



American MASTERS

Benjamin West: The Father of American Painting



What We Learned:

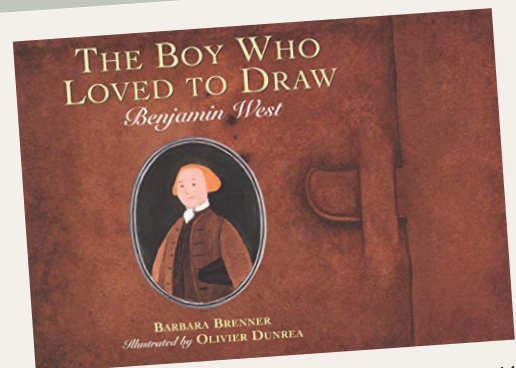
- Benjamin West started drawing at age 6 and was painting portraits at age 17.
- Some things to consider with portraiture is pose, expression, and costume.
- West studied art abroad, first in Italy then settled in London, England.
- The nickname "Father of American Painting" was given to Benjamin West.

Art Activity: Portrait

The students experimented with various expressions and the use of the primary colors to paint a portrait.



Book Nook



The Boy Who Loved to Draw: Benjamin West
By Barbara Brenner

Connections at Home: Self-Portrait Puppets

MATERIALS:

- Sandwich size paper bags
- Pencils, markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Varying supplies such as recyclable materials, googly eyes, yarns, strings, ribbons, construction paper (cut for arms, legs, shoes, hands, clothing, etc.), and magazine pictures
- Glue or glue sticks
- Scissors

DIRECTIONS:

- Hold the bag so the fold is on the front, and you can slide your hand inside to move the fold like a mouth.
- The top portion (the smaller rectangle) will be the face.
- You can cut out and glue the eyes on or draw them on the rectangle.
- The nose can be drawn under the eyes in a “w” shape, the mouth is a “U” shape for a smile or an upside “U” shape for a frown. An “O” shape can show surprise or singing. The ears are a “C” shape and a backwards “C” shape.
- The hair can be made of yarn, papers, or string, which can be glued on, or you can draw the hair.
- Decide on the clothes. These can be cut out of construction paper, newspapers, magazine pictures or anything you might have. They can be glued onto the bag.
- You can decorate your clothes anyway you want. Maybe use stripes on the shirt with buttons and add a belt.
- Cut strips of paper for the arms and legs and glue the arms to the sides of the bag and the legs into the bottom of the bag. These can be pre-cut out of construction paper, newspapers, or magazine pictures.
- Draw and cut out the hands. If you draw a hand on a folded piece of paper, you can make two at one time and cut them out together.
- Then, make the shoes by simply cutting the corner of a piece of paper, which forms a triangle.
- When completed, you can put your hand into the bag and wrap your fingers into the “fold” of the face to make it talk.



For Parents:

Our lesson on Benjamin West began with his early childhood. He was the tenth child born to a Quaker family in Springfield, Pennsylvania in 1738. Although the Quaker beliefs forbid the creation of images, his parents recognized his gift and love for drawing when he was only six. A few years later they allowed him to go to Philadelphia to study under an artist. Because portraits brought in money, Benjamin focused on these in his teen years. At age twenty-two he went to study art abroad, first in Italy and then London, England. History paintings became his focus. King George III made West his royal painter. He also taught many American artists, such as Gilbert Stuart and Samuel Morse. Benjamin never returned to America and died at age eighty-two in England. Because he was the first American artist to gain international recognition Benjamin West is called, “Father of American Painting.”

Please note: As M&G’s host location for *Homeschool Days*, Mack Library will feature books each month for parents to reference as resources. We hope these additional features will further support your teaching at home.

Coloring Page: Colonel Guy Johnson, 1775 by Benjamin West



Original found at Dover Publication: <https://www.doverpublications.com/zb/samples/779424/sample7b.htm>

Known mostly for his paintings of historical scenes around the time of the American Revolution, Benjamin West was one of the first American artists to receive an international reputation. Though he was born in rural Pennsylvania, West would spend most of his life living in England, where he eventually became one of the founders of Britain's Royal Academy. The subjects of this portrait are military officer and diplomat Guy Johnson and Mohawk chief Karanghyontye.

Make Your Own Paint

Instead of using crayons, you may want to paint the West coloring page. Try making your own watercolor paint at home. For full instructions, visit: **How To Make Homemade Watercolor Paints**
- The Make Your Own Zone

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 Tablespoons Baking Soda
- 2 Tablespoons White Vinegar
- 1/2 Teaspoon Light Corn Syrup
- 2 Tablespoons Corn Starch

For tinting your paints, you will also need:

- Food Coloring
- Toothpicks



Additional Resources

To learn more about Benjamin West, click on the links below:

- View an M&G video on West's painting, *Isaiah's Lips Anointed with Fire* here:
<https://museumandgallery.org/isaiahs-lips-anointed-with-fire-benjamin-west-p-r-a/>
- View an M&G video on West's painting, *The Ascension* here:
<https://museumandgallery.org/benjamin-west-p-r-a/>
- To learn more about M&G's collection of West's paintings read and follow the links at:
<https://museumandgallery.org/the-benjamin-west-collection/>
- West's famous history painting is discussed in this short video:
[Gallery Highlights - The Death of General Wolfe by Benjamin West - YouTube](#)
- West was a friend to Benjamin Franklin and drew him in, *Benjamin Franklin Drawing Electricity from the Sky*: [Benjamin West, "Benjamin Franklin Drawing Electricity from the Sky" - YouTube](#)

To learn more about two of West's American students, click on the links below:

- Gilbert Stuart: [Gilbert Stuart Portraits - American Artifacts Preview - YouTube & The Lansdowne Portrait of George Washington - YouTube](#)
- Samuel Morse: [A Quick Intro to Samuel F.B. Morse, Artist and Inventor - YouTube](#)

Due to the changing nature of web resources, M&G strongly urges you as the parent to preview these sites before your child accesses them. The fact that these sites are available on this handout does not imply that M&G endorses their content from the standpoint of morals, philosophy, theology, or scientific hypotheses.



M&G Educational Mission:

Through tours, events, and publications, the Museum & Gallery seeks to partner with educators in fulfilling all of the National Visual Arts Content Standards. By integrating art into the core curriculum, M&G's goals are to teach children to value the arts, to communicate through the arts, to become creative problem solvers through the inclusion of STEAM-related concepts and fully-developed STEAM units, to understand history and culture in light of the arts, to improve literary interest and understanding through visual storytelling, to critique the arts, and to develop an aesthetic awareness of the arts. Through fulfilling the mission, M&G is able to help develop citizens who have the ability to think, feel, and understand the world in which they live.