

Special Exhibition: “Common Ground” (Until November 1, 2026)

Mansion & Museum of Art (60 minutes) | High School (9th-12th) | 30 student maximum

About

This tour uses artwork as historical artifacts to address Tennessee’s high school Visual Arts and Social Studies standards. “Common Ground” highlights 19th and early 20th-century American art and its shared cultural aspirations and contrasting artistic visions. For the first time, the Hainsworth family collection is shown alongside Cheekwood’s permanent collection. Featuring paintings from American Impressionism, the Ashcan School, and Hudson River School, “Common Ground” provides a vibrant example for students to learn just how much art reflects and responds to the times.

Objectives

1. Observe and describe the visual elements of a work of art (colors, shapes, styles, subjects, etc.).
2. Compare and contrast the style, meaning, and content of different works of art.
3. Contextualize artifacts in the context of historical events in the US of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Pre-Visit

Prior to attending the field trip, it is beneficial to review the content vocabulary listed. This field trip is based around visual analysis and inquiry-based learning, and reviewing the vocabulary will enrich your students’ experiences and understanding in the museum. Please let us know if there are any time periods or concepts you are currently covering in your classes that you would like us to support through this program.

Overview of the Day

1. Greetings and guidelines – Please note that food, drinks, and flash photography are strictly prohibited in the Mansion & Museum.
2. Students will be together with the educator the entirety of the trip.
3. Students will complete a brief creative activity responding to the exhibition.

Vocabulary

The Ashcan School – artistic movement in the early 20th-century United States that focuses on day-to-day lives of average people

Cityscape – a piece of art that represents the large-scale aspects of a city

Enlightenment – 17th-19th century intellectual and artistic movement that emphasized order, reason, and individualism

The Hudson River School – artistic movement in the mid 20th-century United States that focuses on the beauty and preservation of natural landscapes

Impressionism – 19th-century style of art that focuses on the light, movement, and emotion of a scene more than the exact details

Industrial Revolution – a period in the 18th and 19th centuries of rapid growth in technology and science causing many communities to become less agrarian (farm-based) and more urban (city-like)

Landscape – a piece of art depicting scenery on land

Portrait – an artistic representation of a person

Realism – 19th-century genre of art that rejects Romanticism and focuses on the struggles of working people

Romanticism – 18th and 19th century artistic movement that focuses on the power, beauty, and unpredictability of the natural world in response to the Enlightenment's emphasis on order and reason

Content Standards Covered (Visual Arts and Social Studies)

HS2.VA.P3.A – *Make, explain, and justify connections between exhibitions of artists or artwork and the context of social, cultural, and political history.*

HS3.VA.R1.A – *Evaluate the connections within a collection of art or artists from a particular time and place, and determine the potential influence on specific audiences.*

HS1.VA.R2.A – *Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.*

HS3.VA.Cn2.A – *Evaluate the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society.*

SSP.02 – *Critically examine a primary or secondary source in order to: Extract and paraphrase significant ideas, discern differences between evidence and assertion, draw inferences and conclusions, recognize author's purpose, point of view, and potential bias, assess the strengths and limitations of arguments.*

Post-Visit

After visiting, students can use the same questioning techniques employed during the field trip in a Socratic Seminar. Have students write open ended questions that they have about pieces of art and their relationships to history and themselves. Students can create presentations analyzing, comparing, and contrasting different artworks, artists, and movements. Have students plan and execute their own works of art inspired by the exhibit in some way.

Explore Cheekwood's Collection

<https://cheekwood.org/discover/art/collections/>

Background on Cheekwood

Cheekwood is a 55-acre botanical garden and art museum located on the historic Cheek estate. Originally built as the home of Leslie and Mabel Cheek in 1929, Cheekwood is one of the finest examples of an American Country Place Era estate. Originally, the 36-room house (excluding service quarters) included eleven bedrooms, twelve bathrooms, and two elevators. While the bedrooms no longer exist, guests can tour the Drawing Room, Library, Loggia, and Dining Room, among other restored spaces.

Since being converted into a museum of art and botanical garden in 1960, Cheekwood has presented world-class art exhibitions, spectacular gardens and a historic estate unlike anything else.

Sources

Avery, Kevin J. "The Hudson River School - the Metropolitan Museum of Art." Metmuseum.org, October 2004. <https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/the-hudson-river-school>.

Midwestmuseum.org. "Ashcan School." Midwest Museum of American Art. Accessed November 26, 2025. <https://www.midwestmuseum.org/project/ashcan-school/>.

Partridge, Isabelle. "Romanticism: Was It a Counter-Enlightenment?" review.gale.com. The Gale Review, January 23, 2024. <https://review.gale.com/2024/01/23/exploring-the-inspiration-for-romanticism/>.

Samu, Margaret. "Impressionism: Art and Modernity - the Metropolitan Museum of Art." Metmuseum.org, October 1, 2004. <https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/impressionism-art-and-modernity>.

Tate. "Realism." Tate, 2017. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/r/realism>.