

Georges Seurat



A Sunday on La Grande Jatte, 1884–1886
oil on canvas, 81 3/4 x 121 1/4 in
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

The Artist

Georges Seurat

Born Paris, France in 1859, died in Paris in 1891

Born into a comfortably situated middle-class family, Georges Seurat attended school in Paris until he was seventeen. He studied sculpture until he was accepted into Beaux-Arts to study painting. His training was extremely academic and included a great deal of copying masters such as Ingres at the Louvre. He studied not only art, but also scientific theories on the uses and effects of color and light during his days at Beaux-Arts. Shortly after concretely formulating his ideas in 1890, Seurat became very ill and died in 1891 at the age of 32. In his wake, Seurat left 400 drawings, six completed sketchbooks, and about 60 paintings.

Art Movement

Neo-Impressionism (Pointillism)

The movement of Neo-Impressionism is an avant-garde movement from France from 1886–1906. This group renounced the random spontaneity of Impressionism in favor of a measured painting technique grounded in science and the study of optics. Seurat's style came to be known as Pointillism (from the French word "point," or "dot"), but he preferred the term divisionism—the principle of separating color into small touches placed side-by-side and meant to blend in the eye of the viewer. He felt that colors applied in this way—not mixed on a palette or muddied by overlapping—would retain their integrity and produce a more brilliant, harmonious result.

The Artwork

A Sunday on La Grande Jatte

This painting took two years and over 60 studies (versions) before the completion of the final version was finished. This painting is nearly 7 feet high and over 10 feet long. In the painting, people are relaxing in a suburban park on an island in the Seine River called La Grande Jatte. The entire painting is composed of tiny dots of pure color, which when viewed from a distance, mingle on the retina to produce the shimmering effect of sunlight.

Discussion Suggestions

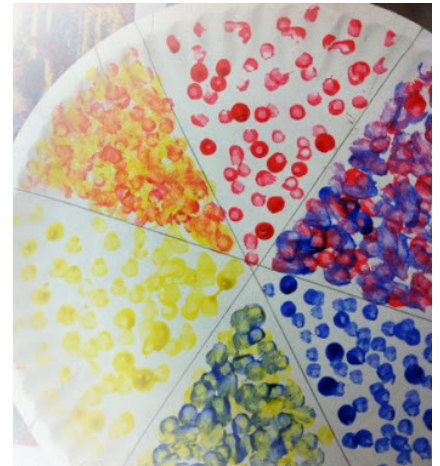
Discuss the Painting:

- *What is different about the way the paint have been applied to this painting?*
- *What colors do you see if you look at the painting up close? From a distance?*
- *Where are there vertical lines in this painting? Horizontal lines?*
- *Where are there diagonal lines? Where do the diagonal lines lead our eyes?*
- *Where are there curved lines?*
- *Where are there repeated shapes?*
- *What animals can you find in the painting? What are the different people doing?*

Activity Idea

Pointillism: Color Wheel & Painting

- Give each student a paper plate with lines already drawn on in a pizza shape with six spaces.
- Have students follow your example by dipping the eraser end of a pencil into the red paint and fill one of the spaces with red **DOTS**. (Repeat with yellow and blue, leave one space in between)
- Use the red to paint dots in the white space on either side of it, repeat with blue and yellow. Yellow and red will mix in between those colors to create orange, red and blue will mix to create purple in between them, and finally in between the pure yellow and blue mixed together creates green.



Pointillism Landscape

- Have the students draw a light sketch of whatever they want their picture to be of a fish, a beach, a star, or a tree (challenge them to make brown using primary colors only for the trunk!).
- Begin adding dots in the desired colors. Try only giving them primary colors. This allows the kids to experiment with mixing colors.
- Encouraged the kids to use lots of colors. Get them to use certain colors for light and shadow effects to give their projects depth. Don't let them get too stuck on using just one color.
- Using more paint leads to darker colors, less paint leads to lighter shades. Since no white or black paint is used in this lesson, it's a wonderful opportunity to teach getting the desired color, light or dark by controlling the amount of paint used.

Materials Needed:

- Paper Plates
- Pencils with good whole erasers
- Heavy white paper 8.5" x 11"
- Acrylic Paint (PRIMARY ONLY: Red, Yellow, Blue)