

REPIN – TOUR FOR SCHOOL GROUPS



ILYA REPIN: *Self-Portrait, 1887.*
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Ilya Repin was a Russian artist best known for his portraits of emperors and famous artists, as well as his large paintings with crowds of people but also his realistic pictures of the life of poor people. Although Repin lived about 100 years ago, he is still a famous artist and many people love his work.



Ilya Repin at the tea table at Penates, 1910s.

He was a master draftsman and painter who is admired for his keen eye when capturing people's emotions and personality on canvas. What thoughts, ideas and emotions come to your mind when you look at his works?

ATENEUM

STUDIES AND PARIS

Gallery 3.1



ILYA REPIN: *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, 1870–73. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Barge Haulers on the Volga is one of Repin's most famous paintings. It took him three years to paint. Although it was met with great admiration, some people were irritated that the picture showed such awful conditions among Russian workers. Perhaps they thought it was bad for Russia's reputation.

The painting shows eleven men who seem to be exhausted. They are pulling a barge, a boat that carries goods on a river. Barges float downstream with the current, but they have to be hauled upstream. This painting was made at a time when

boats did not have engines. Think about it – people pulling a ship. That must have been very difficult!

Study the barge haulers closely and the expression on their faces, then choose one. What does his expression and posture tell you? Can you tell what he is thinking?

Did you know? Volga is a famous river and the longest in Europe – 3,685 kilometres. It is an important transport route even today. The painting also shows how wide the river is.

STUDIES AND PARIS

Gallery 3.1



ILYA REPIN:

Sadko in the Underwater Kingdom, 1876.

State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Repin won a monetary prize for his *Barge Haulers*, which meant he could travel abroad from Russia. He went to Paris, France, where he visited museums, met other artists and painted. One of the works he made there was *Sadko*. Based on a Russian fairy tale, it tells of Sadko, a trader who on his adventures visited the Sea-King in the underwater realm. Sadko played the harp so well that the king didn't want to let him go. In the story, the king offered Sadko one of his daughters in

marriage. The picture shows the moment Sadko chooses his wife.

Study the painting closely.

- How can you tell what it is happening underwater?
- What makes the painting seem like a fairy tale?
- Which woman do you think Sadko will choose? How can you tell?
- What do you think: is it possible to choose your life partner?

GROUP ASSIGNMENT:

The story in the painting

With everyone taking turns, tell a story about this painting. The first person starts with the traditional opening of fairy tales: Once upon a time... After a few sentences, the next one in line continues the story. What adventures will the underwater people have in your story? Make sure that one of you writes down the story.

REPIN THE DRAUGHTSMAN

Gallery 3.2 and 3.5



ILYA REPIN: *Figure and Hand Study, undated.* Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum.

Ilya Repin was fascinated by everything that he saw, and he was always sketching wherever he went. Because he was talented and enthusiastic, and because he practised so much, his drawings are very skilful indeed. What do you think?

The tools you need to make drawings are easy to take along anywhere, whether to draw sketches or make studies for a big painting. In this picture, Repin practises drawing hands in different positions.

THIS ASSIGNMENT CAN BE DONE ALONE AT HOME OR IN SCHOOL:

Pieces of face

You need paper and pencil, as well as a mirror. Preferably, the mirror should stand on a table close to you. Choose some part of your face, such as your eye or your mouth. Study it in the mirror. What is its shape? Are there any lines in it? Dark or light areas? You can draw many versions of that part of your face on the same piece of paper. You can also try different expressions. What does your mouth look like if you put a thoughtful expression on your face? Your nose when you sniff? Your eyes when you smile?

ARTIST PORTRAITS

Gallery 3.4



ILYA REPIN: *Portrait of the Composer Modest Mussorgsky, 1881. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.*

ILYA REPIN: *Portrait of the Pianist Sophie Menter, 1887. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.*



Repin was hugely interested in people – he created over 2,000 portraits! Many of them are of his friends, other artists, writers, musicians and actors. He would also depict anyone he found notable, either because of their expressive appearance or because they were ordinary people, poor people or people who had endured hardships.

These two pictures show a famous composer and a pianist. Repin often painted the sitter without

any details in the background or objects that might indicate what sort of a person is being depicted. He concentrated instead on the person's face, expression and posture, which often communicate a strong sense of the sitter's personality and character. People in Repin's paintings seem strikingly real, although they are painted with a brush on canvas. It's fun to try to imagine what the people were like in real life and what they were thinking when they posed for Repin.

GROUP ASSIGNMENT IN THE MUSEUM OR SCHOOL:

Talking head

You need paper and pencil (you can also do this exercise by talking). Choose a portrait that interests you. What is the person thinking and feeling? While pretending to be that person, write down at least three sentences. To conclude the exercise, everyone will in turn indicate which person they chose and then read aloud that person's thoughts.

You can write sentences of your own invention. Here are some suggestions on how you can start the sentences:

- My personality is...
- Today I am...
- Next I am going to...
- If I could decide...
- I think it is great that...
- I dream of...

THE FULL SPECTRUM OF RUSSIAN CULTURE

Gallery 3.9



ILYA REPIN: *Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Mocking Letter to the Turkish Sultan, 1880-91.* State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

It is alright to laugh in a museum? Sure it is! Many of Repin's paintings have lots of people in them, and all the figures have their own expressions and gestures. The men in this painting seem to be bursting with laughter. The picture is based, in part, on real events. The writing of the letter took place a long time ago, during a war between Turkey and Russia that took place from 1672-1681. The men in the painting are Cossacks. They are writing to answer a letter from the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, in which he demands that they remain faithful to him. The Cossacks seem to disagree. They want to be free.

The painting is a real treasure chest of all kinds of laughter. What different types of laughter can you find in it? Belly laughs? Giggling? Laughing like a horse? Hee-hawing? Quiet tittering? Hysterical laughter that goes on and on until you have tears in your eyes and your sides are aching? Other kinds of laughter?

The men in the picture all look different: they are in different clothes, and some of them carry weapons. Look at the painting. What do you think – are the men crooks or heroes? What makes you think that?

THIS ASSIGNMENT CAN BE DONE ALONE AT HOME OR IN SCHOOL:

Colourful group

You need crayons, paper, a brush and watercolours. Ask a friend or someone from your family to pose for you. We suggest that you use a striking pose, such as with arms wide open or feet wide apart. Observe the sitter carefully. Using a crayon, draw the outlines of the pose. You don't have to draw the face or details at all. Then take a new crayon and ask the sitter to strike another pose. Don't worry if the lines in your drawings cross and overlap. Fill the paper with many characters drawn in different colours. How does the picture feel with the many figures? Try painting the figures with watercolours. You can make some figures stand out by making them darker or using a brighter colour. Finish it by giving a title to the work.

TIME IN TERIJOKI AND KUOKKALA

Gallery 3.12



ILYA REPIN: *What freedom!*, 1903. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

What wonderful surf! The woman and the man are running like children among the waves – with their clothes on! In 1903 Repin moved to Kuokkala in Finland with his partner, the artist Natalia Nordman. Living in a beautiful villa surrounded by trees, they had lots of visitors – artists and friends. It is said that Repin was very happy there. This painting is also full of joy and a carefree feeling. Take a good look at the picture. What do you think Repin meant by the title *What Freedom!* that he gave

to the painting? What does the word “freedom” mean to you?

Did you know? Great changes were happening in Russia when Repin was alive. The emperors lost their power little by little, and a revolution followed. It was a very restless time. The empire collapsed in 1917, and after a long civil war, the Soviet Union was founded in 1922. In 1918 Kuokkala was annexed to Finland. Repin lived there until his death.

THIS ASSIGNMENT CAN BE DONE ALONE AT HOME OR IN SCHOOL:

If I were an ocean

You need crayons or oil pastels, watercolours, a brush and paper. You can also use only watercolours if you prefer. Which are you – a calm or a stormy sea? Is it early morning, day, evening or night? Is there something exciting under the surface? Draw a picture of your inner self. Start with crayons or pastels and fill in the rest with watercolour. You can also wet the paper with clean water before you start. See how the colours mix on the wet paper! Can you make the water seem as if it were moving?

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