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**The Changing Experience of Colonial Childhood**

**Writer:** Zoe Voigt, Humanities Teacher

**Grade Level:** 9–12

**Related Big Picture Concepts:** Family, Identity

**Subject Areas:** American History, Social Studies, Visual Arts

**Duration:** 2–3 class periods

**Essential Question:** What can we learn about childhood in America by analyzing art?

**Abstract:** Students will learn about early American childhood by studying paintings and readings. They will discuss and write about the ways in which childhood was represented in art and some of the differences in how childhood is regarded today.

**Focus Works of Art:**

[](http://68.169.57.134/sites/default/files/Copley,%20Sir%20William%20Pepperrell%20and%20His%20Family,%2052_9_8_0.jpg)

John Singleton Copley (American, 1738-1815)  
**Sir William Pepperrell (1746-1816) and His Family, 1778**Oil on canvas  
90 x 108 in. (228.6 x 274.3 cm)  
[www.artnc.org/node/293](http://www.artnc.org/node/293)

**North Carolina Standards Correlations:**Visual Arts: I.V.1, I.CX.1, I.CR.1, P.V.1, P.CX.1, P.CR.1  
United States History: USH.H.1

**Student Learning Objectives:**

* By analyzing the paintings and readings, students will gain an understanding of societal changes on children from the 17th to 19th centuries.
* Students will use critical thinking skills and the language of the visual arts to collaboratively write about childhood from a historical perspective.

**Activities:**

1. Provide each student with a copy of the [Image Analysis Chart](http://www.ncartmuseum.org/artnc/content/lesson/sampleRubric/20.doc" \t "_blank). Assign the class to examine [*The Mason Children: David, Joanna, and Abigail*](http://www.d.umn.edu/~csigler/childhoodimages.html) and *Sir William Pepperrell and His Family.* Ask the students to record their observations on the [Image Analysis Chart](http://www.ncartmuseum.org/artnc/content/lesson/sampleRubric/20.doc" \t "_blank).
2. Have the class read Nan Wolverton's article on the emergence of childhood play, ["Toys and Childhood in the Early Nineteenth Century."](http://www.osv.org/explore_learn/document_viewer.php?DocID=612)
3. Divide the class into pairs. Assign each pair of students to review the written material accompanying the image of[*The Mason Children: David, Joanna, and Abigail*](http://www.d.umn.edu/~csigler/childhoodimages.html)*.*
4. Assign each pair of students to combine their information on the [Image Analysis Chart](http://www.ncartmuseum.org/artnc/content/lesson/sampleRubric/20.doc" \t "_blank) to create the best compilation of information from the interpretation of the paintings and the information from the article.
5. Assign each student pair to write collaboratively a one-page paper explaining how John Singleton Copley's depiction of children communicates new ideas about childhood that were emerging at the end of the 18th century.
6. Hold a brief class discussion focused on comparing childhood in the colonial era and the present day.

**Assessments:**

* Successful use of the Image Analysis Charts will demonstrate students’ ability to analyze artistic images for meaning, style, and composition.
* Completion of an effective collaborative paper will demonstrate students’ understanding of the societal role of children from the 17th to 19th centuries.
* Class discussion will demonstrate the students' analysis of the impact of the societal changes on American children as portrayed in art.

**Resources:**

Vocabulary:

colonial

composition

interpretation

mood

setting

style

subject

Links:

Nan Wolverton’s article:

[http://www.osv.org/explore\_learn/document\_viewer.php?DocID=612#](http://www.osv.org/explore_learn/document_viewer.php?DocID=612%23)

Portrait of Puritan Children:

<http://www.d.umn.edu/~csigler/childhoodimages.html>

For comparison to British images of childhood:

Sir William Beechey, *The Oddie Children,* 1789

<http://collection.ncartmuseum.org/collection11/media/view/Objects/65/2749?t:state:flow=cda1d0bc-a01b-42d4-91cd-915ca7fd354a>

**Image Analysis Chart**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Painting**  **(*Title*, artist, date)** | **Composition** | **Setting** | **Description of Subject(s)** | **Action(s) Represented** | **Mood**  **(Happy, Sad, Other AND Why)** | **Predictions** |
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