Gifford Beal, *Armistice Day* (1918)

Gifford Beal (1879-1956) was the product of a wealthy East Coast family. He began his art education in 1892 at age thirteen, studying at the Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Art on Long Island. He was impressed and inspired by his teacher, the renowned Hoosier artist William Merritt Chase, with whom he studied on weekends and over the summers until 1900. Although Beal was profoundly influenced by this American master, Chase encouraged his students to develop their own styles and methods to express their unique visions.

Throughout his career, Beal was primarily concerned with capturing the motion and excitement of festive events, the beautiful natural world, and the people which he observed around him. Unrelentingly optimistic, he portrayed his subjects sympathetically and positively, desiring to create a pleasing image, “a good picture, honest and pleasant.” Beal’s art, on the whole, is not about social commentary or displaying the artist’s technical skill, but rather about capturing the simple pleasures of American life.

Sunlight was key to Beal’s exploration of the natural world. In many ways, his painterly approach and emphasis of the effects of light upon the colors of a landscape, is similar to that of the French Impressionists. However, Beal strove to avoid foreign influences and to remain essentially American, deliberating avoiding travel to Paris despite his affection for it. Following his old mentor’s teaching, Beal developed his unique style.

Beal had great concern for art that was ordered and confident, sharing much in common with Puritan sensibilities. His 1918 painting, *Armistice Day*, displays these qualities in full effect. Rather than depicting small details of the festivities at the close of World War One, Beal chooses to capture the overall excitement. Other Impressionists dissolve forms and atmosphere into small patches of color and light, yet here, in this richly textured display, the scene is based on broad, expressive strokes of line and bold, geometric shapes.
Questions to Consider

1. Describe what is going on in this scene
2. What is Armistice Day?
3. How many different flags can you identify?
4. How has the artist suggested depth in this painting?
5. What is the overall mood of this scene? How does Beal convey this mood?

Connections

Art: Impressionism, American Impressionism, Cubism.
Civics: The American flag, patriotism.
History: World War I, Armistice Day.
Mathematics: Geometry

Further Reading

“Festive Gaiety Keynotes Beal Exhibition,” Art Digest (May 10, 1941), clipping in Beal Files, Kraushaar Galleries, New York City.

Teachers’ Resources
Work: Armistice Day (1918)
Artist: Gifford Beal
Location of work: Indiana University Art Museum (IUAM)

Vocabulary/Key Concept(s):
- **Armistice** A suspension of hostilities or fighting by agreement between opponents; (cease fire or truce).
- **Armistice Day** is the symbolic end of World War I on November 11, 1918. It commemorates the armistice signed between the Allies and Germany at Rethondes, France for the cessation of hostilities on the Western Front.
- **World War I** War between the Allies and the Central Powers that lasted from 1914 to 1918. The United States joined the Allies in 1917, helping the Allies to win the war.

Art Connection(s):
- **Impressionism** A movement among late nineteenth-century French painters who sought to present a true representation of light and color. Working primarily outdoors (referred to as plein air), such artists applied small touches of paint to catch fleeting impressions of the scenes before them.
- **American Impressionism** Impressionistic style emerging from France to America in the 1880’s,
- **Cubism** A style of painting the emerged in France around 1909. Cubist artists shattered naturalistic forms and space, attempting to represent on a flat surface all aspects of what existed in three dimensions. Analytic cubism presented different views of an object simultaneously and stressed geometric forms and neutral tones. Synthetic cubism, a later stage, reintroduced color and elements of collage.
  - **Collage:** pasting together two-dimensional materials to form a work of art

Geography Connection(s):
- **Rethondes, France and Europe**

Time Line Connection:
- **November 11, 1918**

Resources:
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) *Picturing America* website:
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/

Connect to web links below by clicking on individual address or access through the NEH site for Additional Resources at:
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/about.php?subPage=about_ad_res

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=634
National Endowment for the Humanities, EDSITEment, *Everything in Its Right Place*, a curriculum overview to a four-part lesson on the structural elements of a painting, featuring Emanuel Leutze’s *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, for Grades 9-12.

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=641
National Endowment for the Humanities, EDSITEment, *Horse of a Different Color: An Introduction to Color in the Visual Arts* has two lesson plans on color; the first: In-Depth with the Full Spectrum, for Grade 9-12, introduces students to color basics, the color wheel, and how artists manipulate color to draw attention to the aspects of their work.

http://www.getty.edu/education/for_teachers/building_lessons/
Getty Museum Education department Web site, *Teachers’ Programs and Resources*, is designed for K-12 teachers who wish to introduce art and art history into their classrooms. The site uses works form the museum’s collection along with pages A Grade-by-Grade Guide, *The Elements of Art* (teaching the formal components of art such as line and color) and a PDF file, Lesson Template.

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=620
National Endowment for the Humanities, EDSITEment, *Realistic Impressions: Investigating Movement in the Visual Arts*, for Grade 9-12, teaches students about the meaning of the terms “movement” in the visual arts, and covers the major movements of *Impressionism*, Realism, and Romanticism, with links to other movements in the arts.

Monroe County Public Library (MCPL) Bloomington, Indiana University
(812) 349-3050 – To Reserve Resource Materials

**Eyewitness Books: *World War I***
Includes CD ROM
Call Number: J940.3Ada (Children’s Collection)

*Events Leading to World War I* by John Hamilton
Includes: Glossary, time line and web site links for additional resources
Call Number: J940.311 Ha (Children’s Collection)

*Monumental Milestones: An Overview of World War I*
Call Number: J940.3 Whi (Children’s Collection)

Web sites:

Impressionism

http://www.brainpop.com/artsandmusic/artconcepts/impressionism/preview.weml
BrainPOP is an animated, curriculum-based content web site that supports educators and engages students.
Includes: information, resources, and movie on Impressionism.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impression
Includes: definition, references, techniques, content and composition, images, time line and
additional references.

American Impressionism
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Impressionism
Includes: definition, references, time line, images, and additional reference material.

Gifford Beal
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gifford_Beal
Includes: background information, career accomplishments, images and additional reference materials.

Armistice Day
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armistice_Day
Includes: definition, images and additional references.

World Flags
http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/flags/flagcnty.htm
Images of Flags of Countries-International Flags

World War I
http://www.brainpop.com/socialstudies/ushistory/worldwari/preview.weml

BrainPOP is an animated, curriculum-based content web site that supports educators and engages students.
Includes: information, resources, and movie on World War I

Indiana Academic Standards – Visual Arts Grade/Level 5
RESPONDING TO ART: History
Standard 1
*Students understand the significance of visual art in relation to historical, social, political, spiritual, environmental, technological, and economic issues.*
5.1.1 Identify the relationship between a work of art and the geography and characteristics of the culture, and identify where, when, why, and by whom the work was made (Focus: North America).
5.1.2 Identify and compare works of art and artifacts with similar functions.
5.1.3 Identify themes and symbols used in works of art and artifacts throughout history that portray universal ideas and beliefs.

Standard 2
*Students recognize significant works of Western and non-Western art and understand the chronological development of art movements.*
5.2.1 Identify and be familiar with a range of selected works of art identifying artists, culture, style, and period.
5.2.2 Identify distinguishing characteristics of style in individual artists work and art movements.
5.2.3 Begin to identify works of art and artifacts from major periods or movements of Western art and place on a chronological time line.

RESPONDING TO ART: Criticism
Standard 3
Students describe, analyze, and interpret works of art and artifacts.

5.3.1 Analyze the artist’s use of sensory, formal, technical, and expressive properties in a work of art.
5.3.2 Construct meaning in the work based on personal response, properties found in the work, and background information on the context of the work.
5.3.3 Use appropriate art vocabulary.

Standard 4

Students identify and apply criteria to make informed judgments about art.

5.4.1 Listen to multiple critiques of works of art by peers, teachers, people from the art world and identify criteria used.
5.4.2 Apply criteria based on properties found in the work and research from the historical context of the work to make informed judgments.

INTEGRATED STUDIES

Standard 13

Students identify and make connections between knowledge and skill in art and all other subject areas such as humanities, sciences, and technology.

5.13.1 Compare characteristics of a theme, historical period, or event through the multiple perspectives of different disciplines.
5.13.2 Create products or performances (debates, critiques, papers) that communicate in-depth knowledge gained through integrated study of a theme, historical period, or event.

Standard 14

Students understand the connections between many art forms including dance, theater, music, visual arts, and media arts.

5.14.1 Compare characteristics of a theme, historical period, or event through the multiple perspectives of different art forms.

National Academic Standards – Visual Arts – Level 5

Content Standard #3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Achievement Standard:
Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values, and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks

Content Standard #4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Achievement Standard:
Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures
Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts
Students analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art

Content Standard #5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Achievement Standard:
Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry
Students describe and compare a variety of individual responses to their own artworks and to artworks from various eras and cultures

Content Standard #6: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Achievement Standard:
Students compare the characteristics of works in two or more art forms that share similar subject matter, historical periods, or cultural context
Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts