

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2010 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 7

Left: Mary Cassatt, *La Toilette (Woman Bathing)*, c. 1891

Right: Blank

7. The work shown is a late-nineteenth-century print by Mary Cassatt.

With which art-historical movement is the artist associated? Analyze how the work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in both style and subject matter. (10 minutes)

Background:

This question asks students how this work of art incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in both style and subject matter. It requires students to consider influences an artist receives from across artistic traditions.

Although Cassatt is most often associated with Impressionism, the lateness of this particular work, along with its style, makes an identification of Post-Impressionism acceptable.

Mary Stevenson Cassatt was born in Pennsylvania, the daughter of a wealthy investment broker and merchant. When she was a child, the family moved to Europe. Cassatt was educated in French and German schools and became fluent in both languages. Upon the family's return to the United States, Cassatt enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of Art, but she became frustrated with the curriculum there and returned to France in 1866. By 1868 she was exhibiting at the Paris Salon; and in 1872, 1873 and 1874, she exhibited works inspired by her studies in Spain, Belgium and Rome at the Salon.

In 1877 Cassatt met Degas, and he invited her to exhibit with the Impressionists two years later. Cassatt also exhibited works in the Impressionist exhibitions of 1880, 1881 and 1886; and in 1889 she exhibited with the Society of Painters and Engravers at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in Paris. As a female member of Parisian society, she could not easily engage in the café lifestyle of her male Impressionist colleagues, so she chose as her subject matter the world of her extended family and her upper-class female friends — subjects that also paralleled the feminist political consciousness that was emerging at the time.

Cassatt began to add color to her graphic work after visiting an exhibition of 725 *Ukiyo-e* works at the École des Beaux-Arts in April 1890. Included in the exhibition were more than one hundred prints by Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806), an artist especially known for his *bijinga*, or images of beautiful women. *Ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world) was an art form that became popular in the metropolitan area of Edo during the seventeenth century. By the following century, the work had become popularized due to the use of printmaking techniques. Its subject matter dealt primarily with themes of modern life, intimate scenes of women at their toilette, and, particularly, scenes taken from entertainment districts, such as the Kabuki theater. After Japan signed a treaty to reopen trade with Europe and America in the mid-1850s, these woodblock prints and other material goods from Japan began to enter the European market. By 1872 the interest in Japanese art and the Japanese aesthetic was inspiring so many European artists that the French critic, collector and printmaker Philippe Burty termed the influence *Japonisme*.

Although Cassatt knew of these Japanese prints and the work of Utamaro prior to the 1890 École des Beaux-Arts exhibition, the impact of seeing so many works and observing the quality of the color in them had a profound impact. Following her visit to the exhibition, she wrote an enthusiastic letter to another Impressionist, Berthe Morisot, about the use of color in the Japanese prints.

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Question 7 (continued)

In 1891 Cassatt produced a suite of 10 color prints, several inspired by the exhibition. One of those prints, *Woman Bathing*, is the work students are asked to discuss in this essay. The influence of Japanese woodblock prints can be seen in Cassatt's use of pattern, cropping, flat planes of color with no modeling, and the oblique angle of the viewer to the subject. The ambiguous and complex use of spatial relationships (the mirror and the back of the top of the dresser, for example) against an essentially flat representation of an interior space, as well as the representation of the hair with linear regularity, also serve as reminders that this artist is looking at and synthesizing the visual influences of Japanese prints.

During Cassatt's time, Japanese prints that were faded from light exposure were considered of better quality and more "authentic" than those with bright color schemes and saturated colors. Some collectors, like Cassatt, expressed suspicion that the richer colored prints were modern forgeries. The soft color palette of *Woman Bathing* reflects Cassatt's preference for what scholars now know to be the more faded prints. In addition, the choice of subject itself, an intimate scene of a woman bathing, was taken from Japanese depictions of females performing personal activities, particularly bathing geishas.

Students have three tasks:

- (1) They must identify the movement as Impressionism or Post-Impressionism.
- (2) They must analyze how the work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in terms of style.
- (3) They must analyze how the work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in terms of subject matter.

The best responses will identify the movement as Impressionism or Post-Impressionism and will analyze the way that both style and subject matter incorporate the influence of Japanese prints. They will note elements of the Cassatt print that are related to elements of Japanese woodblock prints, such as the oblique angle of the viewer and the use of pattern and broad planes of color to articulate flattened form. They will also discuss similarities in subject matter, such as the representation of a woman engaged in a daily activity or women in an intimate setting. They might use the term *Japonisme* and mention particular artists and work from the Edo period in Japan as examples of this influence, or the representation of famous courtesans as subjects of several *Ukiyo-e*, though they are not asked to do so.

Weaker responses might complete the first task, identifying the movement, but will lack careful analysis of subject and style, often describing rather than analyzing the work. In these cases, students will not demonstrate a familiarity with Japanese woodblock prints. They might discuss Cassatt in general without addressing this particular image with specificity. They may discuss elements relating to Japanese culture, such as the vase or the floral elements, but not relate these specifically to Japanese prints.

Points to remember:

- Students are told in the question prompt that the work is a print by Mary Cassatt and asked to identify the movement with which she is associated. Impressionism or Post-Impressionism are the only appropriate answers to the first part of the question.
- Students are not required to identify the title of the print.
- Although students do not need to know this specific print to answer this question, they should refer to this image in their discussion of style and subject matter.
- This is a 10-minute question.

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Question 7 (continued)

Some specific points that show an understanding of the influence of Japanese woodblock prints in terms of style:

- Flattened patterning
- Defined outlines
- Cropping at edges/cutting off of elements (such as the reflection of a face in the mirror, the foot at the bottom)
- Flat planes of color with no modeling
- Oblique angle of the viewer to the subject
- Ambiguous/complex use of spatial relationships (the mirror reflection and the back of the top of the dresser, for example) against an essentially flat representation of an interior space
- Representation of the hair with linear regularity

Some specific points that show an understanding of the influence of Japanese woodblock prints in terms of subject:

- Theme of modern life
- Representation of a woman engaged in a daily activity
- Intimate scene of a woman at her toilette
- Connection to geishas found in Japanese prints

Scoring Criteria

Score Scale 0–4

- 4** Identifies the movement as Impressionism or Post-Impressionism. Fully analyzes how the work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in both style **and** subject matter. There are no significant errors.
- 3** Identifies the movement as Impressionism or Post-Impressionism. Analyzes how the work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in both style **and** subject matter, but analysis is less full and/or contains minor errors.
- OR**
Fails to identify Impressionism or Post-Impressionism as the movement but is otherwise a 4.
- 2** Identifies the movement as Impressionism or Post-Impressionism. Attempts to analyze how the work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in style **and/or** subject matter, but discussion is weak, mainly descriptive and/or contains significant errors.
- OR**
Fails to identify the movement as Impressionism or Post-Impressionism but is otherwise a 3.
- Note: The highest score a response can earn if it does not analyze both style and subject matter is a 2.**
- 1** Identifies the movement as Impressionism or Post-Impressionism but makes no analysis of merit.
- OR**
Fails to identify the movement as Impressionism or Post-Impressionism but attempts to analyze how the work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in style or subject matter. Discussion is weak, mainly descriptive and may contain significant errors.

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Question 7 (continued)

- 0** Makes an attempt, but the response is without merit because it makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements.

- This is a nonresponse, such as a blank paper, crossed-out words or personal notes.

7. The work shown is a late-nineteenth-century print by Mary Cassatt.

7A

With which art-historical movement is the artist associated? Analyze how the work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in both style and subject matter. (10 minutes)

This artist is associated with Post-impressionism. This work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in many ways, both style and subject. Similarly to Japanese prints, this work appears very two-dimensional. There is ~~not much~~ detail in the shadows and it appears ~~very flat~~ ^{to be flat}. Another way it ~~some~~ incorporates Japanese subject matter is by the way it is depicting a woman in an every-day, normal situation (washing her face) but is very personal (she is ~~today~~) yet the woman depicted does not seem to know of our (the viewer's) presence. This is typical in Japanese prints. The colors used also incorporate Japanese prints because they are not incredibly bright or saturated. While the image is colorful, the colors are pale. The flatness of the wall and pattern on the rug are also ~~influenced by~~ ^{influenced by} Japanese prints. At this time in the late 1800's, artists were beginning to be able to access art from other artists around the world. This is how Mary Cassatt was able to be influenced by the art in Japan and make a print (like this one) using some of the same techniques that Japanese artists created.

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7. The work shown is a late-nineteenth-century print by Mary Cassatt.

With which art-historical movement is the artist associated? Analyze how the work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in both style and subject matter. (10 minutes)

The art-historical movement that the artist is associated with is realism. The work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in style because there ~~is~~ seems to be a frame that cuts off elements, this was common in Japanese prints. The sharp angles of the ~~wood~~ table and mirror are also influenced by Japanese prints. The subject is influenced by Japanese because it is depicting a woman, which was common of these prints. In addition, there are flowers, which are part of nature shown. Natural elements were often seen in Japanese prints. In addition, the "genre painting" ^{aspect} of everyday people ~~is~~ in everyday life is represented in this work and Japanese prints.
_{both}

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.

7C

7. The work shown is a late-nineteenth-century print by Mary Cassatt.

With which art-historical movement is the artist associated? Analyze how the work incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in both style and subject matter. (10 minutes)

The print is associated with Impressionism. It depicts a single moment in time. The work incorporates Japanese prints in its definite use of line. The design on the floor and on the vase also is influenced by Japanese prints. Cassatt's print is flat and does not make use of shadowing. This is similar to the style of Japanese prints. Since Japanese prints were carved into wood, the artist did not have as much freedom as someone using paint to depict a scene. Also, Japanese prints also had ornate organic or plant leaves on them, which Mary Cassatt's print also makes use of.

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2010 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 7

Overview

This question asked students how the Mary Cassatt print from the late nineteenth century incorporates the influence of Japanese prints in both style and subject matter. It was intended to make students consider influences an artist receives across artistic traditions. In a peripheral manner, of course, this question also addressed the issue of subject matter chosen by a female artist, although students did have to contextualize the subject matter within the framework of Japanese prints.

Sample: 7A

Score: 4

The student identifies the movement as Post-Impressionism and discusses the influence of Japanese prints in terms of style. To show evidence of this influence, the student cites the fact that the work is “two-dimensional ... flat” and observes that the “flatness of the wall and pattern on the rug are also influenced by Japanese [*sic*] prints.” The essay also shows evidence of the influence of Japanese prints in terms of subject, referring to “a woman in an every-day, normal situation (washing her face) ... very personal” and unaware of the viewer’s presence. Finally, the student makes an astute comment about the influence of Japanese prints on Cassatt’s work, noting that during this time, “artists were beginning to be able to access art from other artists around the world. This is how Mary Cassatt was able to be influenced [*sic*] by the art in Japan and make a print ... using some of the same techniques.” This essay received a score of 4.

Sample: 7B

Score: 3

The student fails to identify the movement correctly. The essay includes a discussion of the influence of Japanese prints in terms of style, indicating that “there seems to be a frame that cuts off elements, this was common in Japanese prints.” The student also refers to the “sharp angles of the table and mirror.” The essay discusses the influence of Japanese prints in terms of subject, noting that the work “is depicting a woman, which was common” and “the ‘genre painting’ aspect of everyday people in everyday life is represented both in this work and Japanese prints.” This essay received a score of 3.

Sample: 7C

Score: 2

The student identifies the movement as Impressionism and discusses the influence of Japanese prints in terms of style, indicating that the work “depicts a single moment in time” and that it shows a “definite use of line.” The student also states that the work “is flat.” The essay fails to include a discussion of the influence of Japanese prints in terms of subject. This essay received a score of 2.