

Henri! Sargent! Savage!

Read All About It!

"Feel the dignity of a child. Do not feel superior to him, for you are not."—Robert Henri

Basic Information

Grade Level: 6–8

Subject Area: Visual Arts, Social Studies, U.S. History

Time Required: 3 or 4 sessions

Student Skills Developed: Making inferences and drawing conclusions, comparison and contrast, narrative writing, evidence-based learning, decision making, interpreting written information

Artworks

Newark Museum Collection

Robert Henri

Willie Gee, 1904

oil on canvas

31¼ x 25¼ in.

Newark Museum, Anonymous gift, 1925 25.111

Augusta Savage

Gamin, ca. 1929

painted plaster

9 in.

Newark Museum Collection

Purchase 2005 Helen McMahon Brady Cutting Fund—2005.60

National Endowment for the Humanities, *Picturing America Collection*

John Singer Sargent

Portrait of a Boy, 1890

oil on canvas, 56 1/8 x 39½ in.

Carnegie Museum of Art, *Picturing America Collection*

Introduction

With even a brief glance at John Singer Sargent's *Portrait of a Boy*, we know that this child of the Gilded Age led a protected, comfortable life. By

comparing it to Robert Henri's portrait of *Willie Gee* and Augusta Savage's *Gamin*, both poor African American newspaper boys, students will learn that life was not easy for all children of this era. In this lesson, students will analyze Progressive reformers' photographs and reports of early twentieth-century child laborers. Students will create a portrait of a child laborer and write an imaginary diary entry for this child.

Guiding Questions

- + How do artists communicate personality and identity in portraits?
- + What was life like for early twentieth-century child laborers?

Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- + Contrast the lives of poor and affluent children of the second Industrial Revolution.
- + Explain Progressives' concerns about child labor.
- + Create a portrait that represents a late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century child laborer.
- + Write a description of what a child laborer's day may have been like during the nineteenth or twentieth century.

Background Information for the Teacher

John Singer Sargent

See 12a, John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of a Boy*, in [Picturing America Educators Resource Book](#) for a description of Sargent's life, this painting, and how he and Augustus Saint-Gaudens created portraits of each other's families. Questions for guiding a careful study of Sargent's *Portrait of a Boy* are also in the Resource Book.

Robert Henri

Robert Henry Cozad was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1865. Because of a scandal involving his father, he changed his name to Robert Earle Henri (pronounced *hen-rye*). From 1886 to 1888, he studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, in Philadelphia, before relocating to Paris in 1888 to attend the Académie Julian. After a year in Paris, where he began experimenting with Impressionism, he returned to Philadelphia to complete his schooling.

Henri became a respected artist, teaching at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, the New York School of Art, and the Art Students League. Edward Hopper, Rockwell Kent, Adolph Gottlieb, and Stuart Davis were among his many students.

He was a leader of the New York Ashcan School. These artists painted New York City's back alleys and changing landscape as immigrants and migrants poured into the city. Henri died of cancer, in New York, in 1929.

Newsboy Willie Gee was part of the Great Migration, the human tide of southern African Americans migrating into northern cities after the Civil War and during the early twentieth century. They sought higher pay and better living conditions. Willie Gee and his mother, a former slave, had only recently moved to New York from Virginia when Henri painted his portrait. Willie delivered the daily newspaper to Henri's studio.

Augusta Savage

African American sculptor Augusta Fells Savage was born in 1892 in Green Cove Springs, Florida. As a child, she enjoyed creating small clay figures. When her family moved to West Palm Beach, Florida, the principal of her school encouraged her art making, even paying her to teach modeling when she was a high school senior. In 1921, she studied at the art school Cooper Union, in New York. Although she was married for just a short time to James Savage, she kept his name after they divorced. She received a fellowship to study art in Paris and won awards in two salons. During the Great Depression, she ran a basement studio in Harlem. Jacob Lawrence was one of her students. Over time, her studio evolved into the Harlem Community Art Center. Eventually, she moved to Saugerties, New York. Throughout her life, she fought for equal rights for women and minorities. She died of cancer, in New York, in 1962.

Savage's nephew was probably the model for her 1929 sculpture *Gamin*. He lived nearby in Harlem. The title *Gamin* comes from the French word for street urchin. This sculpture became an icon for the Harlem Renaissance, a flowering of black culture centered in Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s.

Childhood in the Great Transformation Era

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, educators and parents began to consider childhood as a critical stage in human development. They understood that children were not only the future of the United States but also its continued progress. Children's toys, games, and books began to be manufactured during this "age of the child." Theories about nurturing and educating children proliferated. Wealthy parents commissioned artists like Sargent to paint their children's portraits.

Children in affluent families enjoyed leisure activities, including picnicking, tennis, golf, horseback riding, and traveling with their families. These upper-class children were generally well educated, often attending boarding school. At the other end of the economic spectrum, however, poor children worked long hours in dangerous jobs in factories and mines or, like Willie Gee, hawking newspapers on city streets. Some writers thought that these jobs

built character and strengthened business acumen, but Progressive reformers were concerned about children acquiring bad habits from the street—such vices as gambling, betting, keeping late hours, and irregular school attendance. Reformers documented children’s work and living conditions in photographs, newspaper articles, and government bulletins. All these heightened public awareness of the plight of poor children working in dangerous conditions and eventually resulted in the passage of child labor laws during the early twentieth century.

Preparing to Teach This Lesson

- + Review the lesson plan and the websites used throughout.
- + Locate and bookmark suggested materials and websites.
- + Download and print out documents you will use, and duplicate copies as necessary for student viewing.
- + Students can access the primary source materials and some of the activity materials via the EDSITEment LaunchPad.

Lesson Plan Activities

1. Look and Think Worksheet
 2. Newsies
 3. Drawing Portraits of Child Workers
- Assessment: Child Worker’s Diary: My Day

Lesson Activity 1

Look and Think Activity

Each student should have a good view of *Willie Gee*, by Robert Henri, and *Portrait of a Boy*, by John Singer Sargent either on a computer, a projection, or as printed color copies. Before discussing these paintings, have students study them silently and write their answers on *Worksheet 1 Look and Think*. Use the worksheet questions and students' answers as a framework for class discussion about Henri's and Sargent's portraits. Encourage students to notice details that suggest the boys' personalities, attitudes, and relative affluence.

Look and Think Worksheet Answer Key

1. Glance briefly at Sargent's and Henri's paintings. What are some of the first words that come to mind when you see these paintings?

Students may share their first impressions with the class.

2. What do you know about these boys from these paintings?
Approximately how old is each boy in each portrait?

a. *Although it's difficult to tell exactly how old each boy was, we know that Homer Saint-Gaudens was ten when Sargent painted him. Willie Gee appears to be about the same age or maybe younger.*

- b. What is the ethnicity or race of each boy?

The boy in Sargent's painting, Homer Saint-Gaudens, was the son of the prominent American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, who was born in Ireland. Therefore, Homer Saint-Gaudens is Irish American (Caucasian). Willie Gee is African American. His mother had been a slave who moved from Virginia to New York City.

- c. How does each boy's jacket fit? What do you think this suggests?

Homer's sleeves fall short of his wrists. Perhaps he has been growing rapidly. Could his mother still think of him as a little boy? Willie's jacket seems too large for him. Did he inherit it from someone else?

- d. Which boy's jacket do you think is warmer?

Willie Gee's coat seems heavier than Homer's velvet one. Willie needed sensible clothing as he sold newspapers on New York streets. He delivered the newspaper to Robert Henri's studio.

3. Try posing like each boy. Notice the tilt of each boy's head, his hands, eyes, and the set of his mouth. What do the poses suggest about each boy's attitude toward having his portrait painted? What could he have said when the artist asked him to pose?

Homer, with his dangling feet, slumped shoulders, and unhappy expression seems bored by these hours of sitting still. Willie seems more positive about posing, and probably did not pose as long. Henri's painting is much smaller than Sargent's, and was probably painted or sketched more rapidly.

4. Aside from the boys, who and what else is in each painting? What do the other objects and persons in these paintings suggest about these boys?

In Sargent's painting, the boy's mother is reading a book aloud to entertain him. The boy sits in an oversized ornate chair on a patterned rug. These suggest the protectiveness and richness of the home. Willie Gee holds an apple that could refer to the fruit that aid organizations often gave to underprivileged children. Also, newsboys were given apples for nourishment. Because apples were an inexpensive food that even the poor could afford, they became a symbol of democracy.

5. When you look at each painting, what part of it do you notice first? Consider how each artist directs your gaze toward that focal point.

Homer's pale pink face and white cravat contrast sharply against the dark background. We are drawn first to the glistening whites in Willie Gee's eyes and then to his white collar.

6. How have both artists suggested the form of the faces?

They both paint shadows and highlights on the faces. Note the prominent highlights on Willie's forehead and lips.

7. What do you think each artist wanted to communicate in his painting? How well do you think he got his message across?

Both artists suggest the personality and attitude of the boy. Their clothing also indicates how rich or poor they were. Henri spoke of the dignity of children. Encourage students to explain how they decided on the effectiveness of each artist's communication.

8. Who would want to own a painting like this?

Sargent painted this double portrait as a personal gift to Homer's father, Augustus Saint-Gaudens. But who would want and could afford to purchase a noble portrait of a poor newsboy?

DEPRESSION ERA FAMILIES

LOOK AND THINK

Name: _____ Date: _____

Spend a few minutes looking at Robert Henri's *Willie Gee* and John Singer Sargent's *Portrait of a Boy*.

1. Glance briefly at Sargent's and Henri's paintings. What are some of the first words that come to mind when you see these paintings?
2. What do you know about these boys from the paintings?
 - a. Approximately how old is each boy? What makes you say that?
 - b. What is the ethnicity or race of each boy?
 - c. Describe their clothes. How do they compare?
 - d. How does each boy's jacket fit? What do you think this might suggest?
 - e. Which boy's jacket do you think is warmer?
3. Try posing like each boy. Notice the tilt of each boy's head, his hands and eyes, and the set of his mouth. What does the pose suggest about each boy's attitude toward having his portrait painted? What do you think he said when the artist asked him to pose?
4. Besides the boys, who and what else is in each painting? What do the other objects and persons in these paintings suggest about the boys?
5. When you look at each painting, which part do you notice first? Consider how each artist directs your gaze toward that focal point.
6. How have both artists suggested the form of the faces?
7. What do you think each artist wanted to communicate in his painting? How well do you think he got his message across?
8. Who do you think would want to own a painting like this?

Lesson Activity 2



Newsies

Artwork Analysis

Students will view the Newark Museum's image of Augusta Savage's *Gamin*, 1929, a nine-inch plaster bust of a boy, and relate it to the lives of early twentieth-century newsboys.

- + While viewing the sculpture, ask students to describe this boy's personality from the set of his head and hat.
- + *(He exhibits the streetwise confidence of a gamin, or street urchin.)*
- + Have students compare *Gamin* to Henri's *Willie Gee*.
- + Ask them how these artworks are alike and different. *(Both are portraits of African American boys, but this bust is of a slightly older boy wearing a cap set at a jaunty angle, while Willie Gee's head is bare. Gamin wears a collared shirt but no jacket.)*
- + Explain that a *bust* is a sculpture of a person's head, shoulders, and chest.

Primary Source Documents

Distribute the excerpt from *The Boy's Life on the Street* from *The Newsboys of Milwaukee*, a report written by Alexander Fleisher in 1911. After students have read the excerpt, ask them to describe some of the things that newsboys did. What did the author consider to be the problems in this job? Explain that usually newsboys paid for their bundle of papers, and if they did not sell the papers, they lost money. Tips were an important part of their income. Reports such as this and Lewis W. Hine's photographs eventually led to the implementation of child labor laws.

Show students Lewis W. Hine's photographs of early twentieth-century newsies, newsboys, from the Library of Congress

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=Lewis%20Hines%20newsies>.

- + Have students analyze one of Hine's photographs using the Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool
- + <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/primary-source-analysis-tool/>.
- + After reading Hine's captions and analyzing scenes that he selected to photograph, ask students to describe how Hine felt about young boys selling newspapers on city streets.

PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT

THE BOY'S LIFE ON THE STREET BY ALEXANDER FLEISHER

NOVEMBER 1, 1911

Milwaukee is a rapidly growing industrial city, the greater part of whose business life is centered within a few blocks. The crowds have a tone slightly different, especially in the evening, from those of our eastern cities, but the fascination of the street is the same. There is life all about and continual excitement, even if it takes the form of dodging trolley cars and automobiles. The boy meets a gang that he likes. He naturally enjoys excitement, change, novelty, and a congenial "bunch." These are found most easily on the business streets of our cities, and when we add the opportunity to make money and to be independent, there is little wonder that we find the newsboy in the heart of the city. Moreover, there are the added attractions of the brilliantly lighted shop windows at night, and the flashing electric signs to increase the already powerful fascination. It is hard to explain this "spirit of the street," but that there is something that attracts us all in anything that is moving and changing, is undoubtedly true and nowhere is it found to the same extent as on our down-town thoroughfares.

The boy goes into this excitement and has for his workshop a continually changing panorama and for his customers a continually changing stream of people. The day's work naturally starts either in the circulation department of the newspaper office, or on the street, buying from the wagons. Of the circulation offices little good can be said. The delivery office of one of the newspapers is under the pavement, in the basement of the building, and is a small, narrow room adjoining the presses. There is practically no ventilation and the wooden stairs leading to the street would not give sufficient facilities for exit in case of fire. Before the time for the coming out of the various editions, quite a number of boys congregate—mostly the young boys. It would be impossible to give an accurate estimate of the number, since it is continually changing—the boys going out after they get their papers—and varying with the clemency or inclemency of the weather, the season of the year, and the liveliness of business on the street. Another distributing office is also a basement room, but well lighted by large windows and much cleaner and more wholesome. This paper sells to more of the younger boys because it "trusts"—gives credit to—more than any other. These companies have the largest circulation. The others are primarily "home papers" and are sold through boys operating regular routes.

In the offices there are gatherings of boys older and younger, and although some of the conversation is not fit to be repeated, it is, for the most part, the bravado spirit that crops out, and the stories tend to the ridiculous rather than to the vulgar. There is continual "rough-house" and horse-play and shoving, but it is for the most part given and taken good naturedly.

The great trouble is the gambling that is permitted in these places. Most of the boys have stated that there is a great deal of gambling, "shooting craps" and "latching" about and in the offices. This is natural, when we consider that there is a group of boys with nothing to do and having considerable time on their hands and money in their pockets. There is undoubtedly a great deal more in the alleys around the offices, than in the offices themselves. The greatest amount takes place just before the noon editions of the paper come out, especially on Saturday; and after 7 o'clock in the evening. There is no excuse for the boys being at the offices at the latter time, for they settle up with the street men and it is only the street men that are to report back at the office at that time. They should not be allowed on or about the premises at that time at all.

When the edition comes from the press, the boys line up before the grating and receive their papers and rush out. After the appearance of the papers the place takes on a business-like air and everything goes with snap and order. The boys seldom count them and simply take their bundles, relying on the accuracy of the circulation manager or his assistants.

The other form of distributing is from wagons or automobiles in charge of boys about 21, employees of the newspaper companies, known as the "street men," who supply the newsboys. The boys then rush to their various corners or if they are not allowed on the corners, begin by selling up and down the street.

The Boy's Life on the Street

Experiences of newsboys working on the streets of Milwaukee.

THE NEWSBOYS OF MILWAUKEE (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Bureau of Economy and Efficiency, Bulletin No. 8, November 1911), Alexander Fleisher, 11/1/1911

[http://www.mu.edu/cgi-](http://www.mu.edu/cgi-bin/cuap/db.cgi?db=default&uid=default&view=1&db=default&uid=default&Content=The+Boy%27s+Life+on+the+Street&ww=on&bool=and&sb=&CatAbbrev=---&Neighborhood=---&Decade=---&nh=25&mh=1)

[bin/cuap/db.cgi?db=default&uid=default&view=1&db=default&uid=default&Content=The+Boy%27s+Life+on+the+Street&ww=on&bool=and&sb=&CatAbbrev=---&Neighborhood=---&Decade=---&nh=25&mh=1](http://www.mu.edu/cgi-bin/cuap/db.cgi?db=default&uid=default&view=1&db=default&uid=default&Content=The+Boy%27s+Life+on+the+Street&ww=on&bool=and&sb=&CatAbbrev=---&Neighborhood=---&Decade=---&nh=25&mh=1)



Discussion

What was this author's attitude about newsboys' work?

What did he think were some of the problems with their job?

Lesson Activity 3

Child Labor Portraits

Students create a portrait representing a child laborer from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. They may draw or photograph their subject.

Collect clothing for costumes and props, such as hats, old jackets, apples, and a copy of the Newark Museum's image of a newspapers. Students may take turns posing as newsboys or other child laborers. In a darkened room, shine a bright spotlight on one side of the student model's face. Point out the darkest shadows and brightest highlights. Have students create portraits by photographing or sketching these value contrasts. Students may review typical human facial proportions from a handout like "Standard Human Facial Proportions—Student Checklist" at Connecticut State Department of Education

http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/VisualArts/12HandoutJ_Facial_Proportions_Gr8.pdf.

If drawing or photographing student models is not an option, students may research and print out a historical photograph of a newsboy or other child laborer from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to use as a subject for their diary entry in this lesson's assessment.

Matching Diary Entry

Have students write an imaginary diary entry for a day in the life of the late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century child laborer whose portrait they drew. They should include information about the job he did, the dangers of the job, and the reasons he had to work. This information should be based on what the students have learned from the previous lessons. Display these diary entries with the drawings or photographs of their subject.

Extending the Lesson

- + Art students may create a plaster, papier-mâché, or clay bust similar to Augusta Savage's, based on their drawing or photograph of a child laborer.
- + Robert Henri created portraits of children from several cultures including Native Americans and Irish and African Americans. Students may research other portraits of children by Robert Henri.
- + Students can learn more about the life of Homer Saint-Gaudens, the boy in Sargent's painting, on the [Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site's](#) website. After he attended Harvard, he became a respected art museum director, writer, and art critic. They may see the portrait of [Violet](#), John Singer Sargent's sister, that Augustus Saint-Gaudens sculpted in exchange for Sargent's portrait of his son, Homer Saint-Gaudens.

Resources

Selected NEH EDSITEment Websites

Library of Congress

www.loc.gov

Lewis W. Hine's photographs of early twentieth-century newsies

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=Lewis%20Hines%20newsies>

Primary Source Analysis Tool, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/primary-source-analysis-tool/>

Children wearing velvet suits in the style of Little Lord Fauntleroy

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001706354/resource/>

Newark Museum

<http://www.newarkmuseum.org>

12a, John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of a Boy*, Educators Resource Book and Image Gallery

[Picturing America](#)

<http://picturingamerica.neh.gov>

http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/educators.php?subPage=edu_guide

Picturing America on Screen, Cassett/Sargent—Mothers and Children

http://www.thirteen.org/picturing-america/#.UfWFkBZu_A4

Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site

National Park Services

<http://www.sgnhs.org/Augustus%20SGaudens%20CD-HTML/Busts/Homer.htm>

Violet Sargent

Smithsonian American Art Museum

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=21540>

Selected EDSITEment Lesson Plans

What's in a Picture? An Introduction to Subject in the Visual Arts

Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series: Removing the Mask

Portraits: I've Just Seen a Face

Other Useful Websites

New York Times—Kids Who Shouted the News

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/03/02/theater/20120302-newsboys.html>

Dan Barry narrates over a gallery of images and artifacts from the time when newsboys —“the town criers of the cities, street-hardened ragamuffins”—captured the country's imagination.

Children in Urban America Project

The Boy's Life on the Street

Experiences of newsboys working on the streets of Milwaukee.

THE NEWSBOYS OF MILWAUKEE (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Bureau of Economy and Efficiency, Bulletin No. 8, November 1911), Alexander Fleisher, 11/1/1911

<http://www.mu.edu/cgi-bin/cuap/db.cgi?db=default&uid=default&view=1&db=default&uid=default&Content=The+Boy%27s+Life+on+the+Street&ww=on&bool=and&sb=&CatAbbrev=---&Neighborhood=---&Decade=---&nh=25&mh=1>

Standard Human Facial Proportions—Student Checklist

Connecticut State Department of Education

http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/VisualArts/12HandoutJ_Facial_Proportions_Gr8.pdf

Standards Alignment

[NAES – VisArts – 5–8, 4](#) Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

[NAES – VisArts – 5–8, 6](#) Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Common Core ELA Standards

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2](#) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7](#) Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3](#) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.2](#) Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

Augusta Savage *Gamin*, ca. 1929

painted plaster

h: 9 in., Newark Museum Collection

Purchase 2005 Helen McMahon

Brady Cutting Fund 2005.60



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Robert Henri
Willie Gee, 1904

oil on canvas

31¼ x 25¼ in.

Newark Museum, Anonymous gift,
1925 25.111



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Humanities



John Singer Sargent
Portrait of a Boy,
1890

oil on canvas, 56 1/8 x 39 1/2 in.
Carnegie Museum of Art,
Picturing America Collection

 **NEWARK**
MUSEUM
always new.

 NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE
Humanities

