

The Maria at Honfleur Harbor

By George-Pierre Seurat

Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: 1886
- Size: 20 ¾" X 25"
- Location: National Gallery Prague
- Period:
- Style: Impressionism
- Genre: Pointillism
- Pronounced (ON-flue)
- Seurat spent a summer painting six landscapes at Honfleur Harbor. They, for the most part, convey the idea of peaceful living that Seurat must have been experiencing during the summer vacation in which he created these pieces. In none of the paintings are waves crashing to shore nor is the wind forcefully blowing something. Another strange thing to note is that in none of the Honfleur paintings is there the easily recognizable shape of a human being. Maybe Seurat sees crowds of people as causes of stress and therefore never incorporates them into his Honfleur works. It is possible that this is the reason why there's an innate calmness to the six paintings.

Artist Facts

- Pronounced (sir-RAH)
- Born December 2, 1859
- Seurat was born into a wealthy family in Paris, France.
- Seurat died March 29, 1891 at the age of just 31. The cause of his death is unknown, but was possibly diphtheria. His one-year-old son died of the same disease two weeks later.
- Seurat attended the École des Beaux-Arts in 1878 and 1879.
- Chevreul, who developed the color wheel, taught Seurat that if you studied a color and then closed your eyes you would see the complementary color. This was due to retinal adjustment. He called this the halo effect. Thus, when Seurat painted he often used dots of complementary color. He called this harmony of colors the "emotion."
- Pointillism is a technique of painting in which small, distinct dots of pure color are applied in patterns to form an image. Georges Seurat and Paul Signac developed the technique in 1886, branching from Impressionism. The term Pointillism was first coined by art critics in the late 1880s to ridicule the works of these artists, and is now used without its earlier mocking connotation. Neo-impressionism and Divisionism are also terms used to describe this technique of painting.
- The pointillist style of painting is a notoriously slow one. Some of Seurat's works were said to have taken him two years to complete.
- Together with Cézanne, van Gogh and Gauguin, Georges Seurat is considered one of the 'fathers' of modern art.

- Seurat's theories can be summarized as follows: The emotion of gaiety can be achieved by the domination of luminous hues, by the predominance of warm colors, and by the use of lines directed upward. Calm is achieved through an equivalence/balance of the use of the light and the dark, by the balance of warm and cold colors, and by lines that are horizontal. Sadness is achieved by using dark and cold colors and by lines pointing downward

Key Technique to Teach

- **Perspective** is a technique of visually suggesting a feeling of depth in a flat presentation, by using points or lines that disappear at the vanishing point in relationship to pictured objects as the objects recede. Color can also be used, along with lines, to create perspective. The closer the image is, the more detailed it will appear and the larger it will be.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Perspective

- Are the lines straight up and down or are they at angles?
- What is a vanishing point? (It is the point on the artwork that all the lines begin at, meet, end, or vanish at.)
- Can you identify where the vanishing point is in this painting? (Near the center of the painting, underneath the flag in the foliage.)
- Place paper strips or strings on the paper to help students see the lines and how they all meet at the vanishing point.
- Talk about how the front of the boat is bigger than the back in the picture, but in real life they are of course the same size.

Keywords

- Line, perspective, vanishing point, pointillism, color, complementary colors

Other Possible Questions and Suggestions

- Leave only the top part of the painting visible. Can you guess what this is a painting of?
- Do you see brush strokes on this painting? (No because it is made up of tiny dabs of paint.)
- What do you think this painting would look like if you used a magnifying glass to look at it? (Take a magnifying glass if you can.)
- Would this painting look different if you stood far away or if you stood very close? (Yes! That is part of the greatness of the painting. Seurat made the painting interesting for the viewer to look at it from both vantage points. The boat can appear to be black at first glance, but on closer inspection you can see that it's made up of many colors that all blend together from a distance.)
- Consider playing the sounds of the ocean and wind – what it would sound like to be there.
- To test Chevreul's theory that if you studied a color and then closed your eyes you would see the complementary color (see above), take in enough sheets of colored paper for each student. Have them stare at it for thirty seconds and then ask them to close their eyes and look for what color they see. Before telling students about Chevreul's theory, I tried this with red sheets of paper. The vast majority of students claimed they saw green when they closed their eyes.