

USING THE PICTURE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

TAKE ONE PICTURE

Since 1995, the National Gallery has been promoting the use of a single image for cross-curricular work in primary schools through the **Take One Picture** scheme. The scheme enables teachers to share good teaching and learning practice and the principles of cultural enrichment using a holistic approach which highlights how subject areas support and inform each other. This way of working gives pupils considerable opportunities for engaging with arts and culture within and outside of the school day.

Further information on the scheme can be found at www.takeonepicture.org.uk.

RESOURCES

A digital image of the painting is available at www.takeonepicture.org.uk. This can be used in the classroom, on an interactive whiteboard or projector, or by individuals on PCs. It has a zoom facility which enables the viewer to see details in the painting that are sometimes difficult to make out with the naked eye.

A printed reproduction of the painting can be purchased from National Gallery shops, by mail order at mailorder@nationalgallery.org.uk or by telephone on 020 7747 2870. A copy will be given to teachers attending the Gallery's Continuing Professional Development courses 2008/9, which introduce the **Take One Picture** approach. Details of these courses, and availability, can be found at www.takeonepicture.org/cpd/schedule.html or by telephoning 020 7747 2844.

SOME IDEAS FOR CROSS-CURRICULAR WORK

Use the picture as a 'text' for a discussion to develop thinking skills and visual literacy. Ask open questions to initiate talk, such as:

- What do you see/hear/smell/touch?
- Where are these people? What tells you this?
- What is happening?
- What might have caught the attention of the little girl and the woman on the left of the painting?
- What do you know about these people?
- What do you want to know?

Speaking and Listening

Look at the way Renoir has changed his style of painting in the left and right sides of the picture. Ask the children to experiment with a range of brushstrokes and application of paint to create differing effects.

Art

Consider why Renoir decided to change his painting after nearly five years. Ask the children to think about how this relates to their work, for example editing from initial design to finished product.

Art/Literacy

Monitor the rainfall in your local area over time and use ICT equipment to plot graphs and interpret the results.

Science/ICT

Renoir was a French painter, and this scene is a view of a Paris street. Use the Internet to locate the city on Google Earth. Using clues from the painting, where might the scene be located in the city?

Geography/ICT

Explore tessellation and create patterns using the shapes made by the umbrellas in the painting.

Maths

Research toys and games from history. Design and make your own toys, accompanied by written instructions on how to use them. Create packaging and advertising to market the toys.

History/DT/English/Art

Design and make folding umbrellas using various materials – what works best to keep the water off? Explore waterproofing techniques and investigate materials.

Science/DT

Think about the various people in the painting. Perhaps they have witnessed an event? In groups, use hot-seating as a way to question or interview the characters. With the information gathered, create a newspaper report.

Literacy, Speaking and Listening

The National Gallery

Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 5DN

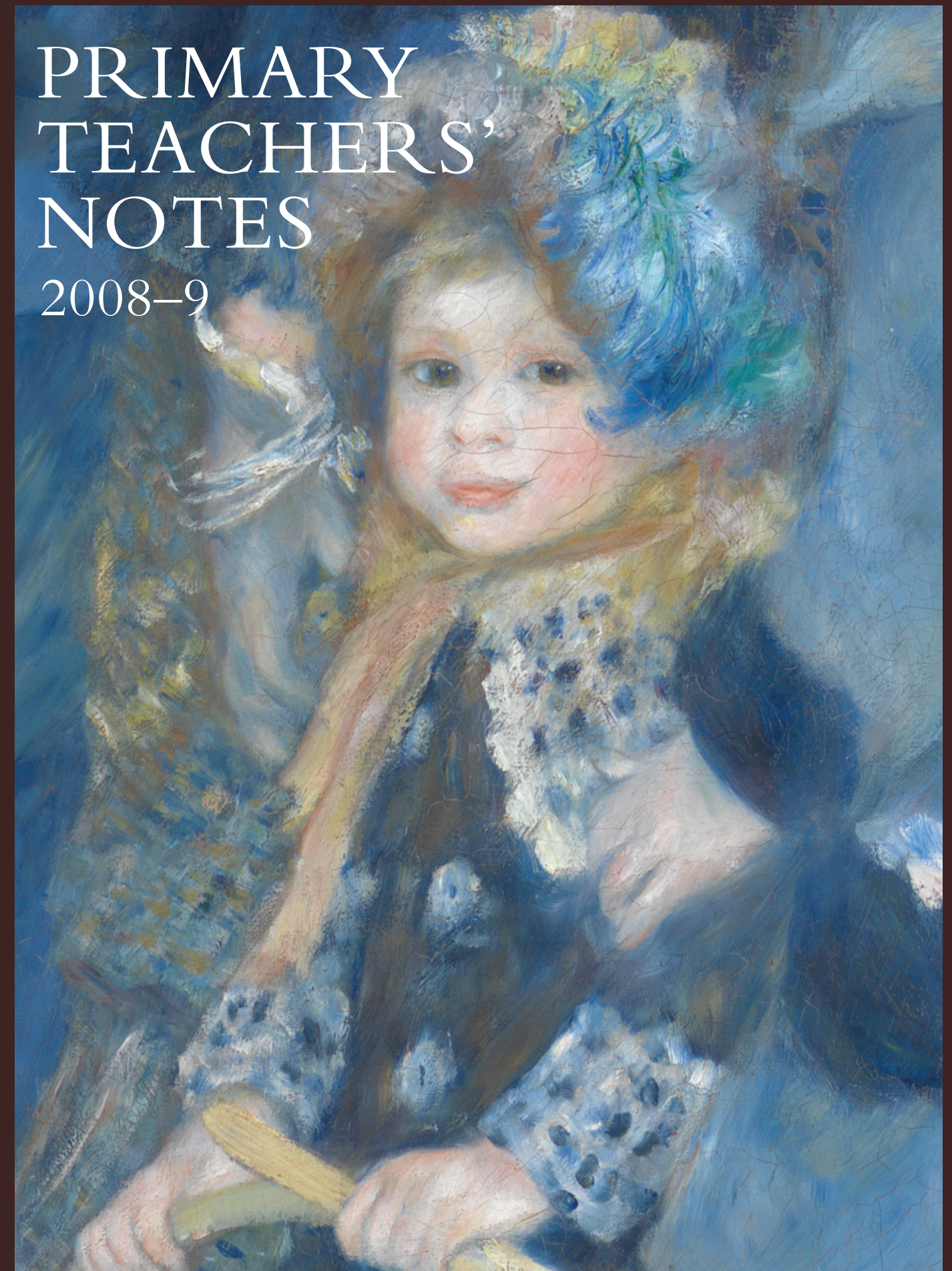
Telephone: 020 7747 2424 Fax: 020 7747 2431

Email: education@ng-london.org.uk

www.nationalgallery.org.uk

www.takeonepicture.org.uk

PRIMARY TEACHERS' NOTES 2008–9



THE
NATIONAL
GALLERY



THE UMBRELLAS, ABOUT 1881-6

BY PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (1841-1919)
OIL ON CANVAS, 180.3 X 114.9 CM



became firm friends after they realised they shared ideas about the type of art they wanted to create, focusing on the effects of colour and light. Paul Cézanne and Camille Pissarro were part of another group preoccupied with similar issues. When both groups began meeting regularly, the early seeds of the Impressionist movement were sown.

IMPRESSIONISM

The term 'Impressionist' was first used as an insult, after an exhibition in Paris in 1874. This was organised by the artists themselves, frustrated at the conservatism of the traditional state-sponsored Salon exhibition. These Impressionist works were mostly landscapes and urban scenes of everyday life, painted in bright, pure colours. The artists often started, and sometimes finished, their paintings outside ('*en plein air*') rather than in the studio. They were preoccupied with the changing effects of light and colour, which necessitated quick brushstrokes.

A CHANGE IN STYLE

Renoir enjoyed modest success as an Impressionist painter and began to achieve financial security. During the early 1880s he was able to undertake a series of trips to Italy, Spain, England and North Africa. On his travels he admired the work of the Old Masters, such as the Italian artist Raphael; Velázquez, who worked in Spain; and the Flemish painter Rubens. In particular, he was drawn to the work of the French artist Ingres. The ancient Roman frescoes at Pompeii also interested him.

He stated at this time: 'I had come to the end of Impressionism, and I was reaching the conclusion that I didn't know how either to paint or draw. In a word, I was at a dead end.' As he became increasingly disillusioned with Impressionism, Renoir developed a more linear, classical technique, with smoother surfaces and an emphasis on volume, contour and line. During the next 30 years he became an established artist, in France and also internationally, particularly in the USA.

Renoir died in 1919 after suffering debilitating rheumatism for the last 10 years of his life. He continued painting until the very end: when his joints were no longer supple, he had a paintbrush bound to his hand.

ABOUT THE PAINTING

WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

The Umbrellas shows a bustling Parisian street scene. The open umbrellas suggest that it is raining, although the woman in the centre, visible in profile, has lowered her umbrella, suggesting that the rain has either just stopped or is about to begin.

Something, or somebody, has caught the attention of the little girl on the right, and the woman on the left. What, or whom, are they looking at? Perhaps they are looking at us? It is almost as if we are standing in the picture with them.

The composition is like a photographic snapshot, cutting figures off at either side. This is a naturalistic arrangement, which was popular with several of the Impressionist artists at the time. However, the composition of *The Umbrellas* is actually very carefully considered. The umbrellas form a geometric pattern of angles and shapes in blues and greys, a linking rhythm across the top of the painting. The little girl's hoop and the band-box held by the woman on the left provide a balance of curves in the foreground.

HOW THE PAINTING DEVELOPED OVER TIME

The Umbrellas clearly shows the change in Renoir's style that occurred in the early 1880s. Using evidence provided by X-ray photographs, by examining the style of the painting, and also the fashions worn by the women, it is clear that the painting was made in two distinct stages in Renoir's career, with a probable interval of about four years.

STYLE

The figures on the right-hand side of the canvas are painted in a soft, feathery Impressionist style, while the couple on the left are created with more distinct outlines and subdued colours. X-rays show us that originally all the figures were painted in the same way, with the typically loose brushwork and bright, pure colours of the Impressionist movement, and also in the same style of dress. Returning to the painting several years later, Renoir painted over the figures on the left in his new crisper, more disciplined style.

X-RAYS

The X-rays have shown that Renoir made little if any adjustment to the group on the right of the painting, but he radically altered many details on the left. For example, the woman on the left was originally painted in the same style as the group on the right, and her dress was very different: her skirt was arranged in tiers of horizontal frills; she had white lace cuffs and collar; and she was wearing a hat.

FASHION

The fashions illustrated in *The Umbrellas* confirm that the painting was made at two different times, some years apart. The woman on the right and the two girls are wearing a different style of dress to the woman on the left, who wears a much plainer style of outfit with simple, straight lines. The costumes on the right date from 1880/1, while the dress worn by the woman on the left was at the height of fashion in 1885/6.

Why did Renoir leave the painting in this ambiguous state? We can only guess. Perhaps he lost interest in the work? Or maybe he wanted to leave a record of his artistic development and change in style?

COME RAIN OR SHINE

The word umbrella comes from the Latin *umbra*, meaning shade. There is evidence from carvings on monuments and paintings on vases that the Ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans all used a form of umbrella. Early umbrellas were designed to protect their owners from the sun, and these are familiar to us today as parasols. This French word comes from the Italian *para*, which means to shield, and *sole* meaning sun. The French name for this painting is *Les Parapluies* (*pluie* meaning rain).

Other cultures from around the world also used parasols, but it was the Chinese who coated the material or paper with wax to make them waterproof. There is also evidence that the Chinese invented the first collapsible umbrella. Parasols were used in Europe from the 16th century but did not become popular in France or England until the late 18th century. By the Victorian era parasols were an essential fashion accessory and umbrellas were increasingly common for both men and women.

TOYS AND GAMES

The young girl on the right of the painting holds a hoop and stick. The hoop for such a toy might be made of metal or wood, and the object of the game was to keep the hoop upright while rolling it along the ground with the stick. Skilled players could do this for lengthy amounts of time and some performed tricks.

The toy can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks, who believed that hoop-rolling was a beneficial form of exercise. Images of Greek athletes with hoops can be seen on ancient vases. The hoop and stick really came into its own as a toy in Britain in Victorian times, and many portraits and early photographs show a hoop alongside a posed child. The modern-day version of the hoop and stick is the plastic hula hoop.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Renoir was born into a large family in Limoges, south-west France, in 1841. He came from a humble background: his father was a tailor and his mother a dressmaker. From 1844 the family lived in Paris, and at the age of 13 Renoir was apprenticed to a porcelain painter. After numerous trips to the Louvre to copy Old Master paintings, he joined the studio of the painter Charles Gleyre. In 1862 he was admitted to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the most important art school in Paris. It was around this time that he met Claude Monet. A group of students, including Renoir and Monet,