

Teachers' Learning Resource

Constable: Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows

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National Museum Cardiff • 7 March – 7 September 2014



Aspire



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Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows 1831
John Constable (1776 – 1837)
Photograph © Tate, London 2013

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Content	pg.
Background information for teachers	3-11
<i>The artist</i>	4
<i>The painting</i>	5-7
<i>Other works in the display</i>	8-11
<i>Looking at Landscapes prompt questions</i>	11
Preparing for your visit	12
Themes and activities	13-21
<i>Influence and Imitation</i>	13
<i>Critical Lights</i>	14-15
<i>Marks, mood, meaning</i>	16-17
<i>Sympathetic Skies I</i>	18-19
<i>Sympathetic Skies II</i>	20-21
Glossary	22
Links and resources	22

Background information for teachers

British masterpiece purchased for the nation

John Constable believed *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 to be the greatest achievement of his artistic life. It has long been considered a masterpiece of British art. In May 2013 it was purchased for the nation through major grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Manton Foundation, the Art Fund (with a contribution from the Wolfson Foundation) and Tate Members.

To secure the painting, a unique partnership initiative was formed between five public collections: Tate Britain, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, Colchester and Ipswich Museums, Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum and the National Galleries of Scotland. This initiative, named *Aspire*, is a five-year project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund enabling the work to be viewed in partner venues across the UK. National Museum Cardiff is the first venue to display the work.

The display at National Museum Cardiff

Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows 1831 will form the centrepiece of a display which offers an insight into Constable's life and the painting itself, and which establishes the artist as a key player in the development of landscape painting in Europe.

Booking a visit

The display can be seen from 7 March – 7 September 2014. Contact the Learning department to book your visit on (029) 2057 3240, or learning@museumwales.ac.uk.

Using this pack

This pack is designed to support teachers and educators in preparing for a self-led visit, but can also be used to support classroom learning. It includes background information about Constable, the painting and other key works in the display; ideas for themes and activities to explore before your visit, in the gallery, and back at school, for KS2-4 pupils; and ideas for themes for exploring this painting at Foundation Phase. While each activity is designed with a specified age group in mind, they are intended to be flexible and can be adapted for different age groups.

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Curriculum links

The painting provides opportunities for cross-curricular learning. In particular it can be used to support learning in Art & Design, Geography, Literacy, Personal and Social Education (PSE), History and for the development of cross-curricular skills (thinking, communication, ICT).

Background information for teachers: the artist

John Constable (1776-1837)

Constable is today considered one of the great masters of landscape painting. Born and bred in the riverside town of East Bergholt, Suffolk, he was destined for a life as a miller in the family business but chose instead to become a painter. Through his innovative technique and commitment to depicting the truth he ushered in a new approach to painting nature, and became one of the artists who turned many of the established traditions of landscape painting on its head.

For Constable every part of the landscape is worthy of an artist's attention. He revered even the smallest details which many of his 19th-century contemporaries would have overlooked. 'The sound of water escaping from mill dams, willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts, and brickwork, I love such things' he once wrote. Nothing was too commonplace, too mundane or too ugly for his art. This was a bold approach at the time.

Constable believed that landscape artists should paint views and subjects with deep personal connections – places they have visited and experienced first-hand, or places that have stirred their senses and emotions. Much of his work was inspired by childhood memories of his native Suffolk. *A Cottage in a Cornfield* (1817), for example, shows a humble countryside cottage with a donkey and a foal at the gate – a scene he saw every day on his way to school.

He once said that 'painting is but another word for feeling'. This is key to understanding his art. Constable's paintings are not just meant to *looked* at – they are meant to be *felt*. This is particularly true in the case of *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831, the focal point of this display.



A Cottage in a Cornfield 1817
John Constable
Oil on canvas
Amgueddfa Cymru
Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund, 1978

Find out more

Constable biography (Tate)
<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/john-constable-108>

Constable on BBC Your Paintings
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/artists/john-constable>

Background information for teachers: the painting

Constable's 'Great Salisbury'

Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows 1831 is the painting that John Constable wished to be remembered by. He called it his 'Great Salisbury'. For him the monumental 6-foot work represented the culmination of his artistic achievements. The painting shows a view of Salisbury Cathedral in Wiltshire under a brooding sky, lightning striking its roof. A rainbow arcs overhead, softening the effect of the storm. But this is more than just a depiction of the Cathedral caught up in a spate of bad weather. It is charged with significance, both personal and public.

Personal and political storms

When Constable painted *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831, he was caught up in his own personal storms, which affected him greatly. His beloved wife Maria had died from tuberculosis just three years earlier, leaving Constable grief-stricken and with seven young children to bring up alone. He was also deeply concerned about the future of both the Anglican Church and of traditional rural life, after a series of political changes appeared to threaten their very existence. Everything that Constable loved and believed in was crumbling around him. The painting can be seen as an expression of the anxieties and emotional turmoil he felt at this tumultuous time.

Constable increasingly turned to the Fisher family of Salisbury for consolation and support. The Fishers were early supporters of Constable's work, and had become dear friends, particularly Archdeacon John Fisher. It is no coincidence that the rainbow – a symbol of hope in stormy times – ends at Leadenhall, the John Fishers' family home.

Technique

Constable's innovative mark-making technique - revolutionary for its time – adds to the powerful impact of the work. At a time when the surface of a painting was expected to be refined and smooth, Constable used a palette knife and brushes to create expressive and textured surfaces. In some places the paint is dense and craggy; in others it is fluid and thin. His lively mark-making technique was often criticised by contemporaries. One complained that 'he dots and dabs and grubs and splashes, more strangely in each succeeding year'.

Find out more

Tate:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows-n01814>

Art Fund:

<http://www.artfund.org/news/2013/05/23/constable-masterpiece-bought-for-the-nation>

Smarthistory:

<http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/constable-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows.html>

Background information for teachers: the painting

Explore the details

Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows 1831 is full of visual details which help reveal its meanings.

Salisbury Cathedral

When Constable painted Salisbury Cathedral, the future of the Anglican Church was in doubt. Catholic Emancipation, which gave Catholics the right to vote, and the Reform Bill passed by the House of Commons seemed to threaten the future of the Church. Constable was a deeply religious man, and this worried him. He shows the Cathedral under a black cloud, with lightning striking its roof – will it survive the storm? The spire pierces through the dark clouds into a patch of light, perhaps suggesting his hopes for the future.

Storm Clouds

When this painting was first exhibited, a writer for *The Morning Herald* complained that ‘the sky is in a state of utter derangement’. But this is a key part of the painting’s meaning. For Constable, the sky is more than just a backdrop. It can convey mood and emotion. The heaving, agitated clouds are often seen as an expression of the emotional turmoil Constable felt at this time.

Rainbow

Constable once said ‘nature... exhibits no feature more lovely nor any that awaken a more soothing reaction than the rainbow’. For Constable, the rainbow represents a glimmer of hope in tumultuous times, and a reminder of God’s covenant with man and all life on earth as recorded in the story of Noah’s ark. It serves as a bridge between heaven and earth.

Leadenhall

The rainbow ends at Leadenhall, home of Constable’s close personal friend, Archdeacon John Fisher. Fisher provided comfort and emotional support to Constable in his grief. It was through his visits to the Fisher family that Constable became familiar with Salisbury Cathedral.

Wooden bridge

Constable was fascinated by the simplest details of rural life. ‘Old rotten planks, slimy posts, and brickwork, I love such things’ he wrote. The paint is thick and coarse suggesting the natural texture of the wooden bridge, a simple detail which most artists of the day would have overlooked.

Horses, cart and dog

Constable believed that no landscape was complete without traces of everyday life. He would fill his sketchbooks with small details which he would later incorporate into his paintings. Here a horse-drawn wagon is shown crossing the River Nadder, and a sheepdog looks up at the Cathedral, perhaps drawing our attention there. The dog appears in other paintings by Constable, like *The Cornfield* (National Gallery, London).

Trees

A tall ash tree dominates the scene, towering over the cathedral. At its base is an elder bush, recognisable by its spattering of white blossom. Constable once wrote of the elder bush ‘it is a favourite of mine, but ‘tis melancholy; an emblem of death’. By contrast, the ash tree is often seen as a symbol of resurrection, of life after death. This could perhaps be seen as an echo of the hope suggested by the rainbow, and could be related both to the death of Maria and to the future of the Anglican Church.

Background information for teachers: the painting

Common questions

Why is the painting so big?

Many of Constable's earliest paintings are small. He would often paint outdoors using small canvases which he could easily tuck under his arm. But around 1818 he began to paint on a much larger scale, producing a series of massive 6-footers – his Great Landscapes - of which *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 was the last. These large canvases would have helped to draw attention at Royal Academy exhibitions. This was essential to raise the profile of his work and help attract sales – by this time Constable had a wife and family to support.

By painting on such large canvases, Constable was also making a claim for the importance of landscape painting. At the beginning of the 19th century, landscape painting was considered an inferior form of art. Constable challenged this by painting his works on the scale usually reserved for the more revered History paintings (see glossary, p.22).

Why paint Salisbury?

Constable's friendship with the Fisher family was his reason for first visiting, and later painting Salisbury Cathedral. Constable first met John Fisher, Bishop of Salisbury, in 1798. The Bishop was an early supporter of his work. In 1811 he met the Bishop's nephew – also John Fisher – who became a close personal friend. Constable visited the Fishers in Salisbury several times, staying at their family home, Leadenhall. He sketched and painted the area during his stays.

How was it made?

Although Constable believed in painting outside directly from nature, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 was constructed in his studio. He had made several sketches and paintings of the Cathedral from different views. He used these to build up the final painting in his studio. The scene shown is not exactly as it would have been seen – he has moved and manipulated different elements of the painting to create a final composition. The small church of St Thomas at the left, for example, can not be seen from this viewpoint. He painted using oil paints applied with brushes and a palette knife (see glossary, p.22).

Find out more

The Great Landscapes (Tate)

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/constable-great-landscapes>

Background information for teachers: other works in the display

Influence and inspiration

Influence and inspiration are underlying themes of the display at National Museum Cardiff. *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 is shown alongside works by other British and European landscape artists from across the centuries who have either influenced, or been inspired by Constable's unique vision.

Constable studied the work of earlier landscape artists avidly. He became so obsessed by the work of the Classical artist Claude Lorrain for example that his wife threatened to throw all of his drawings of Claude's work out of the window! Constable claimed there are two kinds of artists: those who imitate (copy), and those who innovate (create something new). Early in his career he decided he wanted to be an innovator, claiming he was fed up of '[making] my performances look like the work of other men'.

This display provides an opportunity to introduce and think about what influence and development means in art. It also provides the opportunity to compare works by other landscape painters across the centuries with Constable's *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831.

Key works



Rain – Auvers, 1890
Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)
Oil on canvas
Amgueddfa Cymru
Bequeathed by Gwendoline Davies, 1952

This painting of a wheatfield in Auvers, France, is one of the last van Gogh painted before he shot himself. As with *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 here the weather and mark-making technique can both be interpreted as an expression of personal torment. Van Gogh was plagued with depression. In a letter dating from around the time of this painting, he described how he had been painting 'immense expanses of wheat beneath troubled skies and I have not hesitated to express sadness, extreme loneliness'. The paint lies thick on the surface of the canvas, and he has sliced through the surface of the paint with bold downward streaks to create the impression of driving rain.

Background information for teachers: other works in the display



Rocky Landscape with Hagar and Ishmael, about 1788
Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)
Oil on canvas
Amgueddfa Cymru
Purchased, 1965

Constable admired the emotional impact of Gainsborough's landscapes. 'On looking at them, we find tears in our eyes' he once wrote. In this painting, the Egyptian slave Hagar and her son Ishmael trudge through a forest looking for water. They have been banished to the wilderness by their masters. The landscape and the dramatic use of darkness and light contribute to the mood. Shadowy masses of trees tower menacingly over the figures, and a small glimmer of sunlight is the only sign of relief. This could be compared to Constable's use of small patches of light in the sky in *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831. *Rocky Landscape with Hagar and Ishmael* is Gainsborough's only original religious painting, based on a story from Genesis. There is also a link to Genesis in Constable's painting – the rainbow could be a reference to the story of Noah's Ark.



The Morning After the Storm, about 1840-45
JMW Turner (1775-1851)
Oil on canvas
Amgueddfa Cymru
Bequeathed by Gwendoline Davies, 1952

Turner and Constable were rivals, often competing for attention at the same exhibitions. Both were interested in capturing the effects of light on a landscape, but their approach was very different. Here Turner explores the atmospheric effects of a morning after a storm. The painting was apparently inspired by the storms that ravaged Britain in 1840. The rising sun has tinged the land and sea with gold, and the whole scene is suffused in a golden mist. Objects and forms seem to disappear. Constable described Turner's paintings as 'just steam and light'. He delights in intangible atmospheric effects: foam, mists, blazes and hazes. By contrast, Constable is more interested in forms and textures, and depicting light as it bounces off the tangible features of the landscape.

Background information for teachers: other works in the display



Landscape, 17th century
Gaspard Dughet (1615-1675)
Oil on canvas
Amgueddfa Cymru
Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund, 1961

This bright, airy landscape was inspired by the countryside around Rome. Constable studied the works of earlier landscape painters avidly. He admired Dughet's work, and recommended him to other landscape painters. Despite this their works are very different. Dughet's landscapes follow the rules of Classical landscape painting (see glossary). They are clearly structured and carefully contrived. The surface of the paint is flat and smooth. Although Constable was familiar with the Classical landscape tradition, he wanted to create something new.



Lake Avernus with a Sarcophagus, about 1760
Richard Wilson (1714-1782)
Oil on canvas
Amgueddfa Cymru
Purchased, 1934

This small sketch by one of Wales' most influential artists, Richard Wilson, shows the area surrounding Lake Avernus. This area was well known to tourists and artists who travelled to Italy in the 18th century, like Wilson. Some believed that the entrance to Hades – the underworld, or realm of the dead – could be found there. A large sarcophagus (coffin) towers over the figures, a reminder of death in this otherwise idyllic landscape. This sketch belonged to Constable, who was an admirer of Wilson's work. Wilson showed British artists that landscapes could be used to convey mood, emotions and layers of meaning – an idea which had a powerful influence on Constable. But their approach differed in other ways. Wilson loved the warm, golden lights of Italy so much that he applied it to his paintings of the British landscape. Constable, on the other hand, preferred to paint weather and light effects that were typical of the British landscape.

See more: *Richard Wilson: The Transformation of European Art* is on display at National Museum Cardiff from 5 July – 26 October 2014. A partnership with the Yale Center for British Art.

Background information for teachers: other works in the display

Series of mezzotints by David Lucas

The exhibition will include a changing display of mezzotints (see glossary) by David Lucas. These are all based on sketches and paintings by Constable. They were intended for publication and to raise awareness of Constable's work. Lucas worked in close collaboration with Constable on these. Constable carefully scrutinised each print and made recommendations for changes and adjustments. He was still checking the progress of a print of Salisbury Cathedral two days before he died, and was particularly concerned that Lucas should get the effect of the rainbow just right. 'If it is not tender – and elegant – evanescent and lovely' he wrote 'we are both ruined'. These prints draw attention to the effects and patterns of light and shade in Constable's work.

Looking at Landscapes

Guideline questions to promote looking and responding to landscape paintings:

What is the first thing you notice about this painting?

What do you see? What is in the foreground (front of the painting), middle ground and background?

What sort of landscape is it? *Countryside, city, seaside*. Can you tell what season/time of day it is?

Describe the weather. Have you experienced this weather before? How did it make you feel?

If there are people or animals, what are they doing? Why do you think the artist put them there? *To show the landscape being used, to portray an emotion*.

Take an imaginary walk through this landscape. What sounds do you hear? What can you smell?

What would the different parts of the landscape feel like to touch? *Smooth, rocky, damp*. Do you like being here? Why?

What do you think is the most important part of this landscape? Why do you think this?

Does it remind you of anywhere? Do you think this is a real or imaginary place? Why?

What different colours can you see? Do they look realistic or made up? Why do you think the artist used these colours?

What materials is it made of? Can you work out what sort of paint has been used? Describe the paint... *watery, thick, colourful*.

Look at the marks made by the artist's brush. Describe them... *dots, dashes, smooth, squiggly*.

What size is it? How does the size make you feel?

What do you like / not like about the work? Why?

Why do you think the artist painted this landscape? Is there a story or message?

Preparing for your visit

Before your visit, you may want to familiarise pupils with the painting. You could...

Ask questions. See 'Looking at Landscapes' on the previous page for possible questions. Ask pupils to create a list of their own questions – things they would like to know about the painting. See how many answers you can find out as a class.

Play a memory game. Give pupils one minute to look at an image of the painting. Turn it away. How many details can they remember?

Label the painting. Create a list of nouns – *spire, tree, bridge*. Add adjectives – *soaring spire, rickety bridge*.

Ask pupils to do some background research and create a class display on one of the following:

Landscapes. What is a landscape? What might you see in a landscape? Why do artists paint landscapes? Useful link: Art Gallery visit – historic art collections

<http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/learning/cardiff/teachers/>, pages 33-42.

John Constable. Find examples of his work. Find other examples that feature Salisbury Cathedral, storms or rainbows. Can you find the sheepdog in any of his other paintings?

Salisbury. Locate on maps or Google Earth. Split the class into groups to research a different aspect of the area (history, geographical features, what's there today). Report back in a class presentation.

Cathedrals. What are they for? Different features of a Cathedral. Research Salisbury Cathedral. Plan a sketching trip to a local Cathedral.

Rainbows. What are they? How are they formed? Find out what rainbows have come to symbolise in mythology, religion and different cultures.

KS3/4: Catholic emancipation and the Reform Bill of 1831. How does the imagery used in this painting relate to these upheavals? Useful link: <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/constables-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows.html>.

KS3/4: Barbizon School. Find out about Constable's influence on the Barbizon school of artists. Think about how landscape and the weather can be used to express ideas about social and political issues.

Compare *Salisbury Cathedral* to Millet's *Gust of Wind*

http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/art/online/?action=show_item&item=1321.

Foundation Phase: themes and activities

I-spy. What can you spot?

Sounds. Identify noises (thunder, dog barking, water splashing). Recreate with musical instruments.

Storms. What is a storm? Different features (thunder, clouds). Storm stories and rhymes. Keeping safe in a storm.

Clouds. Shapes, patterns, colours. Cloud-spotting. Make cloud collages, or a cloud mobile.

Rainbows. Make your own. Songs about rainbows.

Dress up and role play. Recreate an artists' studio in the class. Go sketching outside.

Buildings. Identify different religious buildings.

Rivers. What are they used for? Different ways of crossing a river. Rivers today and yesterday. Safety around water.

Influence and Imitation

KS2-KS3
Art and Design

Before your visit

Discuss: *What is a Museum? What is an exhibition or display? What is a curator?* Curators create displays by putting groups of objects together for other people to see. These objects are often related in some way e.g. a collection of objects related to dogs; a group of portraits. **You can be a curator too!** Ask pupils to think of examples of things or objects they have grouped together - photographs in an album, images on Pinterest, or objects on their bedside table perhaps. What were the objects and why were they chosen?

Learning objectives:

to understand the purpose of a Museum display

to be able to articulate the difference between influence and imitation

to record the work of landscape artists from first-hand observation, and use this to explore own ideas

In the gallery

Ask pupils to look around the gallery. Why do they think the curator chose these works? Is there a common theme? Many of the works in this display are by artists who have influenced or been influenced by Constable. What does 'influence' mean? Have they ever been influenced by anyone? Perhaps their hair or clothes have been influenced by their favourite celebrity for example. What is the difference between influence and imitation?

Discuss *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows 1831*. Use the questions in the 'Looking at Landscapes' section (p.10) to prompt discussion. Choose one other painting in this display, and compare to *Salisbury Cathedral*. What is similar or different? Think about scale, subject matter, colour, use of light, mood, weather, technique. Is this a work by an artist who has inspired Constable, or one that has been inspired by him? The gallery labels will give a clue.

Explain that they are now going to gather information to help them create a landscape *influenced by another artist back at school*. Pupils choose one or two landscape paintings, and copy it in their sketchbooks. Encourage them to record as much information as possible to help back at school: artist's name, title of painting, notes about the colour, size, texture, marks.

Back at school

- Pupils paint their own landscape influenced either by *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows 1831*, or one of the other works they saw. Their work should not be a copy. Perhaps they have been inspired by the colours or marks used for example.
- Use these paintings to curate your own classroom display. Pupils choose what to put where, and write their own labels. Photograph the works and produce a class exhibition catalogue (ICT).

Critical Lights

KS2

Art and Design, Science, Literacy, Communication

When *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 was first displayed, the press had a field day. Many disliked the way Constable had painted the light in this landscape. In traditional Classical landscapes (see glossary) the light is clear, harmonious, and evenly dispersed across the surface of the canvas. It is often soft and glowing, suggesting a kind of Arcadia – a place where everything is perfect and peaceful. But Constable was not interested in imaginary Arcadias. He wanted to paint the truth. One of the most important things he learnt as a student is that light never stays still – it is always moving and changing. In *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831, he used small scatterings of white paint to suggest lights flickering across the landscape, and reflecting off the surface of the water. These spatterings are sometimes called Constable's 'snow'.

Learning objectives

to observe and consider Constable's depiction of light

to explore the role of an art critic, and formulate and communicate their own critical responses

to make observations on the physical properties of light

Examples of critical responses to the painting:

'Somebody has spoiled [this landscape]... by spotting the foreground all over with whitewash. It is quite impossible that this offence can have been committed with the consent of the artist' (*The Times*, May 1831)

'The View of Salisbury Cathedral... appears to have been taken immediately after a snow storm... The numerous patches of dead white, intended for the lights of the picture, or perhaps for drops of rain after a shower, have all the chilling coldness of a winter's morn' (*The Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1831)

'[if only] the artist could have avoided scattering his lights about in a manner that.. renders it almost painful to the eye... We have had some opportunities of examining English scenery under various circumstances, but we never saw the sober light of our northern sun so broken into bits' (*The Examiner*, 3 July 1831)

'The glittering white speckly effects [are] so offensive to the eye' (*Library of the Fine Arts*, June 1831)

Source, and for further examples see Judy Crosby Ivy, *Constable and the Critics 1802-1837* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1991)

Before your visit

Introduce the term critic. What is a critic? What do they do? Have pupils ever read a review about a book, song, gadget or computer game? Have they ever clicked 'like' on Facebook? Have they ever blogged their opinion? These are all the kinds of things a critic might do. Explain that you are going to visit an exhibition and be critics for the day.

Critical Lights, cont.

In the gallery

Discuss *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831, using the 'Looking at Landscapes' prompt questions. Pay particular attention to the way Constable has painted light. Ask pupils to squint their eyes – where are the lightest / darkest areas? Can they identify any light effects? (reflections, rainbow, lightning, shadows). What other light effects or sources might you see in a landscape? Can they spot any others in the gallery?

Find... a painting with warm, sunny light; a painting with very little light; a painting with cool, crisp light.

Role play. Take a prop along with you – a 'critic's hat' for example. Write the critical responses above on separate pieces of paper (paraphrased to suit the reading age of your class), and place each one in an envelope. Ask for four volunteers to be critics. They take it in turn to wear the critic's hat, choose an envelope and read the comments. Remind them to put on their best critic's voice!

Ask pupils: Can you tell if the critic liked or disliked the work? What are the clues? What words did they use to describe Constable's way of painting light? Do you agree or disagree? Does it look realistic to you? Compare to other paintings in the gallery.

Now everyone puts on an imaginary critic's hat. Ask pupils to think of words or sentences to describe Constable's technique and his way of painting lights. Think of complements (things you like) or insults (things you don't like) about the painting. Encourage pupils to make notes and record their opinions.

Back at school

- Pupils write up their critical review. Post them on a class blog, or using a video camera interview your critics about their opinions. The curators at the Museum would love to read what your critics have written! Please email to learning@museumwales.ac.uk.
- Investigate and observe different light effects. Observe and draw natural objects under different light sources, or coloured lights.
- Investigate rainbows. How are they formed? What happens when you pass a beam of light through a prism? Find paintings of rainbows by other artists (try searching BBC Your Paintings, or Tate websites). Make your own rainbow painting or collage.
- **Other artists to investigate:** Richard Wilson, JMW Turner, the Impressionists. **Link:** Art Gallery visit - Impressionist and Modern Art <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/learning/cardiff/teachers/> pages 14-21.

Marks, mood, meaning

KS2-KS3

Art and Design, Literacy

Constable's technique was revolutionary for its day. Traditionally many artists believed that paintings should have an even, polished surface, and all brushstrokes should be smoothed out until almost invisible. But Constable disagreed. He created variety and texture on the surface of his paintings using different marks and mark-making techniques. He spattered, scratched and daubed paint onto the canvas. This animated surface suggests the rough textures of the natural world, and also contributes to the mood of the painting. Not everyone liked his technique. One reviewer said his paintings look so sketchy and unfinished that they are best viewed from across a four-acre field! But Constable insisted that his paintings should always be viewed close-up. He wanted people to notice the rich variety of marks and textures. *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 is a painting that is heavy with evidence of Constable's touch.

Learning objectives

to investigate a range of different materials and mark-making techniques

to recognise and form a vocabulary for describing different marks in a painting

to be able to explain and demonstrate how marks can be used to convey mood and meaning

Find out more about Constable's technique (Tate): <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/constable-great-landscapes/constable-great-landscapes-techniques>

Before your visit

Discuss: What is a mark? A mark is left behind after something has been *touched* by something else. Ask pupils to produce a list of words or different ways of touching something: squeeze, rub, scratch, smooth, knead, pinch, jab, tickle. Ask them to imagine they had paint on their fingers. What marks would these different touches leave behind? Try them out.

Discuss: How do artists create marks? What different tools do they use? Arrange a handling session of artist's tools and materials (brushes of different shapes and sizes, palette knives, sponges, tubes of paint).

Almost anything can be used to make a mark. Ask pupils to collect different materials. Try natural materials (stones, twigs, grass, mud), man-made ones (toothbrushes, cotton wool, strips of cardboard, scourers, old socks), and artist's tools. Experiment with as many types of different marks as possible, noting how the marks were made. Ask pupils to think of words to describe the marks or what they remind them of e.g. fat and squiggly, spiky, pitted like the surface of the moon.

Marks, mood, meaning, cont.

In the gallery

Tell pupils that they are going to be art detectives for the day. Their task is to try and work out what tools different artists used to make their paintings. They can use their portfolio of marks to help them on the way. Pupils can take it in turns to look at the painting in detail, but take care not to get too close or to touch the paintings.

Discuss *Landscape by Gaspard Dughet*. Ask pupils to describe the paint – is it thick, thin, smooth, runny, rough? Do they think the artist has painted this slowly and carefully, or quickly? Why? Can you see any marks? What tools do you think the artist has used?

Compare with *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows 1831*. If pupils have seen the work in reproduction before the visit, is it different or the same as they expected? How? Look at one area at a time (sky, water, grass, trees) and ask pupils to think of words to describe the marks. How do they think the marks have been made? Mime the actions. One reviewer said he thinks Constable has painted with his toes! Why do you think he said this?

Look at other works in the gallery. Ask pupils to think of creative adjectives, similes and metaphors to describe the marks. Try personification: if these marks were a character, feeling or an emotion, what would they be?

Be an art detective. On display in gallery 16A is a series of works given to the Museum by the Davies sisters. These were originally thought to be by Constable, but now this is in doubt. Looking at marks in a painting can give us clues who made it. Perhaps pupils have seen the BBC programme *Fake or Fortune*. Ask pupils to look closely – do they think these are by Constable or not?

You may also want to consider: Turner, Frank Auerbach, Van Gogh.

Back at school

- Make your own life-size version of *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows 1831*. Draw the basic shapes and outlines. Pupils work in groups to fill in one area of the painting at a time, using different mark-making techniques.
- Explore feelings and marks. Pupils draw angry marks, happy marks, excited marks, calm marks. Paint to music – how does the music affect the marks?

Sympathetic Skies I

KS2-KS3

Art and Design, Geography, PSE, Literacy

Constable once said that the sky in a landscape painting should *sympathise* with the subject. He believed that the sky is more than just a backdrop - it helps set the mood or emotional tone of a painting. The turbulent sky in *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 is often seen as an expression of the emotional turmoil that Constable felt at this period in his life. The rainbow and small patches of clear blue sky perhaps represent glimmers of hope for the future.

Learning objectives

to identify different ways weather effects can be used to create mood or reflect personal feelings, drawing on personal experience

to encourage the development of emotional maturity and empathy with the human condition

Before your visit

Go outside and ask pupils to think of words to describe the weather. Is it windy, hot, muggy, cloudy? Ask them: what can you feel against your skin? What can you hear? Do you like this sort of weather? How does it make you feel? If this weather was an emotion, what would it be? Choose an emoticon on your mobile phone to symbolise this weather.

Discuss different types of weather and how these relate to different moods or emotions. How do pupils feel on a sunny / rainy / cold / stormy day? Discuss the weather in different seasons. Which season makes them happiest / saddest? Why?

Geography in the News: recently the UK has been affected by severe bad weather, storms and floods. Ask pupils to bring in news stories and clips. Did it affect the local area? Share experiences. How have people been affected? Write a letter or diary entry of someone whose home has been destroyed by the bad weather. What happened? How did it make them feel?

Keep a class weather diary. Observe and record once a week. Take photographs. Ask pupils to note how the weather makes them feel on that day.

Identify and explore idioms, metaphors and similes related to the weather e.g. weathering the storm, a blanket of clouds, rain like needles against my skin. Ask pupils to invent their own. Share examples of pop songs that use weather as metaphors of feeling. Ask pupils to bring in examples.

Sympathetic Skies I, cont.

In the gallery

Familiarise pupils with the painting. Share experiences - have they ever been outside in weather like this before? Have they ever seen a rainbow? What was it like / how did they feel? The artist Henry Fuseli said that every time he sees a painting by Constable it makes him reach for his umbrella and winter coat. What do you think he means by this? Ask pupils to imagine they were inside this painting. What would they wear? What would they do? Describe the landscape through different senses (e.g. sound of the thunder, taste of the rain).

Compare *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 to *A Cottage in a Cornfield*. Think about the weather, the sky, the people and animals, colour, light and darkness. These were painted at very different times in Constable's life. They are both expressing very different emotions. Ask pupils to describe and compare the different moods created by these paintings. Ask pupils to choose a feature from one of these paintings (an animal, person or even a building). Write a monologue expressing the thoughts or feelings of this item.

Pupils find and draw examples of weather effects that make them feel happy / sad / excited / afraid.

You may also want to look at: Van Gogh, Turner, Millet *A Gust of Wind* (not in this gallery – please check if the work is on display)

http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/art/online/?action=show_item&item=1321

Back at school

- Perform your monologues to the class.
- Draw your own version of *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 but change the weather to express different emotions (joy, anger, confusion, fear).
- Write and record a weather report for *Salisbury Cathedral for the Meadows* 1831. Interview the man in the boat.
- Write lyrics for your own weather-feeling song.

Sympathetic Skies II

KS3-KS4

Art and Design, English, Religious Studies

When this painting was first exhibited at the Royal Academy, Constable quoted an excerpt from *The Four Seasons: Summer* (1727) by Scottish poet James Thompson in the exhibition catalogue. The excerpt describes the calming of a storm and the arrival of the sun after a period of particularly bad weather. Throughout the poem, the weather is interpreted as a series of signs from God. The rainbow, for example, arrives from the heavens as a 'sign of danger past'. It is related to the Biblical story of Noah's ark, where the rainbow is sent as a reminder of God's promise to man. The poem paints a picture of man at the mercy of the weather, just like he is at the mercy of an all-powerful God.

As from the face of heaven the scatter'd clouds
Tumultuous rove, th'interminable sky
Sublimar swells, and o'er the world expands
A purer azure. Through the lightened air
A higher lustre and a clearer calm
Diffusive tremble; while, as if in sign
Of danger past, a glittering robe of joy,
Set off abundant by the yellow ray,
Invests the fields, and nature smiles reviv'd

James Thompson, *Summer* (lines 1223-1231)

Full version of poem: <https://archive.org/details/seasons00thom3>

This helps to explain the meaning of the painting. Lines 1169-1222 of the poem, immediately before the lines quoted above, tell the tale of the tragic young lovers Celadon and Amelia. As they walked through the rugged mountains of Caernarfonshire, north Wales, they found themselves caught in a violent summer storm. Amelia is struck by lightning, and dies in Celadon's arms.

This story has clear resonances with Constable's own tragic loss. His wife Maria had recently died of tuberculosis, after just twelve years of marriage. On top of this, it is likely that the poem had special significance for the young couple: Constable is known to have quoted lines from this very poem to Maria in a bid to win her hand in marriage. *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 is not a straightforward illustration of this tale, however. Constable does not include the figures of Celadon and Amelia in the painting. Instead he evokes the emotions and sentiments of the tale through his portrayal of the landscape and the weather.

Learning objectives

to explore ways in which weather and the landscape can be used as an expression of feelings in art and literature

to compare and understand how changes in the weather or landscape have been read as signs with religious or cultural significance

Sympathetic Skies II, cont.

Before your visit

Research *The Seasons*, particularly the story of Celadon and Amelia.

Find paintings based on the story. Ask pupils to imagine these painting without the figures of Celadon and Amelia. Find examples where the landscape contributes to the emotional tone of the painting. How does the artist achieve this? Think about the use of light and shadows, weather effects, natural features (the shape, colour and scale of trees, cliffs), composition, materials and technique.

Explore the symbolism of the weather and the landscape in the poem. What role does the weather play in the poem? Explore religious symbolism - weather as a symbol of man's relationship with God.

In the gallery

Discuss the details of *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831. Ask students to make notes about the emotional tone of the landscape, and to think about how this has been created.

Choose a landscape painting in any of the galleries that you feel has a powerful emotional effect. Make notes on how the artist has created this effect. If this landscape was representative of a feeling, what would it be?

You may also want to look at: Van Gogh's *Rain* in relation to *The Rainy Day* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (readily available online).

Back at school

- Creative writing: write a poem or create your own narrative based on the landscape you chose.
- Design a landscape stage set for a play based on the story of Celadon and Amelia. Make the landscape expressive of the mood or emotion of the story.
- Think of a time in your own life when you've experienced strong emotions, or gone through a big change. This does not have to be a difficult time – perhaps you have succeeded in a big challenge, changed home, or welcomed a new family member. Write a list of the different emotions you felt at this time. How would you express this using weather and features of the landscape? Paint your own emotional landscape based on this experience.
- The weather can affect us at a very primal level. Discuss how weather can have a serious effect on some people's health e.g. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).
- Class debate: Bad weather is often seen as a consequence of man's actions: as punishment from God or a higher being for example, or more recently as a consequence of climate change. Ask pupils to research and find examples in the Bible or other sacred texts, mythology, literature, and the news (e.g. UKIP councillor David Silvester's comments on floods and gay marriage). Debate: is extreme bad weather a result of man's actions on earth?

GLOSSARY

Classical landscape

The idea of the Classical landscape was born in the 17th century. Classical landscapes do not represent a particular place as it actually looks, but represents what that landscape should look like *in an ideal world*. Sometimes the landscape isn't based on any particular place, but is completely made up. In a Classical landscape every feature is idealised (made more beautiful than in real life – this could be compared to photoshopping) and carefully placed to create a harmonious, balanced picture. It is a landscape in which nature is dictated by rules and conventions, and represents man's control over the natural world.

More information: see Art gallery visit – historic art galleries resource pack
<http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/learning/cardiff/teachers/> , pages 23-25

History painting

History paintings are large, noble canvases showing scenes from history or mythology, with a moral message for viewers. History paintings were traditionally considered the most important form of painting in the history of art.

Palette knife

An artist's tool used for mixing and applying paint.

Mezzotint

A print made from a copper or steel plate. The technique allows the representation a range of different tones, from darkest to lightest and the mid-tones in between. It was often used to reproduce paintings.

LINKS AND RESOURCES

Amgueddfa Cymru: *Art Online* - find images of some of the works in the display
<http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/art/online/>

Amgueddfa Cymru: Art gallery visit – historic art collections resource pack
<http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/learning/cardiff/teachers/> . Information on landscape painting on pages 23-25, 32, 36-39, 40-42, 51-52

Art Fund: interactive guide to *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831
<http://www.artfund.org/news/2013/05/23/constable-masterpiece-bought-for-the-nation>

Tate: *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 (image)
<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows-t13896>

Tate: *A Picture of Britain* – British landscapes – includes teachers' pack
<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/4649>

Tate: *The Great Landscapes* – explore Constable's 'six-footers', including *Salisbury Cathedral*
<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/constable-great-landscapes>

Tate Gallery, *Constable*, exhibition catalogue, written by Leslie Parris and Ian Fleming-Williams (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1991)

Thornes, John E., *John Constable's Skies: A Fusion of Art and Science* (Birmingham: The University of Birmingham Press, 1999)

Wilcox, Timothy, *Constable and Salisbury: The Soul of Landscape* (London: Scala, 2011)