

## TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH LANDSCAPE

The shift to implementing Common Core standards in schools has placed new emphasis on helping students develop critical thinking skills. While the use and definition of these skills continues to evolve, it is clear that students need to be able to:

- Reason effectively
- Examine details and use them to form conclusions
- Solve problems
- Compare and contrast
- Analyze how parts relate to the whole (systems thinking)

Works of art provide an opportunity for students to exercise these and other skills associated with critical thinking.



*Railroad Bridge, Argenteuil*, 1874  
Claude Monet, French  
Oil on canvas  
21 3/8 x 28 7/8 inches (54.3 x 73.3 cm)  
John G. Johnson Collection, 1917  
Cat. 1050

### Grade Level

For high school, grades 9–12, but can be adapted for younger classes

### Common Core Academic Standards

#### LANGUAGE ARTS

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1b](#)

### Art Images Required

Click on the Museum object titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art website. Images that are also available in the

ARTstor Digital Library are indicated by an ID number or search phrase. Entering that number or phrase into the ARTstor search bar will direct you to the corresponding image in that database.

- [Railroad Bridge, Argenteuil](#), 1874, by Claude Monet  
ARTstor search: PMA cat 1050
- [The Bridge at Saint-Mammes](#), 1881, by Alfred Sisley  
ARTstor search: PMA cat 1082

# PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

## Lesson Process

1. Examine the painting *Railroad Bridge, Argenteuil* by Claude Monet. Take a few minutes to look at it closely before discussing. (If viewing on the Museum website, be sure to click on the zoom feature. If using ARTstor, employ zoom to bring the entire painting into closer examination.)
2. What clues does Monet provide regarding the setting of this painting? What can you tell about time, place, and mood?
  - a. What time of year is indicated? Give reasons for your decision.
  - b. What feeling is evoked from this painting? (Keep in mind that mood is an aspect of setting.) What details help you form this conclusion?
  - c. (Challenging) What do you learn from looking at the shadows and reflections in this image? Using these things as clues, where in the sky would you guess the sun is? What time of day do you think it is?
3. Monet could have chosen any landscape or scene to paint, but he chose this one. What does his choice reveal about a possible purpose or theme for this painting? (Read the Teacher Resources on the Museum website for this painting to gather additional clues to answer this question.)
  - a. What is in this painting from the world of nature?
  - b. What is in this painting from the world of mankind?
  - c. Which seems more prominent to you? Why do you think so?
4. Now examine the painting *The Bridge at Saint-Mammes* by Alfred Sisley. Take a few minutes to look closely.
5. At first glance, these seem like very similar images. What are some things these two paintings have in common? Answer the same questions about setting (#2) in regard to Sisley's picture.
6. How are these paintings different? Do you sense a different mood? If so, what details cause you to feel this way? Respond to the same questions about nature and mankind (#3) in relation to Sisley's painting.
7. What does each painting convey about the impact of mankind on nature? Do you sense intrusion? Coexistence? Does one painting seem more positive than the other regarding this relationship? Why do you think that?

## Assessment

1. State a thesis regarding the theme of one (or both) of these paintings. As you write to support your statement, be sure to include details from the works and the reasons behind your interpretation of those details.
2. Imagine a conversation between Monet and Sisley as they examine these two paintings. Write a dialogue that reveals their observations and possible comments on each other's work.

## Enrichment

1. Research the French Impressionists—their techniques, subjects, ideas, and artistic innovations. What aspects of that art movement can you see in these works?
2. Research the impact of the Industrial Revolution on people's lives. Look for specific references to life in the outskirts of Paris and Impressionist artists of the time.