



DELAWARE ART MUSEUM

Seeing the City: Sloan's New York



CURRICULUM GUIDE

Delaware Art Museum • 2301 Kentmere Parkway • Wilmington, DE • 19806
(302) 571-9590 • www.delart.org

Image: *Man Monkey*, John Sloan, 1905, Etching, Delaware Art Museum, Gift of Helen Farr Sloan, 1963.

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Seeing the City: Sloan's New York

Go out into the streets and look at life

~ John Sloan

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Introduction

Art is the result of a creative impulse derived out of a consciousness of life. ~ John Sloan

American realist artist and illustrator John Sloan (1871-1951) is best known for his scenes of life in New York City. In the exhibition *Seeing the City: Sloan's New York*, John Sloan's numerous images of the city, from paintings, drawings, prints, and illustrated letters, come together to not only address Sloan's impressions of New York as he walked through its streets and neighborhoods, but universal themes such as increased immigration to large cities and the impact of the changing urban environment on city life.

This guide is designed to provide teachers and group leaders with an overview of *Seeing the City: Sloan's New York*. This information can be taught before and/or after a visit to a museum. Please adapt the information and activities to the grade level, ability, and learning styles of your students. These materials may be reproduced for educational purposes.

Objectives:

- To understand Sloan's aesthetic in relation to his association with Robert Henri and other artists affiliated with "The Eight."
- To map John Sloan's time in New York based on the images he created.
- To understand Sloan's use of architecture in localizing a setting in his art.
- To explore the many changes of New York City at the turn of the twentieth century, including increased immigration and industrialization.
- To see how the politics of the time affected Sloan's work.
- To understand how artwork reflects the society in which it was created.
- To perceive and interpret visual elements in a work of art

John Sloan Biography

"Though a living cannot be made at art, art makes life worth living. It makes living, living. It makes starving, living. It makes worry, it makes trouble, it makes a life that would be barren of everything—living. It brings life to life." ~ John Sloan

John Sloan was born in 1871 in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania. While still a young boy, his family relocated to Philadelphia, where Sloan would attend the prestigious collegiate Central High School with fellow artist William Glackens. In 1892 he landed his first full time job in the art department of the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. It was his reputation as an illustrator at the *Inquirer* which landed him a position at the *Philadelphia Press* in 1895.

Beyond his commercial work as an illustrator, Sloan also taught himself how to paint from popular how-to manuals, and in 1892 enrolled in evening courses at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the oldest art institution in the country. The friendships Sloan formed at the Academy led to his first meeting with artist Robert Henri, who would become a life-long friend as well as a great influence on Sloan's artistic career.

In 1904 he moved to New York City with his wife of three years, Dolly. He continued to work as a freelance illustrator and became increasingly interested in depicting city life and city scenes, highlighting the streets and parks of his neighborhood in Chelsea, and the working-class people he encountered on his daily travels through the city. In 1912, John and Dolly relocated to Greenwich Village and became part of the burgeoning art scene there.

By 1906 Sloan began to supplement his income by teaching art, initially as a substitute for his friend Robert Henri. For the next decade Sloan taught sporadically within various art schools until 1916, when he became a full-time faculty member at the Art Students League in New York, a position he would hold until 1937. His students included the young talents of sculptor David Smith and Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock.

In 1939 Sloan's teaching philosophy and techniques were compiled and published in the book called *Gist of Art*. Based in part upon the notes Sloan's student Helen Farr took in his classes and gathered over the years, *Gist of Art* allowed subsequent generations to learn from him. A year after the death of Sloan's wife, Dolly, John married Helen Farr in 1944.

John Sloan died of postoperative complications in Hanover, New Hampshire in 1951.



Self Portrait in Gray Shirt
John Sloan
1912
Oil on canvas
Delaware Art Museum
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan, 1980

John Sloan in New York

When John and Dolly Sloan arrived in New York City in 1904, they were two of approximately 100,000 people moving to the city that year. As an artist and newcomer, Sloan made sense of this busy and ever-changing metropolis by moving through it and describing it—in his diaries, letters, and pictures. He focused on people, street life, elevated trains, public parks, and the pedestrian experience.



Roofs, Summer Night
John Sloan
1906
Etching
Delaware Art Museum
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan, 1963

The Sloans settled in Chelsea, one of the city's commercial centers, where shops, moving picture parlors, and entertainment halls of every sort clustered around Sixth Avenue. In Sloan's New York, the parks, like the streets, were places where diverse individuals encountered each other every day. The city allowed male and female, old and young, affluent and impoverished, to observe and comment on each other, a pleasure which Sloan indulged in his art. Shortly after moving to New York, Sloan began etchings that would become his *New York City Life* series, which recorded the vibrant life the artist witnessed on the streets in addition to the more private realms he witnessed from his windows.

In 1912 Sloan moved first his studio and then his apartment down Sixth Avenue to Greenwich Village. In moving to the Village, Sloan left a commercial center in Chelsea for the heart of the city's liberal, intellectual community, subtly shifting his alliance from the workaday world of Chelsea to the city's most bohemian and artistic quarter. The Village was fast becoming a haven for creative types, and in the popular imagination, it represented a place outside the bounds of middle-class social norms, inhabited by artists, writers, and political radicals.

Sloan found a community in the Village, and many of his paintings and etchings document this community, as seen in his images of Jefferson Market, Washington Square, McSorley's Bar, the Lafayette, and the Golden Swan.

Sloan remained in the Village for more than two decades. In 1927 the Sloans were forced to vacate their apartment because it was being demolished as part of subway construction and the extension of Sixth Avenue southward. They settled on Washington Square South. When New York University took over the building housing Sloan's apartment on Washington Square in 1935, the Sloans could not find affordable accommodations elsewhere in the Village, and returned to Chelsea. For the rest of his life, Sloan kept an apartment in the Chelsea Hotel, only a few blocks from his first home in New York City.



The City from Greenwich Village
John Sloan
1922
Oil on canvas
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

Sloan and the “The Eight”

Under Robert Henri’s guidance, John Sloan and his peers focused on painting subjects from their immediate experience. Within their group discussions, Henri would often comment on the role of the artist in the U.S., emphasizing that each artist should develop their own individual form of expression rather than conform to any aesthetic convention.

Sloan’s visions of ordinary people of the streets and in their homes did not always prove popular with the art establishment, and his works and the works of his colleagues were often rejected from juried exhibitions. In 1908, Sloan and his circle organized a protest exhibition at Macbeth Galleries. This show brought together the work of the Philadelphia artists—John Sloan, Robert Henri, William Glackens, George Luks, and Everett Shinn—with Arthur B. Davies, Maurice Prendergast, and Ernest Lawson. In this exhibit they showcased their work independently and democratically without prejudice for one particular style. The show was a surprising success, with approximately 7,000 people attending the exhibition. The show also earned the group a nickname, “The Eight.”

Reviews of The Eight exhibition were mixed. Critics who disapproved of their choice of subject matter—such as alleys and tenements—labeled these artists the “Ashcan School,” a term the artists disliked. While many critics challenged the anti-academic approach taken by Sloan and others like him, forward thinking modernists praised their work as a refreshing departure from styles and subjects with little relevance to modern life.

In the wake of The Eight show Sloan became a public figure in the New York art world, helping to organize important exhibitions, including the 1911 Exhibition of Independent Artists and the 1913 Armory Show, a display of American and European modernist art. Together these exhibitions altered the course of American art produced in the twentieth century. Sloan also served as president of the Society of Independent Artists for more than twenty years.

New York at the Turn of the Century

During the turn of the twentieth century, New York City represented the idea of the “new metropolis,” a major city that was continually changing and expanding.



View of Washington Square Arch with One Fifth Avenue
John Sloan
1927
Photograph
Delaware Art Museum

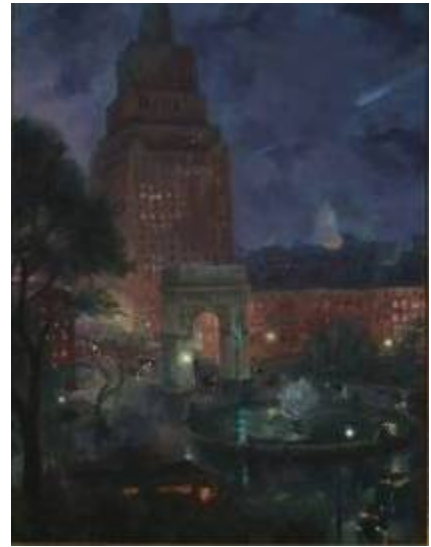
In 1898, the five boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island were consolidated to form the modern city of New York. With the dawn of the twentieth century, new transportation links were created, such as the New York City Subway (1904). These advances in transportation generated an increased spread in population as well as development of the city’s infrastructure.

Over the next few decades, New York City saw an incredible construction boom—from the underground subway system to the construction of skyscrapers, which altered the city’s skyline in addition to the lives of the city’s inhabitants. John Sloan’s art offers viewers a primary document of the New York landscape as it is undergoing these changes.

At this time New York also added waves of immigrants to its population. Over a period of three decades the population of Greater New York more than doubled—from 1.91 million in 1880 to 4.77 million in 1910. Various

European catastrophes, such as the potato famine and war, caused a multitude of immigrants to travel to the United States at the turn of the century. With this increased immigration came social upheaval. Overcrowded tenements, unclean water, and poor removal of garbage and sewage caused sickness and epidemics.

Despite the poverty and hard times faced by these immigrants, they developed their own cultural identity in their new city, through the creation of clubs and festivals. John Sloan, by closely studying people and their everyday activities, was able to capture their unique cultural characteristics.



Wet Night, Washington Square
John Sloan
1928
Oil on panel
Delaware Art Museum
Gift of the John Sloan Memorial Foundation, 1997

Art and Politics

In February of 1910, John and Dolly Sloan became members of the Socialist Party, and, that fall, Sloan allowed his name to be placed on the ballot as a Socialist Party candidate for New York State Assembly. Although he did not win the election, he had other talents to offer to the party. Sloan did his part as an illustrator and designed posters and flyers for socialist rallies, lectures, and fundraisers. In the early twentieth century, socialist rallies in major American cities attracted thousands.

Often inspired by specific injustices the artist observed, Sloan's drawings for these socialist periodicals could be pointed in their messages. The fire that killed 146 of 500 employees at the Triangle Waist Company in March of 1911 was the subject of one of Sloan's strongest political illustrations. Sloan graphically symbolized the tragedy in the burned body of a young woman, which he surrounded with the triad of "Rent," "Profit," and "Interest" to implicate the larger forces involved.

Much of Sloan's political activism was wrapped up in his involvement with *The Masses*, a socialist magazine which began publication in 1911. He served on the editorial board and was a contributor from 1912-1916, receiving no pay. In his illustrations he addressed moral and political injustices, poked fun at fashion and recorded scenes from New York's parks, rooftops, and streets.

At first, *The Masses* offered considerable editorial freedom, because the magazine was not an official organ of the Socialist Party. Over time, it became more entrenched in party politics, and the writers began adding captions to the artists' drawings, often to give them a more clearly socialist spin. In 1917 Sloan resigned the magazine in protest and left the Socialist Party.

John Sloan always maintained the separation of his art and his politics, and though his paintings show his sympathy with the lower classes and distinct dislike of the privileged, Sloan's New York paintings, unlike his illustrations, rarely address political topics directly and specifically.



The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire
John Sloan
1911
Ink, Chinese white and crayon on illustration board
Delaware Art Museum
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan, 1991

Curriculum Connections

Elementary level

My City

Have students create an idea web of their town or city. What makes up their town/city? Have them consider homes, businesses, types of transportation, parks, etc. Once their list is complete, have students look through magazines and newspapers to find objects listed on their idea web to create their own collage city.

Everyday Life

John Sloan often depicted neighborhood pastimes, with people engaged in a variety of outdoor activities. Have students create a list some of the everyday pastimes they do with family and friends. Next, have them make sketches of their listed activities, including descriptive captions for each sketch.



Spring Rain
John Sloan
1912
Oil on canvas
Delaware Art Museum
Gift of John Sloan Memorial Foundation, 1986

Parks – Then and Now

Have students look at Sloan's images of parks. What do they tell us about the city parks in the early twentieth century? What types of transportation, games, and leisure activities does he incorporate in his works? How do Sloan's park scenes differ from the parks we enjoy today? Have students create a Venn diagram to show the similarities and differences.

Letter Writing

John Sloan regularly wrote letters to friends and family while he was in New York, describing his surroundings and experiences. Using a work of art from the exhibition, have students imagine they are in the scene. Have them write a letter that describes their surroundings.

Mapping

John Sloan's artwork shows many places and people that he saw each day while living in New York City. Mapping is a way of recording the places people go and the things they see. Have students map the places they go to in any given day.

Curriculum Connections

Secondary level

Journal Writing

While in New York, Sloan wrote in a journal, documenting his thoughts and the activities of the people he observed while walking throughout the city. These close observations of his urban environment are also recorded in his paintings, prints, and drawings. For one week have students record their thoughts in a journal, and include descriptions of people and activities they see/encounter along the way.

Social Causes

Sloan was very aware of the social injustices inflicted upon on the lower class city inhabitants, and often acknowledged social issues in his political illustrations and posters. Which social issues are of wide concern in today's society? Have students select a social issue that they want to address in their own political illustration or poster.

Travel Guide

Upon arriving in New York City in 1904, John Sloan became acquainted with his new home by walking the city and rendering its inhabitants, buildings, and constant changes in his art. Divide class into small groups and have them create a travel guide brochure for Sloan to use as he begins to experience New York. What background information should Sloan know about the city? What places should he visit and why?

Celebrating the City

Robert Henri encouraged John Sloan and his circle to paint pictures of the American scene, a notion which Walt Whitman had also called on poets and painters to celebrate. Have students select two works from John Sloan—one from his time in Chelsea and the other from Greenwich Village. In what way does Sloan celebrate New York and its inhabitants?

Architecture

John Sloan's use of architecture in his drawings, prints, and paintings help us in clearly defining the settings of his works. Have students take a photograph of an important intersection in their town or city. How would future historians interpret this photograph? What comment might they make on the significance of the various buildings to those living in the community?



Circumstances Alter Cases: "Positively disgusting! It's an outrage to public decency to allow such exposure on the streets!"

John Sloan

1913

Crayon and ink on paper

Delaware Art Museum

Gift of Helen Farr Sloan, 1984

Resources

Books

Coyle, Heather Campbell and Joyce K. Schiller. *John Sloan's New York*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Brooks, Van Wyck. *John Sloan. A Painter's Life*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1955.

Burns, Ric, and James Sanders. *New York: An Illustrated History*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.

Elzea, Roland. *John Sloan's Oil Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991.

Loughery, John. *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995.

Mecklenburg, Virginia M., Robert Snyder and Rebecca Zurier. *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York*. Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1995.

Web Resources

Seeing the City: Sloan's New York

www.johnsloansnewyork.com

New York: A Documentary Film, Online

www.pbs.org/wnet/newyork/index.html

Museum of the City of New York: Byron Company Collection On Line

<http://museumofnyc.doetech.net/voyager.cfm>

New York City Films from the Library of Congress

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/papr/nychome.html>

The 1911 Triangle Factory Fire

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>

The 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike

http://www.lucyparsonspj.org/iww/kornbluh_bread_roses.html

Greenwich Village History

<http://gvshp.org/history.htm>

Tour Information

School Tours

To arrange a guided school group tour, contact the Education Department at 302-571-9590, ext. 509 or cwaring@delart.org. Teachers can download the *Student and Teacher Programs* newsletter from the Museum website, www.delart.org.

Program Costs

Admission for guided student tours is \$4 for students. For grades K-3, two chaperones are required for every 10 students. For grades 4-12, one chaperone for every 10 students is required. Chaperones are free of charge up to the ratio limit. Additional chaperones are \$5 each.

Red Apple Fund

The Red Apple Fund for Student Enrichment was inaugurated in 2006 to further the Delaware Art Museum's educational mission. The Red Apple Fund will finance tours of the Museum for school groups in academic levels ranging from kindergarten through grade 12 as well as individual enrollment in studio art classes and seasonal camps that teach the fundamentals of art.

Generous support for the Red Apple Fund is provided by corporations throughout the region, including AstraZeneca, the first corporate sponsor of this program. To apply for a Red Apple Grant, go to www.delart.org/redapple.

HOURS

Monday	Closed
Tuesday	10 am - 4 pm
Wednesday	10 am - 4 pm
Thursday	10 am - 4 pm
Friday	10 am - 4 pm
Saturday	10 am - 4 pm
Sunday	Noon - 4 pm

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