Sunday in the Park With George Study Guide

by

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Table of Contents

Sunday in the Park With George Production Information ………. 3

Georges Seurat and his Art ……………………………………… 8

"Color and Light": Art in the 1880s …………………………… 15

France in the 1880s …………………………………………….. 21

Fashion in the 1880s …………………………………………… 24

The Isle of La Grande Jatte Today ……………………………... 33

Sunday in the Park with George Production Information

Stephen Sondheim
Born March 22, 1930

Stephen Joshua Sondheim is widely recognized as one of the greatest musical theater composers of the twentieth century. Throughout his long and prolific career he has won an Academy Award, eight Tony Awards including a Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre award, eight Grammy Awards, seven Drama Desk Awards, a Pulitzer Prize, and six Laurence Olivier Awards. He has also been honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Kennedy Center and was given the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2014. In 2010, in celebration of his 80th birthday, the Henry Miller's Theatre on Broadway in New York City was renamed the Stephen Sondheim Theatre.

Sondheim has traced his passion for musical theater back to a production of *Very Warm for May* which he saw on Broadway at the age of nine. He recalls, "The curtain went up and revealed a piano. A butler took a duster and brushed it up, tinkling the keys. I thought it was thrilling." Shortly after, at age ten, Sondheim became friends with James Hammerstein, the son of lyricist and playwright Oscar Hammerstein II. Oscar Hammerstein became a surrogate father and mentor to Sondheim, helping him to develop his composing talents. Sondheim's first musical was titled *By George* and was based on the goings-on at his high school.

He attended Williams College in Massachusetts, graduating magna cum laude in 1950. He first studied with Robert Barrow who, as Sondheim says, "made me realize that all my romantic views of art were nonsense… Never occurred to me that art was something worked out. And suddenly it was skies opening up." He then went on to study composition with Milton Babbitt, a famed composer known for his work in serialism.

After graduating Sondheim continued to hone his craft. He was commissioned to write three songs for a musical titled *Saturday Night*, however the musical would not end up being performed. His first major breakthrough was in 1957, when he was asked by Arthur Laurents to write the lyrics for *West Side Story.* Although this is one of the most popular shows Sondheim has contributed to, he has said that he doesn't like most of his lyrics. His next big project was writing the lyrics for *Gypsy* in 1959.

The first musical for which Sondheim wrote both the music and lyrics was *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* which opened in 1962 to great success. His next show, *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964) was an enormous flop, lasting only nine performances. For the rest of the decade Sondheim worked on various projects including *Do I Hear a Waltz?, Evening Primrose,* and *Follies*, which opened in 1971.

Over the next two decades Sondheim worked on a succession of musicals which would become some of his most beloved works. Throughout the 1970s he collaborated with producer and director Hal Prince on six musicals, the first of which was *Company* (1970),

the first “concept musical”. In 1973 *A Little Night Music* opened, a musical based on the Ingmar Bergman film *Smiles of a Summer Night*. The musical featured the song “Send in the Clowns” which would go on to become a top 40 hit and be performed as a standard by an enormous variety of artists. The musicals that followed included *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd* (1979)—considered by many to be Sondheim’s masterpiece--, and *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981).

In the early 1980s Sondheim began collaborating with James Lapine who had a taste “for the avant-garde and for visually oriented theater in particular.” Their first collaboration was *Sunday in the Park With George* (1984) which on the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Their next collaboration was *Into the Woods* (1987) which remains Sondheim’s most performed work. This was followed in 1994 with the musical *Passion*.

Between *Into the Woods* and *Passion*, Sondheim wrote *Assassins* (1990), a dark comedy which follows the different assassins and would-be assassins of US presidents. In the late nineties he began work on a musical titled *Wise Guys* about the Mizner brothers. *Wise Guys* became a project lasting nearly ten years and was renamed twice (*Bounce* in 2003 and *Road Show* in 2008).

Despite the negligible commercial success of his musicals, Sondheim’s music is widely celebrated and has become standards of musical theater and jazz. The complexity of both his music and lyrics and the unique way he is able to capture the world of his musical through song make his works stand out from the crowd. In addition to the continued production of his musicals, several musical reviews celebrating his work have been produced. In addition to his work for musical theater, Sondheim has also composed scores for several movies including *Stavisky*.

James Lapine
Born January 10, 1949

James Elliot Lapine is a director, filmmaker, playwright, screenwriter, and librettist who has frequently collaborated with Stephen Sondheim and composer William Finn. He has written the book for several musicals including *Into the Woods*, *Passion*, *Sunday in the Park With George, Falsettos,* and *A New Brain*. He has won five Drama Desk Awards for his work on the books of musicals as well as for his directing. He has also won three Tony Awards and was inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame in 2010. Along with Sondheim he received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Sunday in the Park With George*.

Lapine was born in Mansfield, Ohio. He attended Franklin and Marshall College for his undergraduate work, graduating in 1971. He then attended graduate school at the California Institute of Arts, studying photography and graphic design. He taught design at the Yale School of Drama which is where his theatrical career began. While there he wrote and directed an adaptation of *Photograph*, a play by Gertrude Stein. *Photograph* was produced Off-Broadway in 1977. From there he continued to work in theater, writing and directing plays and musicals Off-Broadway. In 1981 he worked with composer

William Finn on *March of the Falsettos*, serving as director. He rejoined William Finn in 1992, writing the book for and directing *Falsettos*. They also collaborated on *A New Brain*, which opened Off-Broadway in 1998. In 2005 Lapine directed Finn's *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, which ran both on Broadway and Off-Broadway. He won a Drama Desk Award for his directing of this musical.

In 1982 Lapine met Stephen Sondheim and their first collaboration was *Sunday in the Park With George*. For *Sunday in the Park* Lapine won a Drama Desk Award for both the book and his direction, as well as a Pulitzer Prize for Drama. His next collaboration with Sondheim was *Into the Woods* which opened on Broadway in 1987. For that he won both the Tony And Drama Desk Awards for Best Book of a Musical. He continued his work with Sondheim by writing the book for and directing *Passion* which opened on Broadway in 1994. As with *Into the Woods*, *Passion* won both the Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Book.

Lapine's recent work includes the musical review *Sondheim on Sondheim*, a touching and personal musical which combines Sondheim's music with personal interviews about his life and career. *Sondheim on Sondheim* ran on Broadway in 2010 and won the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Musical Revue. In 2011 he once again collaborated with Finn on *Little Miss Sunshine.* His other directing work includes *Dirty Blonde* (2000) and the 2012 Broadway revival of *Annie*.

Lapine has also worked in film. He wrote and directed his first film, *Impromptu*, in 1991. This was followed in 1993 by *Life With Mikey* and *Earthly Possessions* in 1999. He also returned to *Into the Woods* in 2014, writing the screenplay for the film adaptation directed by Rob Marshall.

Production History

Sunday in the Park With George was first workshopped in 1983 at Playwrights Horizons. It opened at the Booth Theatre on Broadway for previews on April 2, 1984. After 35 preview performances it opened on May 2, 1984. The Broadway production ran for 604 performances, closing on October 31, 1985. It starred Mandy Patinkin as George and Bernadette Peters as Dot. The Broadway production won two Tony Awards, eight Drama Desk Awards, as well as the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1985, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Musical, and the Outer Critics Circle Awards for Best Musical and Best Scenery. Frank Rich's review of the show in The New York Times stated:

> "In his paintings of a century ago, Georges Seurat demanded that the world look at art in a shocking new way. In "Sunday in the Park With George,"… Stephen Sondheim… and James Lapine demand that an audience radically change its whole way of looking at the Broadway musical. Seurat, the authors remind us, never sold a painting; it's anyone's guess whether the public will be shocked or delighted by "Sunday in the Park." What I do know is that Mr. Sondheim and Mr. Lapine have created an audacious, haunting, and in its own intensely personal way, touching work."

In 1986, a taped performance of the Broadway production aired on Showtime and PBS.

Other notable productions include the 1990 production at the Lyttleton Theatre of the Royal National Theatre in London, the 2002 production at the Kennedy Center, and three performances at the Ravinia Festival Pavilian in Highland Park, IL in September 2004 with a cast starring Michael Cerveris and Audra McDonald. In 2006 the show was given a London revival at the Menier Chocolate Factory Theatre. The production then transferred to Broadway in 2008 where it ran for 32 previews and 149 performances at the Studio 54 Theater. The latest major production was in 2013 at the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris.

Analysis and Musical Themes

Sunday in the Park With George functions similarly to Seurat's paintings—it captures two moments in time, allowing the audience snippets of people captured in the midst of living their lives. *A Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte* is a snapshot in time and similarly throughout Act I we are presented with snapshots of people's lives, their relationships, their actions. Some critics have complained that the characters other than Georges and Dot are two-dimensional, but this is done intentionally. Act I is seen through the eyes of Georges Seurat, who is characterized throughout Act I as being unable to understand and connect with people, a characteristic that is then reflected in his renderings of stiff, faceless figures in his painting. As Georges sings, "How you watch the rest of the world through a window/While you finish the hat." Act II skips ahead 100 years and focuses on Georges' descendant, George. There are clear parallels to Act I, as George too struggles with connecting to the people in his life and to find a clear vision for his art. While the conflicts of Act I remain unresolved, Act II George is given a stronger resolution, learning to "move on" with his art and recapture his artistic drive and vision.

Sunday in the Park explores several major themes including change, art vs. commerce, and the interplay of art and science. Within Georges in Act I there exists a dichotomy of change versus not changing. Artistically, Georges is the agent of great change, brining on Neo-Impressionism and becoming one of the Post-Impressionists who helped change art dramatically. But in his personal life Georges refuses to change, causing much of his conflict with Dot. The song "Beautiful" perhaps reflects this theme of changing most, as Georges and his Mother sing their reactions to the changes that happen around them. Their different opinions are reflected in their two different melodies. When placed on top of each other, the melodies clash, reflecting their inability to truly connect to each other. In Act II, George struggles with the opposite artistic problems. While his art was initially something new and different, he's stuck in a creative rut and his art isn't changing at all, as evidenced by his work on display, the seventh of a series. It is only after meeting the spirit of Dot, a character who continually pushed for change in Act I, that he is able to move forward.

Another major theme throughout the show is the conflict between art and commerce. Act I Georges is unsuccessful financially but he is true to his artistic vision. Act II George seems to be successful with his artistic output, but he's not happy and his vision is stunted. This arc seems to parallel Sondheim's own creative output, which is widely celebrated as innovative and genius yet has never been very financially successful. Ultimately the show concludes that staying true to personal artistic vision is more important than financial success. As Dot sings, "Stop worrying if your vision is new./ Let others make that decision,/ They usually do./ Just keep moving on."

A third major theme is the interplay of art and science. Act I Georges bases his painting style on modern theories of optics, using the science of how the eye and brain works to blend the colors on his canvas. Similarly, Act II George uses scientific knowledge, this time to create his technologically complex Chromolume series.

One of the most prominent musical themes throughout the show is a series of arpeggiated chords which represent the creation of art. They shimmer, similar to Seurat's paintings. This is the first music we hear, fitting as the musical is about the creation of art and the musical itself is a creation of art. The next musical motif we hear is the theme from "Sunday". While the audience does not yet know this, the theme frames the narrative, appearing in the beginning, middle, and end. Returning to this theme is returning to the Isle of La Grande Jatte, a sort of home for the characters and the place where both Georges and George find their creative vision. There are also short staccato bursts, first heard in "Color and Light", representing the tiny dots which make up Georges' painting.

The accompaniment has within it various leitmotifs, short musical phrases which correspond to a character or idea. For example, the leitmotif of Georges is a series of rising and falling chords which form the musical base of "Finishing the Hat" and can be heard when Dot sings about Georges in both "Sunday in the Park With George" and "Everybody Loves Luis". The styles of music also reflect both the characters and snapshot framework of the show. Much of the music for both Georges and George is sung in soliloquy, fitting as both characters have difficulty connecting to others. And in songs like "Sunday in the Park with George", "Color and Light", and "The Day Off" we hear multiple different melodies combined in one song. With "Sunday in the Park with George" and "Color and Light" this reflects the stream of consciousness style of the songs. In "The Day Off" we see small snippets of life from different characters, so it is fitting that the music changes with each short moment and group of characters. The music in this sequence helps to fill out these characters who only get a relatively short amount of time on stage and little development. For example, the Soldier's melody resembles a fanfare. And when the Nurse sings about caring for Georges' mother, her complaints are slow and droning ("Listening to her snap and drone"). But as she moves into her statement that she doesn't mind caring for Georges' mother because it pays for care for her own mother, the tempo has a distinct uptick and the notes move up.

Georges Seurat and his Art

"I want to make modern people, in their essential traits, move about as they do on those friezes, and place them on canvases organized by the harmonies of color."

"Art is Harmony."

~ Georges Seurat

Georges Seurat
December 2, 1859 – March 29, 1891

Georges Pierre Seurat was born on December 2, 1859 to a wealthy family in Paris. His father, Antoine Chrysostome Seurat, was a former legal official who had made his fortune through property speculation. Georges was the youngest of three children; his father and mother, Ernestine Faivre, also had another son, Émile Augustin, and a daughter, Marie-Berthe. Georges lived with his mother and siblings in Paris at 136 Boulevard de Magenta, while his father lived in the suburb of Le Raincy.

In 1875, at the age of 16, Seurat began studying at the École Municipale de Sculpture et Dessin under the tutelage of sculptor Justin Lequien. In 1878 he enrolled in the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts, studying under the artist Henri Lehmann. While there he read the Grammaire des arts de Dessin, published in 1867 by Charles Blanc. In this book, Blanc merged developments in science with aesthetics, stating that colors obeyed consistent rules and that color theory could be taught similarly to music theory. This work would become extremely influential to the artists in Seurat's circle. In the spring of 1879, he attended the annual Impressionist exhibition at the Avenue de l'Opera, viewing influential works by Degas, Monet, and Pissarro.

His artistic education paused in November 1879, when he left the École for a required year of military service at the Brest Military Academy. After leaving the military, he moved to a studio at 19 Rue de Chabrol with his friend Edmond Aman-Jean, whom he met at the École Municipale. He spent the next two years honing his artistic talent, exhibiting his first work, a Conté crayon drawing of Aman-Jean, at the Salon of 1883.

Bathers at Ansières

Bathers at Asnières, Georges Seurat, 1884. National Gallery, London.

His first major painting, *Bathers at Asnières*, was painted from 1883-84. It depicts young working-class men relaxing by the Seine. It's use of color and light, as well as the depiction of a moment of modern life, shows the influence of Impressionism. The aesthetic of the painting is hazy and soft, reflecting the heat of a summer day. As art historian Roger Fry describes, "No one could render this enveloping with a more exquisitely tremulous sensibility, a more penetrating observation or more unfailing consistency, than Seurat." Seurat used small, sharp brushstrokes which criss-cross across the painting, evoking this hazy quality.

Final study for *Bathers at Ansières*, 1883. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Bathers at Ansières was rejected by the Paris Salon in 1884. Following this rejection, Seurat became one of the founding members of the Groupe des Artistes Indépendants and exhibited his painting at the Groupe's first exhibition, the Salon de Artistes Indépendants, in the summer of 1884. However, the work was stuck behind the bar and did not garner much attention. Later that year, the Groupe renamed themselves the Société des Artistes Indépendants and held another exhibiton, where *Bathers at Ansières* was once again exhibited. In 1886 French art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel took the picture to the National

Academy of Design in New York where it was exhibited in an exhibition of Impressionist works.

Bathers at Ansières received mixed reviews in New York. Writer Edmond Bazire wrote, "Behind and under some prismatic eccentricities Seurat conceals the most distinguished qualities of draughtsmanship, and envelops his bathing men, his ripples, his horizons in warm tones." Artist Paul Signac commented that *Bathers* was painted "in great flat strokes, brushed one over the other, fed by a palette composed, like Delacroix's, of pure and earthy colours. By means of these ochres and browns the picture was deadened and appeared less brilliant than the works the Impressionists painted with a palette limited to prismatic colours. But the understanding of the laws of contrast, the methodical separation of elements—light, shade, local colour, and the interaction of colours—as well as their proper balance and proportion gave this canvas its perfect harmony." Newspaper The Sun gave the work a less favorable review, writing "The great master, from his own point of view, must surely be Seurat whose monstrous picture of *The Bathers* consumes so large a part of the Gallery D. This is a picture conceived in a coarse, vulgar, and commonplace mind, the work of a man seeking distinction by the vulgar qualification and expedient of size. It is bad from every point of view, including his own."

A Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte

A Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte, 1884-86. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Seurat's most famous work was begun in the summer of 1884 and took two years to complete. Painted on a huge canvas, 7 x 10 feet in size, *La Grande Jatte* debuted at the final Impressionist exhibition in 1886 and was immediately hailed as the founding of a radical new style of painting. The painting is composed of small dots layered on top of

each other to create depth and texture, and giving the painting a shimmering quality. This technique was dubbed Pointillism, although Seurat preferred the term Divisionism. Seurat was the pioneer of Divisionism, but he was not its only practitioner. Artists such as Henri-Edmond Cross and Paul Signac adopted the technique. Together, these artists were known as the Neo-Impressionists, a term coined by art critic Félix Fénéon.

Divisionism was a painting technique based in the study of optics. As art historian Robert Lehman describes:

> "Led by the example of Georges Seurat, artists of the Neo-Impressionist circle renounced the random spontaneity of Impressionism in favor of a measured painting technique grounded in science and the study of optics. Encouraged by contemporary writing on color theory—the treatises of Charles Henry, Eugène Chevreul, and Ogden Rood for example—Neo-Impressionists came to believe that separate touches of interwoven pigment result in a greater vibrancy of color in the oberserver's eye than is achieved by the conventional mixing of pigments on the palette. Known as *mélange optique* (optical mixture), this meticulous paint application would, they felt, realize a pulsating shimmer of light on the canvas."

This technique of separating color through individual strokes of pigment came to be known as Divisionism. Paul Signac described the final result saying that "the separated elements will be reconstituted into brilliantly colored lights." Seurat himself described his theories of color and light in a letter in 1890: "Art is Harmony. Harmony is the analogy of opposites, the analogy of similar elements of tone, color, and line, considered according to their dominants and under the influence of light, in gay, calm, or sad combinations."

Evening Calm, Concarneau, Opus 22o (Allegro Maestoso), Paul Signac, 1891. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

After *La Grande Jatte* premiered in 1886 Neo-Impressionism quickly spread to other artists and Seurat's influence can be seen in the subsequent works of Charles Angrand, Henri-Edmond Cross, Hippolyte Petitjean, and Camille Pissarro who called it "a new phase in the logical march of Impressionism". The greatest champion of Neo-Impressionism was Paul Signac who wrote the influential D'Eugène Delacroix au Nèo-Impressionisme in 1899, arguing for Neo-Impressionism as the legitimate successor to Impressionism. As the twentieth century dawned, artists of the Fauvism movement looked back to Seurat's technique for purity of color, and Neo-Impressionism and Divisionism continued to influence artists including Mondrian and Kandinsky.

Study for *A Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte*, 1884. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

With works like *La Grande Jatte* Seurat sought to evoke a permanence, a distinct departure from the spontaneity of Impressionist works. He took influence from Greek and Egyptian sculpture and Italian Renaissance frescoes. He explained his ideas to poet Gustave Kahn saying, "I want to make modern people, in their essential traits, move about as they do on those friezes, and place them on canvases organized by the harmonies of color."

Despite its status as the beginning of the Neo-Impressionist style, *La Grande Jatte* did not gain favorable reviews from most contemporary critics. As art historian Martha Ward says, "Reviewers interpreted the expressionless faces, isolated stances, and rigid postures to be a more or less subtle parody of the banality and pretensions of contemporary leisure." Contemporary critic Henry Fèvre wrote that after looking at the image "one understands then the rigidity of Parisian leisure, tired and stiff, where even recreation is a matter of striking poses." Another critic, Paul Adam, wrote "Even the stiffness of these people, their punched-out forms, help to give the sound of the modern, to recall our badly cut clothes, clinging tight to our bodies, the reserve of our gestures, the British cant we all imitate. We strike attitudes like people in a painting by Memling." And critic Alfred Paulet wrote that "The artist has given his figures the automatic gestures of lead soldiers moving about on regimented squares. Maids, clerks, and troopers all move around with a similar slow, banal, identical step, which catches the character of the scene exactly." One

of the most important critics of *La Grande Jatte* was Félix Fénéon who acknowledged the groundbreaking technique of the painting saying, "Everything was so new in this immense painting—the conception was bold and the technique one that nobody had ever seen or heard of before. This was the famous Pointillism." However he also described the technique as "a monotonous and patient tapestry".

Other Works and Death

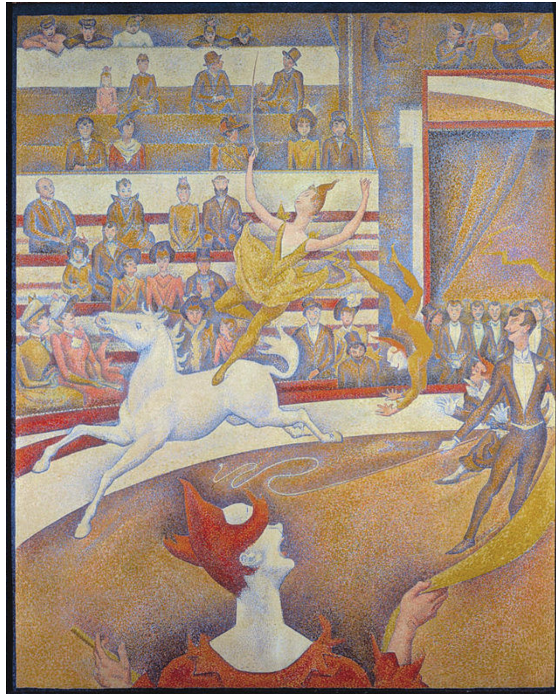
Jeune femme se poudrant, 1888-90. Courtauld Institute of Art.

Seurat continued to produce works throughout the 1880s using his Divisionist technique. *Jeune femme se poudrant* portrayed his mistress, Madeleine Knobloch (1868-1903). In 1889 Knobloch moved in with Seurat at his studio in 128bis Boulevard de Clichy. She soon became pregnant, and the couple moved to 39 passage de l'Élysée-des-Beaux-Arts. Their son, Pierre-Georges, was born on February 16, 1890.

The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe, 1890. Indianapolis Museum of Art.

In 1890 Seurat visited the coast at Gravelines where he painted numerous canvases, including *The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe*. This was to be one of Seurat's last paintings. On March 29, 1891 Georges Seurat died in Paris at the age of 31. His cause of death is still unknown. Two weeks later his son died as well. At the time of his

death, Knobloch was pregnant with Seurat's second child. However, the child died shortly after birth. Seurat's final large-scale painting, left unfinished, was *The Circus.* He is buried at the Cimetière du Père-Lachaise.



The Circus, 1891. Musée d'Orsay.

"Color and Light": Art in the 1880s

If pre-modern art is about the finished product, modern art is as much about the creation of the work as it is the finished image. Arguably the artistic process even took precedence over the final product. Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Post-Impressionism were the beginnings of modern art and represent a distinctly new direction in artistic expression. The nineteenth century was an age of innovation and discovery and these new modern art movements reflected this. Artists were breaking free from traditional molds and finding new and unique ways to express themselves. Thus modern styles were highly personal. The view of the world from one artist's eyes was completely different than the view from another artist's eyes. Notable for art in the 1870s and 1880s is it's devotion to the exploration and expression of color and light.

Impressionism

Impression, Sunrise, Claude Monet, 1872. Musée Marmottan Monet.

Impressionism was an artistic movement founded in 1874. Notable artists of this movement were Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Camille Pissarro. The movement takes it's name from Claud Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* which was described by critic Louis Leroy as being an "impression" rather than a finished painting.

Breton Brother and Sister, William Bouguereau, 1871. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Birth of Venus, Alexandre Cabanel, 1875. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

These paintings were displayed in the Paris Salons.

The Impressionists first came together in 1874 when a group of artists called the Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors, Printmakers, etc. organized an exhibition in Paris that was separate from the official annual Salon, hosted by artists from the Académie des Beaux-Arts. The annual Salon was an extremely important event where the top artists of the day exhibited their work. Reputations were made at the Salon and to obtain success an artist traditionally had to display there. The Impressionists were the first group to break away from the entrenched Salon system, which typically celebrated traditional academic artistic styles (as seen above), and represented a distinctly new direction of artistic output.

*Garden at Sainte-Adress*e, Claude Monet, 1867. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Allée of Chestnut Trees, Alfred Sisley, 1878. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

While each Impressionist artist had a unique artistic style, Impressionism as a whole can be defined by certain shared traits such as short, broken brushstrokes that barely convey forms, pure and unblended colors, an emphasis on the effects of light, and a depiction of

modern life. They style seemed highly casual in comparison to the defined and realistic style of painting that had previously dominated. The Impressionists also used bright colors, a departure from the sober color palate that dominated much of traditional artistic styles. The subjects of the impressionists were not mythological figures or Biblical stories, but scenes from modern life. Impressionist art explored capturing a moment in time, like a snapshot. Both suburban and rural subjects were popular, as well as landscapes and nature paintings.

The Dance Class, Edgar Degas, 1874. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Young Woman Seated on a Sofa, Berthe Morisot, ca. 1879. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Impressionists had a fluid membership and organized eight exhibitions between 1874 and 1886. By the last exhibition in 1886, most artists had moved on from the Impressionist style and were exploring new methods of artistic style. Artists like Georges Seurate and Paul Signac adopted a technique based on small points of color, known as Neo-Impressionsim (also called Pointillism and Divisionism). Paul Gauguin worked in a style known as Primitivism, and Odilon Redon worked in Symbolism. While each of these artists had distinctly different styles, they are usually gathered under the umbrella of Post-Impressionism.

Post-Impressionism

As can be seen from the images below, the styles of Post-Impressionist artists vary widely. The Post-Impressionists broke away from the naturalism of Impressionism in the late 1880s and explored even more independent artistic styles. There was also a shift towards expressing emotions and deep symbolism as opposed to optical impressions. These early explorations of abstraction paved the way for the extreme modernist abstraction that took place in the early twentieth century. Some Post-Impressionist artists included Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Cézanne. These artists did not consider themselves part of a collective movement, and it was critic ad artist Roger Fry who categorized them as Post-Impressionists in 1910.

Le Chahut, Georges Seurat, 1889-90. Kröller Müller Museum.

Georges Seurat was at the forefront of the Post-Impressionist movement. His most famous work, *A Sunday Afternnon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte*, was exhibited in 1886 at the final Impressionist exhibition. His experimental style, known as Neo-Impressionism, was based on contemporary theories of optics and color. Other artists working in this style included Paul Signac, Maximilien Luce, and Henri-Edmond Cross. *(For more information on Seurat and Neo-Impressionism, see pages 10-13.)*

Two Tahitian Women, Paul Gauguin, 1899. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Paul Gauguin was another notable Post-Impressionist artist whose style developed out of Impressionist foundations. His style is defined by solid patches of simplified color, clearly defined forms, and a lack of perspective. His subject matter took on exotic themes as well as private and religious symbolism. Gauguin traveled extensively, searching for unindustrialized and simple lands where he could paint a pure way of life.

Still Life with a Ginger Jar and Eggplants, Paul Cézann, 1893-94. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Paul Cézanne became one of the most influential artists for the twentieth century, his work influencing the Cubists, Fauvists, and other avant-garde artists. He exhibited in the 1874 Impressionist exhibition, but his style was somewhat different than the traditional Impressionist technique. His artistic style developed throughout the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, as he explored different approaches to color and form. His mature style ignored the traditional rules of perspective, creating distorted images. He also explored the creation of depth, and many of his most celebrated works use a system of color gradations to build form and give a three-dimensional quality.

Wheat Field with Cypresses, 1889, Vincent van Gogh. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Vincent van Gogh, one of the most famous artists in history, is also considered a Post-Impressionist. His work is exemplified by thick, rapidly applied colors with dark and definitive outlines, restless lines, and distorted perspectives. He developed his highly emotional technique throughout the 1880s and his works would strongly influence the Fauvists (including Henri Matisse) and the German Expressionists. Although his career only spanned a decade, he produced almost 900 paintings and more than 100- works on paper. Towards the end of his life his work began to garner critical attention, but it was

only after his death by suicide in 1890 that he became regarded as one of the great artistic geniuses and a pivotal figure in the history of art.

France in the 1880s

<u>Timeline</u>
French Revolution- 1789-1792
First Republic (also known as the Directoire period)- 1792-1804
First Empire under Napoleon I- 1804-1814/15
Bourbon Restoration under Louis XVIII and Charles X- 1814/15-1830
July Revolution- 1830
July Monarchy under Luis Philippe I- 1830-1848
Revolution of 1848- 1848
Second Republic- 1848-1852
Second Empire under Napoleon III- 1852-1870
Third Republic- 1870-1940

As can be seen from this timeline, French history in the long nineteenth century (1789-1914) was a volatile and complicated period filled with several changes of government. All of these changes stem from the French Revolution, which overthrew the monarchy and the ways of life of the *ancien régime*. After the Revolution, the French went through several different types of government as it tried to regain stability. The Revolution continued throughout many years of the First Republic and a stable system of government was not fully in place until Emperor Napoleon came to power, turning France once again into a monarchy. After the fall of Napoleon the Bourbons, the family of Louis XVI which had ruled France since the 16th century, returned to power in a period known as the Bourbon Restoration. This was a constitutional monarchy, a system that gave more power to the people than previous monarchies. However, this regime was overthrown during the July Revolution in 1830. The next ruler was Louis Philippe I who ruled over a constitutional monarchy until he was overthrown by the Revolution of 1848. After the Revolution of 1848, France became a republic under the rule of President Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte. However, in 1851 he staged a coup and in 1852 officially declared himself Emperor Napoleon III, beginning he age of the Second Empire.

"Mademoiselles, I and my friend, we are but soldiers!"

The Second Empire, ruled by Napoleon III and his wife the Empress Eugenie was an authoritarian regime, and brought back much of the excesses of the 18th century. Empress Eugenie identified herself with ill-fated 18th century queen Marie Antoinette. The Second Empire came to an abrupt end in the 1870s after the disaster of the Franco-Prussian war.

In July 1870, war was declared between Prussia (now Germany) and France. This was an ENORMOUS disaster for the French, with the French troops being badly defeated within weeks forcing the surrender of Napoleon III on September 1. This marked the official fall of the Second Empire. The Prussians, however, continued aggressions and laid siege to Paris in January 1871. Shortly after the city surrendered. Napoleon III fled into exile in England with his family, where he died in 1873. This is why the Soldier tells the Celestes that some people think he should change his name.

The next government put in place was once again a parliamentary republic system, and the Third Republic was born. According to the French Constitutional Laws of 1875, the government consisted of a legislature of a Chamber of Deputies and a Senate, with a President serving as the head of state. This government continued until 1940, when France was defeated by Nazi Germany.

Government in the 1880s

From 1879 to 1887, the President of France was Jules Grévy, who is seen as the first truly republican President of France. His rule was mostly uneventful, save for a scandal involving his son-in-law, Daniel Wilson, in 1886. It was revealed that Wilson was trafficking in the awards for the Legion of Honour. While Grévy had no personal involvement in this scandal, his reputation was tarnished and on December 2, 1887 he was forced to resign.

"Changing. It keeps changing."

Paris was a place of great change in the late nineteenth century. One of the most major changes was the major overhaul given to the entire city, directed by Georges-Eugène Haussmann. Known as the Haussmannization of Paris, the project remodeled the city into the Paris we know today. This was the first major public works program commissioned by Napoleon III and ran from 1853 to 1927. Before Haussmann's renovation, Paris was still very much a medieval city with narrow roads and crowded neighborhoods. Haussmann demolished several of these neighborhoods, widened streets, and created boulevards, parks, fountains, and other large public spaces. In 1860 he annexed the suburbs of Paris to the main city, doubling the city in size. He also renovated the city's infrastructure, which included a new sewer system. Many buildings were renovated and many new building projects begun, such as the pavilions of Les Halles, the Church of Saint Augustin, and the Palais Garniet, home to the Paris Opera.

Work on the Eiffel Tower also began. It was meant to be the centerpiece for the 1889 Exposition Universelle, an enormous worlds fair that brought together delegations from all over the globe to celebrate the history of France as well as the latest advances in technology, art, and other fields. The first designs were drawn in 1884 but the project was debated over the next few years. A contract to make the tower was signed on January 8, 1887 and construction started a few weeks later.

The Industrial Revolution continued to push France towards modernity. The 1880s were part of what is known as the Second Industrial Revolution or the Technological Revolution. Mechanized production in factories brought a huge influx of people into the city to work the machines. Because an enormous variety of items were now able to be mass produced, they were more affordable to the middle and lower classes and more people were able to afford small luxuries ("And dust their knick-knacks,/Hundreds to the shelf"). There was rapid progress in the field of electrical science and engineering and

cities were increasingly powered by electricity. Railroads were built on a massive scale, allowing people to travel quickly and cheaply from place to place.

Fashion History

Paris Street; Rainy Day, Gustave Caillebotte, 1877. The Art Institute of Chicago. This painting is a good illustration of the homogenization of men's fashion in the nineteenth century.

Political cartoon from 1881.

The nineteenth century saw a general homogenization of men's fashion, with a dark suit being the main uniform of the bourgeois man throughout the century. Although to the untrained eye all 19th century suits look the same, there are subtle varieties in suits throughout each decade of the century. However, there certainly weren't the dramatic changes in fashion that can be seen in women's fashions. The plain suit came into being as a reaction to the French Revolution, which is when fashion became gendered. Fashion, considered superficial and silly, became relegated to women as men had more important things on their mind. There was an enormous variety of different types of suits, each suited to a particular time of day or activity. Even the evening suit had multiple manifestations, depending on the formality of the event.

Women's fashion, however, experienced extraordinary change throughout the century. The 1880s saw the Second Bustle Period, which featured an extreme silhouette with strong emphasis on the back.

Too Early, James Tissot, 1873. Guildhall Art Gallery.

Fashion plate from 1873.

To understand 1880s women's fashion, it is necessary to know what came before. The first half of the 1870s is what's known as the First Bustle Period. The emphasis was on the back and women wore bustles to create the extreme silhouette. The aesthetic was extremely feminine with soft curves and lighter colors dominating. Ruffles, bows, and flowers were popular decorations on the highly elaborate confections. The paintings of James Tissot from the early 1870s (see above) perfectly capture this aesthetic.

Fashion Plate from 1880.

The second half of the 1870s and the early 1880s saw an extreme shift in fashion. The silhouette narrowed and all the emphasis was placed on the bottom back of the skirt which often extended in a train. The bodice became more shaped and molded and the color palate sobered. In contrast to the early 1870s, the mid 1870s/early 1880s saw a more controlled aesthetic.

Fashion plate from 1884.

The mid to late 1880s saw the return of the bustle. However, the aesthetic was markedly different than that of the early 1870s. The angle of the bustle was more extreme, jutting

out at a 90 degree angle from the back. Bodices were extremely molded and extended down past the hips, creating a more controlled silhouette. A more sober color palate was popular and the decorations on gowns took on a sharper appearance (the whimsical ruffles of the first bustle period were replaced with precise pleats). The overall aesthetic is tight and controlled.

Coquelicots, La promenade, Claude Monet, 1873. Musée d'Orsay.

A Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte, Georges Seurat, 1884-86. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Consider the changing fashion aesthetic with the changes in art. The Impressionist paintings of the 1870s feature loose and free brush strokes and a color palate of bright and intense colors, similar to the loose and airy aesthetic of early 1870s fashion. Compare this with the Post-Impressionist aesthetic of *A Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte.* The brush strokes are controlled and precise and the stiff figures are far more harsh than the casual figures in the works of Impressionist artist like Monet. This compares with the structured, precise, and stiff silhouette of the mid to late 1880s.

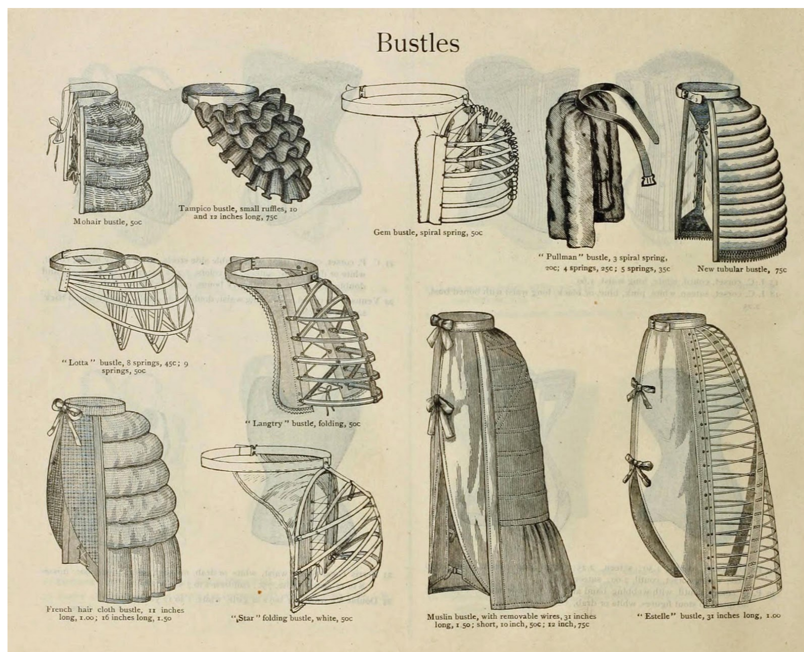


Illustration of bustles from the 1880s.

“Silly little simpering shopgirls…”

The department store was born in Paris in the early nineteenth century. Le Bon Marché, the worlds first department store opened in 1838, but it wouldn’t be until the second half of the century that both Le Bon Marché and other department stores would fully take hold. In 1870 La Samaritaine, another famous department store, opened. The impact of the department store on the middle and lower classes was enormous. They were one-stop-shops for an enormous variety of goods which were sold at fixed and cheap prices, an enormous departure from the previous shopping experience. Mass production allowed such a wide variety of goods to be sold at such low prices. This is why there are two Celestes in *Sunday in the Park With George*. The shopgirls, who most likely work in a department store, are literally mass produced, just like the products they sell during the week.

The end of the nineteenth century also saw the beginning of mass produced fashion. Previously, all items of clothing were custom made. But by the 1880s there was a burgeoning ready-to-wear clothing industry and some items of clothing were beginning to be mass produced and ready to be bought off the rack. Innovations in synthetic dyes and fabrics also brought greater fabric options to the lower and middle classes. All of this allowed the middle and lower classes greater opportunities to engage in style and fashion than ever before. With the rise of the department store there was also a feminization of the work force, as mass forces of women worked to sell the items in Le Bon Marché and La Samaritaine.

The department store was such a cornerstone of popular thought that Émile Zola set his novel, Au Bonheur des Dames (The Ladies’ Paradise), in one. Published in 1883, this novel was extremely popular and would have been a part of the zeitgeist of the world of *Sunday in the Park*.

What would Dot Wear?

Chemise/Shirt/Smock and Pantalettes or Combinations- This was the first layer of dress for every woman. Worn closest to the body, these garments were made of a soft cotton or linen and were washed often. The protected the fancier fabrics of outergarments from the oils and sweat of the body. The chemise is just a loose, shapeless type of long shirt or dress with thin straps. Pantalettes were bifurcated garments worn on the legs and usually extended down to the knees. They were crotchless, which made it a lot easier to go to the bathroom. Combinations were another option for women and are exactly what they sound like—a one-piece combination of chemise and pantalettes, like a jumpsuit.

Chemise, pantalettes, corset, and bustle, 1880s. The Victoria and Albert Museum.

Corset- The corset was responsible for molding the body into the correct shape. Unlike what Hollywood may tell you, corsets were not tightly laced nor did they prohibit breathing. They are given their shape by boning made of either whalebone or, by this point in history, most likely steel. Each boning was called a stay, hence "the tip of the stay, right under the tit".

Bustle- Bustles of the 1880s gave the body the correct silhouette. They were often made from strips of steel, padding, and/or thick ruffles.

Chemise, pantalettes, corset, and bustle, 1880s. The Ohio State University Historic Costume and Textiles Collection.

Petticoat- Worn over the bustle, this would smooth the lines that may be created by all of the understructure. Sometimes could be worn under the corset.

Bodice and Skirt- Dresses were made of two pieces, the bodice and the skirt. The bodice was tightly molded to the body and created one smooth line from top to bottom when a woman was viewed from the front. The skirt was often highly elaborate and decorated with pleats, fringe, and draped swags of fabric.

1884 evening dress in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Hat- When outdoors, a woman would always wear her head covered. Hats in the 1880s often had tall crowns, similar to a top hat, and were decorated with feathers and flowers.

Fashion plate from 1885.

What would Georges Wear?

Drawers and Undershirt- Bifurcated garments which covered the legs, could be long or short. They were usually made from cotton or linen and were washed often. When it was cold out men could have a flannel undershirt and pair of drawers.

Drawers from the 1890s. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Shirt- A white, long sleeved, button down shirt was the next layer for menswear. Shirt collars were a separate item of clothing and attached to the top back of the shirt. Collars were separate items of clothing and attached to the top back of shirts.

Man in an ascot, 1880s.

Necktie or cravat- Neckties could be tied in a variety of ways depending on the occasion and the personal taste of the man. The ascot was a particularly popular style in the 1880s.

Waistcoats featured in an advertisement from 1894.

Day suit, ca. 1880. LA Count Museum of Art.

Suit- The parts of a suit were a jacket, trousers, and waistcoat. The style and color of suit changed depending on the time of day and the occasion. Suits were generally not colorful and came in shades of cream, black, brown, and gray.

Evening suit, ca. 1885. The Victoria and Albert Museum.

Hat- When outside, men would wear a hat. Like the suit, the style of hat reflected different times of day and occasion. Most popular during this period were the top hat and the bowler hat.

Illustration of men’s hats, ca. 1880s.

The Isle of La Grande Jatte Today

There are photos taken during a trip to Paris in July 2011. I visited the Isle of La Grande Jatte on a Sunday and, contrary to what George sings in "Lesson #8", the park is thriving and there were plenty of people out strolling on Sunday. There is no one spot where you can clearly see where Seurat set the painting, and the island is built up above the river so it would be impossible to sit on the banks and fish. That said, the park is still a peaceful haven away from the bustle of central Paris, and has plenty of walking paths, benches, and even houses and restaurants.