

# STEAM LESSON PLAN

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Grade Level Middle school (adaptable for lower and higher grades)

**INSPIRED BY** Mary Cassatt, *Woman Reading*

## PROJECT TITLE: Be Extraordinary

### DRIVING QUESTION

What is ordinary?

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Put these on the board or have students write them in a notebook/journal.

- *I will create a newspaper's front page.*
- *I will respond to the ordinary and make it extraordinary.*
- *I will present my thoughts about ordinary activities.*
- *I will connect the visual arts and musical arts.*

### CONTENT STANDARDS

[NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS](#)

[IOWA CORE STANDARDS](#)



Mary Cassatt (American, active in France, 1844–1926), *Woman Reading*, 1878–79, oil on canvas, 38 3/4 x 31 in. (98.4 x 78.7 cm), Museum purchase, 1943.38

### THE FOUR C'S FOR STEAM CAREER READINESS SKILLS

- **Critical Thinking:** students will develop their own definitions of ordinary and extraordinary.
- **Creativity:** students will use the components of a newspaper to interpret a work of art and the artist.
- **Collaboration:** students will work together to create music with found objects.
- **Communication:** students will what they think is an ordinary activity through a self-portrait.

**VOCABULARY:** extraordinary, newspaper terms, ordinary, portraiture, sitter/subject

**RESOURCES:** [Cassatt Teaching Poster](#); [Cassatt Pinterest board](#); [Nelson Teacher Resource Center](#)

- Resource - [Mary Stevenson Cassatt \(1844–1926\) Essay, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Met](#)
  - Resource - ["Reading" Portraiture Guide for Educators, National Portrait Gallery](#)
  - Resource - [Free Blank Newspaper Template for Kids, aguse.info](#)
  - Resource - [News Report Organizer, worksheetplace.com](#)
  - Resource - [Looking at Newspapers: Introduction \(Part Two\), Media Smarts](#)
  - Video - [Inside Out Meet Your Emotions Joy, Sadness, Anger, Disgust, Fear, Kalajoseph20183, YouTube](#)
  - Video - [Debussy plays Debussy | La Cathédrale Engloutie \(The Sunken Cathedral\), Prélude Book I, No.10 \(1913\), Adagietto, YouTube](#)
  - Video - [Found Object Instruments \(music video\), glankrudolph, YouTube](#)
  - Video - [Students Turn Everyday Objects Into Something Musical, USC School of Music](#)
- Preview all resources before sharing with students.

## PROCEDURE

**Overview:** Using Mary Cassatt's *Woman Reading* (1878–1879), students will consider ordinary vs extraordinary while learning about newspapers.

**Engage:** Show students Cassatt's *Woman Reading* and ask them to reflect on the picture by asking what words they would use to describe it. Students may write about the work or you can discuss the observations and perhaps you will organically get to the word "ordinary."

### Ask students...

- Do you take photos of anything ordinary?
- What makes them ordinary?
- Do you ever catch anything extraordinary?
- What makes it extraordinary?
- What techniques can (or do) you use to make an ordinary photo extraordinary?

### Deliverables: Tell students they will...

- Front page of a newspaper, interpreting the Cassatt's *Woman Reading*
- Make an ordinary portrait
- Create extraordinary music with found instruments

**Art Talk:** Together, and using the looking strategies from the *"Reading" Portraiture Guide for Educators* (National Portrait Gallery, 2016), examine Cassatt's *Woman Reading*. Use the Cassatt teaching poster to share more information about the artist and her subjects.

- Another option is to read the portrait like a newspaper. Provide students with a graphic organizer to collect their thoughts.

### Ask students...

- What is the sitter doing?
- Why is it significant that the artist painted a woman reading?
- What does reading a newspaper tell us about the sitter?
- How do you learn about current events?
- Do you read the newspaper?
- Who do you know who reads a newspaper?

### Description of Activity:

Take what students discovered in the art talk and have them create a front page of a newspaper to describe the painting and the artist.

- Bring in a newspaper and talk about the parts of a front page.
- As a small writing exercise, have students take an ordinary headline and turn it into an extraordinary one.
- Students may want to research how the delivery of news have evolved over time (think of centuries of news and technology advancements).

### Ask students...

- What is the headline?
- Would Cassatt's painting be on the front page? Why or why not?
- What types of stories are on the front page?
- What constraints did women like Cassatt have during the late 19th century?

- How could Cassatt be a pioneer for other female artists?
- What makes Cassatt extraordinary?

Students may produce their front page using various art materials or if available, they can use InDesign or MS Publisher to lay it out on a computer.

- Consider having students work in small groups to produce it for an experience working on a journalism team.
- Talk about how newspapers are produced (can even talk about how paper is made and produce paper).
- Share front pages with classmates and compare the language of the headlines and angles of stories.

For elementary students, using the movie *Inside Out* (Pixar, 2015), have students talk about Cassatt.

- What might each of the characters—Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger, and Disgust—have to say?
- Consider the time period in which the artist lived. What frustrations did Cassatt have, perhaps, as a woman Impressionist?
- Have students describe each character and then select and draw their favorite one.
- Using their artwork, they can talk about what was "inside" Cassatt

Tell students it is their turn to draw a portrait of something seemingly ordinary.

- What may seem ordinary today that people 100 years from now will see as extraordinary for the 2000s?

**Ask students...**

- What does ordinary look like to you?
- What color is it?
- What is its shape?
- How can you turn your picture into something extraordinary?
- How do journalists turn the ordinary into extraordinary?

Shift the discussion to music. At times, musical arts movements paralleled the visual arts, like Impressionism.

- Ask students what they think is ordinary music and extraordinary music.
- Discuss how artist Claude Monet's (1840–1926) Rouen Cathedral series informed composer Claude Debussy's (1862–1918) *The Sunken Cathedral* (1913). Are there more examples?
- Compare hip hop (or other types of music) to Debussy—how are they similar?

Now it is time to make some music.

- Use found sounds or create instruments from recycled materials.
- The ordinary items around us become extraordinary instruments, capable of creating music.
- Have students consider the density of sound while creating beats.

**Closing:** Show students Cassatt's *Woman Reading* portrait again. Ask them to share words they would now use to describe it.

**Assessment:** Have students write their own definitions of ordinary and extraordinary citing examples from this lesson. Ask them to share how this changed or did not change how they view their world.

**STEAM LESSON PLAN** Joslyn Art Museum uses the Nebraska Department of Education's STEM Approach as a guide, but we took the liberty of adding the "**A**" to emphasize the **ARTS**.

NDE's STEM Approach reflects an integrated and interdisciplinary philosophy to teaching and learning that emphasizes collaborative school-based, work-based, family-based, and community-based experiences as a context for helping students to master key competencies within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Teaching and learning resources, experiences, and example activities included within NDE's STEM Approach serve as a standards-based framework for supporting the engagement of students in hands-on, authentic, and contextual learning experiences that provide students with the opportunity to learn STEM content while promoting essential career readiness skills, including communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.

NDE's STEM Approach strives for compatibility with all content-areas, all grade levels, and all career clusters, not just those traditionally defined as STEM.