and with whom did this artist study? How did this impact his/her style?
- Was there anything that specifically inspired this artist to become an artist?
- Who were this artist's peers? How does his/her style compare to those artists?
- Are there any people, places, or objects that the artist represented multiple times that relate to his/her biography?

Historical Context:

- In what country was this work of art created or what country, if known, does it depict?
- What were some major events happening in these countries during the time this piece was created?
- What was happening in the rest of the world at this time?
- If the work depicts a historic scene, think about what was happening during that historic moment and how it might relate to the time in which the work was created.
- If the work represents a person, what social standing do you think he or she had and why?
- What social standing did this artist have? How might this have impacted his or her views on the subject of the piece, or art making in general?

Artistic Production:

- What is the medium of the work?
- What are some qualities of this medium?
- Why do you think the artist chose this medium?
- Does the medium connect the work to any other well-known or historic works?
- Does the medium have any economic, professional, or gender-specific connotations? Did the artist spend or meet these connotations?

Part III: Informed Art Making

In Part III, students take what they learned in Parts I and II about careful observation and historical context, and they apply it to the creation of their own works of art inspired by the Biggs' collection. In the past, among many other things, students have adapted portraits to represent themselves and their culture, created their own still-life paintings based on the principals they observed in those at the Biggs', and painted our outdoor, sculptural installation in fantastic environments. Many students also directly copy the works in our collection, providing the opportunity to truly embody the process the artist engaged with to create that work of art. This last stage is a creative application of the skills and knowledge the students have gained in the previous sections of the program.