

Unit snapshot: Brushstrokes of a Brief Moment

Painting a Brief Moment: Impressionist Brushwork Meets Munnings.

Alfred Munnings, while not strictly an Impressionist in the French tradition, exemplifies the influence of British Impressionism through his loose brushwork, plein air painting, and a keen interest in light.



Figure 1. Alfred Munnings, *A Canadian Trooper and his Horse (Unfinished)*, 1918, oil on canvas, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

Core inquiry question

How can Impressionist ideas about perception and their brushwork help us to capture a brief moment in history or everyday life?

Anchor resources

- **History/context:** "[Impressionism: Art and Modernity](#)," The Met.
- **Technique:** "[Impressionist Painting Techniques: BRUSHWORK \(Part 2 of 5\)](#)"
- **Catalyst artwork:** Alfred Munnings, *A Canadian Trooper and his Horse (Unfinished)*, 1918

Culminating task

Students will create an original painting of a brief moment (historic or contemporary) using Impressionist brushwork strategies, and write a short artist statement connecting:

1. A concept from the Met essay,
2. at least one brushwork tactic from the video, and
3. What they borrowed/challenged from Munnings' treatment of the moment.

Inquiry model

1. **Engage** – Explore the Munnings exhibition and meet the Impressionists; define "a brief moment."
2. **Explore** – Research Impressionism's ideas (light, modern life, speed, broken colour) + study brushwork.
3. **Explain** – Technique labs; thumbnails translating Munnings into Impressionist handling.
4. **Extend** – Plan and paint students' own "brief moment."
5. **Evaluate** – Critique, curate, and publish (mini exhibition or digital gallery).

Lesson-by-lesson plan (8–10 classes)

Lesson 1 — Catalyst & Questions

Focus: Why this moment? Why this brushwork?

Hook: Project Munnings' *A Canadian Trooper and his Horse (Unfinished)* (1918).

Question: In your sketchbook, answer the following questions:

- *What is the "brief moment"?*
- *Where's the light?*
- *What emotions are here but not said?*

Class Discussion.

Mini-lecture: Who Munnings was; why his war "moments" matter.

Inquiry Launch: Students generate 'Need-to-Know' questions about Impressionism, brushwork, and translating war/modern moments into paint.

Exit Ticket: "Define 'a brief moment' in 1–2 sentences."

Products: Question wall, sketchbook notes.

Lesson 2 — Impressionism: history, modernity, looking fast

Resource: Met essay ([Impressionism: Art and Modernity](#)).

Task: In groups, students jigsaw sections

Sections to study:

- Urban leisure
- Sketch-like finish
- Plein air painting
- Modernity
- Light & optics

Divide the class into groups and assign each group a specific topic (or allow them to choose their own).

- Group A studies urban leisure (how artists depicted café life, streets, etc.)
- Group B studies plein air (painting outdoors, capturing natural light)
- Group C studies light & optics (scientific influences on colour and perception)
- Group D studies sketch-like finish (loose brushwork and spontaneity)
- Group E studies modernity (themes of change, urban life, and the modern world)

Each group will become an expert in their assigned topic and create a one-page visual synthesis. This will include three key ideas, two images, and one quote relevant to their work. At the end, each group will write a statement on **"What this means for how we might paint our moment."**

Students then "jigsaw":

They re-group so that each new group has one member from each expert team. Each student teaches their section to the rest of the group.

By the end, every student has learned about all the sections, not just the one they researched.

Lesson 3 — Brushwork clinic

Resource: [YouTube brushwork video](#)

Focus skills:

- Broken colour
- short loaded strokes
- softer edges
- visible mark-making
- speed

Demo + Drills:

- Paint a grey sphere using only short, directional strokes.
- Edge control drill: hard vs. soft vs. lost edges.
- Colour flickers: two complements side by side (no blending on canvas).

Connect back to Munnings:

- How did Munnings use brushstrokes to convey emotion in *A Canadian Trooper and his Horse (Unfinished)*, 1918?
- How did he depict the light?

Products: Technique swatches taped into sketchbooks with annotations.

Lesson 4 — Propose your "brief moment"

Students choose one of two paths:

1. Historical (WWI or another documented moment)
2. Contemporary (a present-day fleeting scene: a bus stop in rain, a hockey practice, a protest, a family kitchen at dinner time)

Deliverables:

- 1-paragraph concept statement: the moment, the light, the emotion, why Impressionist brushwork serves it.
- Reference collection: 3–5 images (own photographs, archival photos, or stills)
- Palette plan (inspired by Impressionists): dominant temperature, accent colour (s).
- Brushwork plan: Which techniques from Lesson 3 will they deliberately feature?
Teacher check-in for feasibility, references, and ethical use of images.

Lessons 5–14: Painting days

Structure each studio day:

1. Work time with teacher coaching.
2. peer check-ins focusing on:
 - Is the "brief moment" precise?
 - Where is the light?
 - Are the strokes doing the storytelling?

Ongoing evidence: Process photos, notes on changes, palette swatches taped to sketchbook.

Lesson 15 — Artist statements & final critique

Artist statement must cite:

- 1 idea from the Met essay that influenced their approach.
- 1 brushwork technique from the video they used intentionally.
- 1 connection or contrast to Munnings' *A Canadian Trooper and his Horse (Unfinished)*, 1918 (e.g., "He captured pause; I captured acceleration" / "He retained tighter drawing; I let edges dissolve").

Critique format:

- Gallery walk + 2 Questions / 1 Insight feedback slips.

Materials

- Acrylic or oil paints (encourage limited palette to focus on temperature & value)
- Assorted brushes (include brights & filberts for Impressionist strokes)
- Viewfinders, palette knives for broken colour, gessoed boards or canvas paper
- Access to the Met essay, YouTube video, and Munnings PDF (projected or printed details)

Quick teacher cheat sheet (talking points to anchor the unit)

- Met essay → Ideas: modernity, speed, sensory immediacy, painting, *how it feels to look*
- Video → Techniques: visible mark, broken colour, edges, paint load, speed
- Munnings → Catalyst: capturing a specific, transient pause in wartime; students translate that *specificity* into their brief moment, but with Impressionist optics & gesture

Visual Arts Assessment Rubric – Art 10/20/30 (Edit as Necessary)

Dimension (with Direct Curricular Connection)	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Beginning
Inquiry and Research Art 30 – Encounters: Research selected artists and periods to discover factors in the artists' environments that influenced their personal visions. Art 20 – Articulate and Evaluate: Understanding styles or artistic movements related to visual studies is part of developing critical abilities.	Synthesizes the Met essay and video to drive original, thoughtful visual decisions; demonstrates deep understanding of artistic and historical context.	Accurately references ideas and techniques from sources and applies them meaningfully.	Some reference to sources; the application lacks depth or clarity.	Minimal or unclear reference to research sources; weak connection to artwork.
Planning and Process Art 10 – Compositions: Solve teacher-directed problems of unity and emphasis. Art 20 – Compositions: Chance occurrences or accidental outcomes can influence the making of a work of art. Art 30 – Drawings: Explorations of a technical or creative nature may lead to highly personalized work sessions.	Demonstrates precise, iterative planning; visible learning and refinement through thumbnails, palettes, and revision based on critique.	Solid planning is evident, demonstrating thoughtful preparation and some revision.	Planning shows limited exploration or response to critique.	Minimal planning; lacks organization or thoughtful response to the task.
Technique (Impressionist Brushwork) Art 10 – Drawings: Tactile qualities of surfaces can be rendered through controlled use of line. Art 20 – Drawings: Control of proportion and perspective enhances the realism of subject matter in drawing. Art 30 – Drawings: A repertoire of drawing techniques is needed to express visual ideas.	Brushwork is intentional, expressive, and enhances mood, light, and form.	Techniques are controlled and support artistic intent.	Techniques are attempted but inconsistently applied.	The technique is lacking or shows minimal control and understanding.
Concept: "Brief Moment" Art 10 – Compositions (Organizations 2): Mood is created by tools like atmospheric perspective. Art 30 – Compositions (Components): The selection and presentation of perceptions, conceptions and experience as visual content for artworks is an important aim of the artist.	The moment is vivid, emotionally resonant, and time-bound; strong visual storytelling.	The moment is expressive and mostly clear, effectively communicating its purpose.	The moment is present but lacks development or clarity.	The moment is vague, generalized, or difficult to interpret.
Artist Statement Art 10 – Articulate and Evaluate: Discussing the components of composition is part of learning to talk about art. Art 20 – Articulate and Evaluate: Discussing the compositional relationships and effectiveness of components is part of learning to interpret one's own artwork. Art 30 – Articulate and Evaluate: Use the vocabulary and techniques of art criticism to analyze and evaluate their own works in relation to the works of professional artists.	Insightfully links the Met essay concept, brushwork video technique, and Munnings' work; shows strong self-awareness and justification of choices.	Clearly connects ideas and techniques to personal artwork and artistic influences.	Some relevant connections are made; they may lack depth or clarity.	The statement is unclear, incomplete, or lacks meaningful reflection.
Critique and Reflection Art 10 – Articulate and Evaluate: Discussing the components of composition is part of learning to talk about art. Art 30 – Relationships 2: Criteria such as originality, organization, technique, function and clarity of meaning may be applied in evaluating works of art.	Uses critique to make thoughtful and substantial revisions that significantly improve the work.	Responds to feedback with noticeable improvements.	Evidence of limited revision or engagement with critique.	Little or no change after critique; weak reflection or justification.