

# **Bathers at Asnieres**

## **By George-Pierre Seurat**

### **Print Facts**

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: 1884
- Size: 79" x 118"
- Location: National Gallery, London
- Style: Post-Impressionism, Mural painting
- Genre: Genre Painting
- Technique: Divisionism
- Pronounced (az-nee-air)
- Seurat was only 24 years old when he painted this painting and would only live 7 more years.
- This was his first major painting. The Paris Salon rejected it.
- This painting was highly criticized in its time as "too original" and was not regarded as a masterpiece until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- The bathers are at the River Seine (pronounced Sen), just 5 miles from the center of Paris.
- This painting is huge (79" x 118" or approximately 6.6 ft x 9.8 ft)
- While the painting was not executed using Seurat's pointillist technique (pointillism), which he had not yet invented, the artist later reworked areas of this picture using dots of contrasting color to create a vibrant, luminous effect. For example, dots of orange and blue were added to the boy's hat.

### **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.
- 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 Element of Design to Teach**

- **Color** may be described in many ways. Primary colors are red, yellow and blue. Secondary colors are orange, green and violet. Tertiary colors are red-violet, blue-violet, blue-green, yellow-green, yellow-orange, and red-orange. Color can be described as being warm (in the red-yellow range) or cool (in the blue-green range). There are also various color schemes that the artist may use to emphasize certain parts of their work.

### **Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Color**

- What are the primary colors? (Use the color wheel to help teach students.)
- Can you see primary colors in this painting? Where?
- What other colors do you see in this painting?
- Cover the few spots of warm color. What colors do you see in this painting? Warm or cool? Remove the coverings. Do you see any warm colors in this painting?

### **Keywords**

- Color, warm and cool colors, secondary colors, complementary colors, pointillism, profile

### **Other Possible Questions and Suggestions**

- Cover the bathers. What do you see in the background of this painting? (Paris skyline-factories, industrial buildings, bridge, people boating on the water.)
- Is it a hot or cold day? How can you tell? ("A hot haze softens the edges of the trees in the middle-distance, and, with a boldly conceived use of aerial perspective, washes out colour from the bridges and factories in the background. The blue of the sky at the horizon is paled almost to whiteness. A shimmering appearance at the surface of Bathers at Asnières subtly reinforces this saturating heat and sunlight." - Wikipedia) Also, notice the tossed clothes on the hill and the relaxed postures of the bathers that indicate comfort. The use of shadows suggests strong sunlight.
- What is the boy in the orange hat doing? (Cupping his hands and blowing to make the sound of a boat horn. Have the kids try to do it.)
- Why do you think the artist only chose to draw people in profile?
- What else do you see in this painting besides bathers?
- How did the artist use texture in this painting? The artist used a stroke technique called *balaye*, which are tiny criss-crossed strokes applied with a flat brush. Can you see where he did this? (The grass). This creates implied texture. Look at the contrast with the horizontal strokes he used for the water, and the smooth, waxy finish he used for the skin.
- His last ambitious work, *The Circus* (which is in the packet), was left unfinished at the time of his death.