

#11779

DROPPING IN ON ROUSSEAU

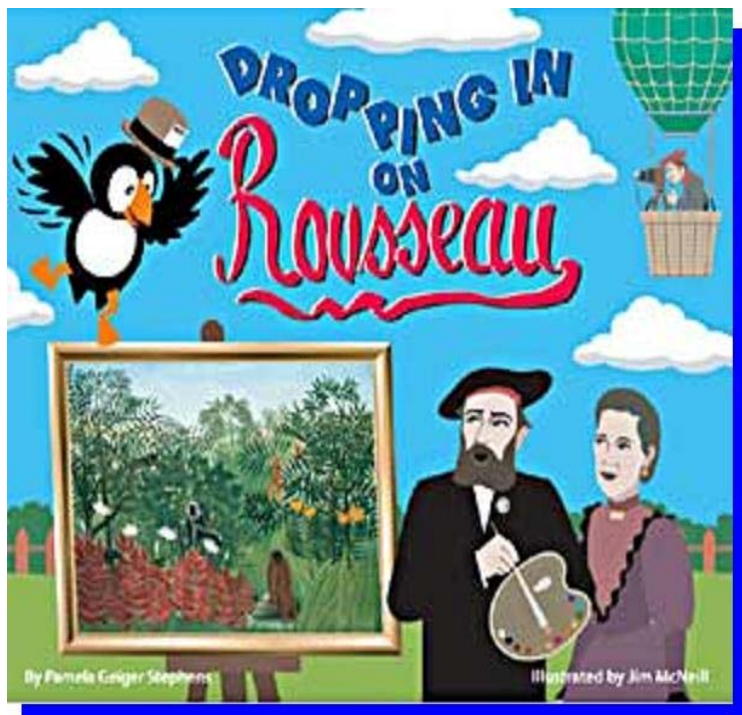
CRYSTAL PRODUCTIONS, 2002

Grade Level: 4–8

26 Minutes

Crystal
Productions

Art Education Resource Materials for
Elementary, Secondary, and College



CAPTIONED MEDIA PROGRAM RELATED RESOURCES

[#11820 DROPPING IN ON PICASSO](#)

[#11824 DROPPING IN ON MATISSE](#)

A Masterpiece

VIDEO VIEWING STRATEGIES

Dropping in on Rousseau is designed to be watched in segments or in its entirety. When viewing this or any video, it is important to remember the attention span of viewers. Select only the portions of the video that support the learning objectives to be taught.

Keep an eye on the background while watching *Dropping in on Rousseau*. Can you identify artists and elements of artworks by Rousseau and other artists that are shown throughout the video? Many of the background images underscore the idea that Rousseau was not as widely traveled as he sometimes claimed and suggest that the artist drew upon his Parisian surroundings as themes for his paintings.

QUESTIONING STRATEGIES

Questioning strategies in the visual arts, like any other content area, should be open ended and lead to discovery of the meaning of the artwork or the artist's intent. Leave room for a variety of reasoned responses. Supported answers should vary from student to student. To lead students in a thorough investigation of any work of art, begin with the specific and expand to the broad. The following is an example of a good questioning strategy:

1. What is the one most important object (action, person, shape, etc.) in the artwork?
2. How does the artist make this an important part?
3. Why would the artist choose to make this part important?
4. What do you think the artist is trying to tell the viewer?

PRODUCTION ACTIVITIES

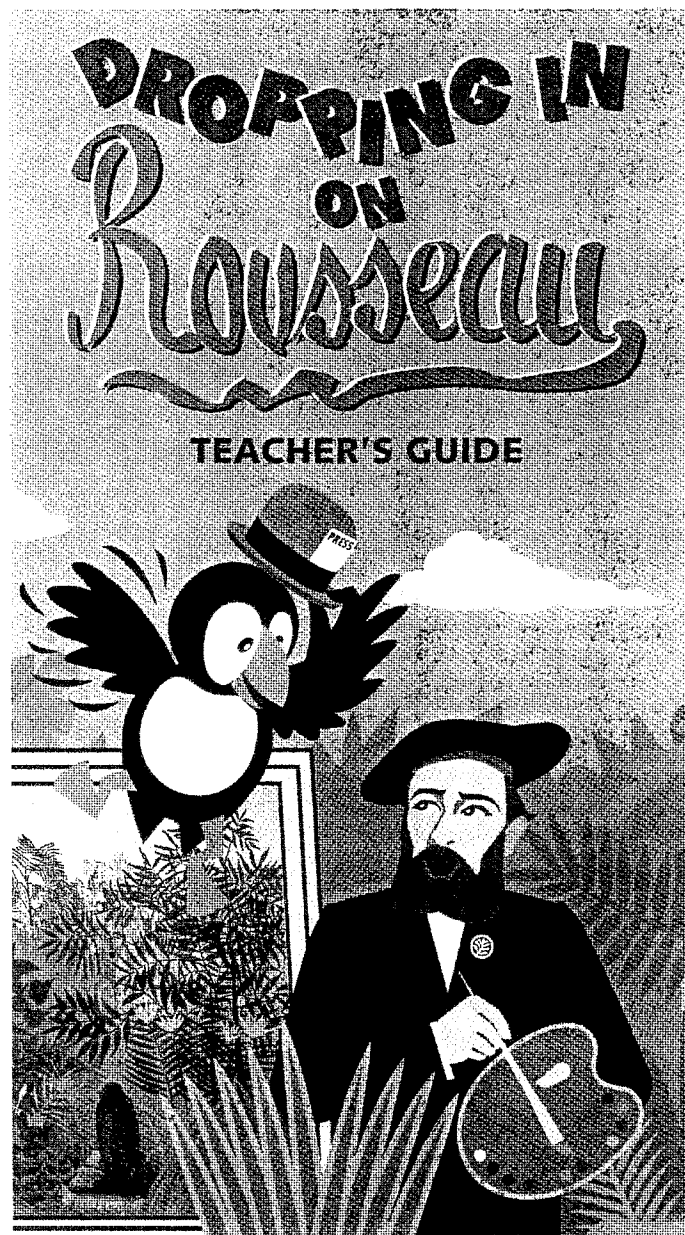
1. Provide an assortment of everyday objects. Explain that Rousseau sometimes used everyday objects (such as potted plants) in different ways to create his imaginary scenes. Ask students to select one object to exaggerate and use in a drawing about an imaginary world.
2. Extension of drawing lesson: Create 6 x 6-in. clay slabs about 1/2-in. thick. Recreate a portion of the drawing on the clay slab. Use additive or subtractive sculptural techniques to make the tile dimensional. Fire the tiles, then glaze or paint them.
3. Explain the ideas of foreground, middle ground, background, and overlapping. Using photographs of animals as reference, ask students to draw a fist-sized animal in the foreground (near the bottom of the page), a slightly smaller animal in the middle ground (near the center), and a small animal in the background (near the top of the page). Using overlapping shapes, create an imaginary jungle of unusual foliage. Outline with black marker and use oil pastels, construction paper, crayons, or paint to complete the work. Encourage the use of multiple shades and tones of green. Contrast and compare student work to masterworks by Rousseau.

1908

Introduced to Pablo Picasso; paints *The Football Players* and *The Cart of Père Juriel*

1910

Paints *Tropical Forest with Monkeys* and *Negro Attacked by a Jaguar*; *Virgin Forest with Setting Sun*; Rousseau dies after suffering blood poisoning



PAINTINGS SEEN IN THE VIDEO: BRIEF BACKGROUND INFORMATION



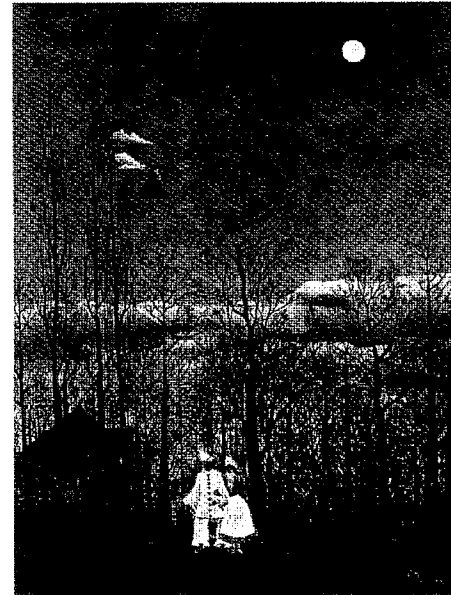
Tropical Forest with Monkeys, 1910

Oil on canvas, 51 x 64 in. (129.5 x 162.5 cm)

John Hay Whitney Collection

Photograph © 2002 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Tropical Forest with Monkeys was painted during the last months of Rousseau's life and seems to depict an actual jungle with typical animal inhabitants and lush foliage. Closer examination, however, reveals that the monkeys in the painting (a brown macaque, black and white langur, and orange gibbons), are native to a variety of continents and do not live together in the wild. Rousseau has used his imagination to add tails to the gibbons so that they are able to swing through the trees. Similarly, Rousseau created the verdant vegetation by greatly exaggerating or combining plant specimens that he observed in the botanic garden in Paris. Typical of Rousseau's style, the flat picture plane provides a setting reminiscent of a stage environment.



A Carnival Evening, 1886

Oil on canvas, 42 x 35 in. (106.9 x 89.3 cm)

Louis E. Stern Collection

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA

After Rousseau completed *A Carnival Evening* he was happy to pay a small fee to have it exhibited with the Society of Independent Artists. The Indépendants —as they became known — were a group of academically trained artists that included Cassatt, Manet, and Seurat, among others. These artists sought alternate exhibition space for their own non-traditional paintings. For the 42-year old Rousseau, his premiere exhibition was an exciting moment. Many critics ridiculed Rousseau's self-trained painting style; nonetheless, Rousseau continued undaunted in his work, believing that he was destined for recognition as one of the greatest painters in history. Typical of many of Rousseau's later paintings, juxtaposition between reality and imagination create an air of mystery in *A Carnival Evening*. Also typical of Rousseau's later works are characters that are presented in stiff frontal poses, not unlike puppets on a shallow stage.

1844

Henri Julien-Félix Rousseau born in Laval, France, the third child of Julien and Eléanore

1849-1869

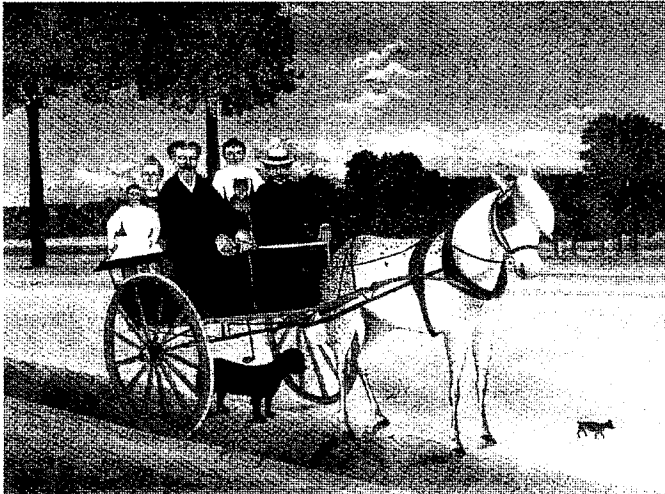
Rousseau family becomes bankrupt and moves from Laval; Henri remains with relatives to attend school, but does not graduate

1864

Enlists in the Army after serving a short sentence for petty theft

1868

Early discharge from Army after father dies; moves to Paris where he works as an office clerk



***The Cart of Père Juniet*, 1908**

Oil on canvas, 38 x 50³/₄ in. (97 x 129 cm)

Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, France. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

Characteristics of Rousseau's mature style — stiff poses, out-of-scale proportion, and detailed backgrounds — are seen in *The Cart of Père Juniet*. Based upon a photograph, as were many of Rousseau's paintings, *The Cart of Père Juniet* shows Juniet sitting rigidly in his cart with his family. Most of the characters in the painting awkwardly face the viewer and are to varying degrees out-of-proportion. The two most ill-proportioned characters are the solemn girl standing in the rear of the cart and the large dog under the cart. The girl resembles a miniature adult and is recognizable as a child only because of her relative size to the other figures. When asked why the dog was so exaggerated in size, Rousseau said only that it "had to be that way." The details of the trees and shrubs in the background contrast to the lack of detail found on the figures in the foreground. The red wheel of the cart, drawn in almost correct perspective, contrasts to the skewed perspective of the other parts of the painting and adds to the mystery of the artwork while focusing attention on the central characters.



***The Sleeping Gypsy*, 1897**

Oil on canvas, 51 in. x 79 in. (129.5 x 200.7 cm)

The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim

Photograph © The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The Sleeping Gypsy was first exhibited at an annual art show held by the Indépendants. Shortly after the exhibition the painting disappeared from public view and was lost for about 25 years. The public did not see it again until 1923 when the artwork was discovered at the home of a Parisian coal merchant. Rumors circulated that *The Sleeping Gypsy* was actually painted by Picasso because of its anticipation of the cubist style as seen in the flatness of the lute and vase. The painting itself is large (4 ft. 3 in. x 6 ft. 7 in.) while its content poses many questions about its meaning. In the painting, a lion with a windswept mane stands over a sleeping woman, garbed in bright colors, who is oblivious to impending danger. Is the lion real or only a dream? How did the woman find her way to this spot? There are no footprints in the sand. Such is the mystery surrounding many of Rousseau's paintings as he created a world of exotic themes to escape the humdrum nature of real life.

1869

Marries Clémence Boitard and fathers nine children; only one daughter, Julia, lives to be an adult

1871

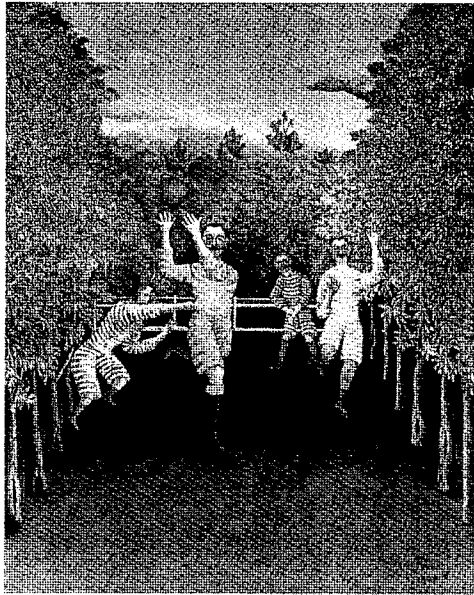
Hired as a tollbooth operator in Paris and acquires the nickname Le Douanier; works at this job for more than 20 years

1884

Buys a copying license for the palaces and museums of Paris

1886

Paints *A Carnival Evening*; pays a small fee to exhibit the work and three others in the Society of Independent Artists; many critics laugh at the paintings; the artist Pissarro admires them



The Football Players (Les joueurs de football), 1908

Oil on canvas, 39¹/₂ x 31³/₈ in. (100.5 x 80.3 cm)

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. 60.1583

Photograph by David Heald. © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

The Football Players can be seen as an attempt by Rousseau to show the times in which he lived. The first international rugby football match between France and England occurred in 1908, the same year that *The Football Players* was painted. The central character with the ball is purported to be Rousseau himself, perhaps an allusion to his daydreams of success as an artist of grand importance. *The Football Players* is a classic example of Rousseau's use of non-scientific perspective, minute detail, and stiff, frontally posed figures of illogical proportions. Typical of other Rousseau paintings, the setting resembles a puppet theatre with its flat planes. The rigid poses of the characters seems to have stopped all sense of action.



Negro Attacked by a Jaguar: Virgin Forest with Setting Sun, 1910

Oil on canvas, 45³/₄ x 64 in. (116 x 162.5 cm)

Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland

© Giraudon/Art Resource, NY

Jungle images became a hallmark of Rousseau's mature art style. *Negro Attacked by a Jaguar* is immediately recognizable as a Rousseau jungle painting because of the oversized plants, bright colors, and a shallow depth of field. A dreamlike quality also exists within the image causing the viewer to question what is real and what is imagined. It is suggested that Rousseau considered this picture to be a statement about his own life as an artist where he battled everyday problems in a world that was anything but tranquil. It is interesting to note that Rousseau likely copied the silhouette of the man and the attacking jaguar from a turn-of-the-twentieth-century photography book titled *Bêtes Sauvages*. Rousseau was known to use a pantograph to make such copies.

1888

Clémence dies from tuberculosis; Julia sent to live with relatives in Angers; Rousseau lives a Bohemian and impoverished lifestyle

1893

Retires as tollbooth worker and dedicates much of his time to art; teaches violin, painting, and singing

1897

Paints *The Sleeping Gypsy*

1899

Marries Joséphine-Rosalie Nourry, a widow who owns a stationery shop where Rousseau exhibits and sells his artwork