

Capturing Light: The Impressionist World of Claude Monet

Learning objective: To understand the techniques of Impressionism and analyse how Claude Monet used light, colour, and brushwork to depict atmosphere.

Study the artistic principles of Claude Monet and apply your understanding of light and movement to answer the following questions. Zara the zebra is looking for your expert analysis of these techniques.

Claude Monet was a pioneer of Impressionism, a movement that prioritised the effect of light over fine detail. By painting 'en plein air' (outdoors), he captured the fleeting nature of light across subjects like water lilies, haystacks, and cathedrals. He avoided black paint, instead using complementary colours to create shadows, and applied paint in short, thick, broken brushstrokes that appear to shimmer when viewed from a distance.

Word bank: Impressionism · Brushstrokes · Atmosphere · Refraction · Pigment · Landscape · Transient · En plein air

1. Monet often painted the same subject at different times of the day. Explain why the appearance of the subject would change significantly between sunrise and midday. (2 marks)

2. Impressionists rarely used black paint for shadows. Instead, they used dark blues or purples. Why do you think using a dark colour found in the colour wheel creates a more vibrant shadow than pure black? (2 marks)

3. Compare and contrast the technique of 'Impressionism' with a 'Realist' painting that aims to show every tiny detail of an object. Which style do you think better captures a 'feeling' or a 'moment'? (3 marks)

4. Justify your answer: If Monet were alive today, why might he be fascinated by the way light reflects off a modern glass skyscraper compared to a stone bridge? (2 marks)

5. What might happen to the 'shimmering' effect of a Monet painting if an artist used long, smooth, blended brushstrokes instead of short, broken ones? (2 marks)

Draw: Create a 'series' of two miniature sketches of the same local park scene. In the first sketch, use cool colours (blues and purples) to represent a foggy, early morning. In the second, use warm colours (yellows, oranges, and pinks) to represent a bright, sunny afternoon. Use short, quick dashes for your brushwork.



Extension challenge: Research Monet's 'Water Lilies' series. Write a short paragraph explaining how his deteriorating eyesight in later life influenced the abstraction of his work. How does this challenge our traditional definition of 'artistic skill'?