Impressionist painting comprises the work produced between about 1867 and 1886 by a group of artists who shared a set of related approaches and techniques. The most prominent characteristic of Impressionism was an attempt to accurately and objectively record visual reality in terms of the transient effects of light and color. Claude Monet achieved the most refined expression of this technique by pondering questions such as, "How many shades of how many colors are there within the nuances of light in this simple tree trunk?"

Monet was born in Paris on November 14, 1840. At the age of five, he and his family moved to Sainte-Adresse, near the port town of Le Havre. It was there that his father, Adolphe Monet, took over the management of the family-owned ship chandling and grocery business. Despite the hope of Monet’s father that he would continue this business, painting was the only subject that sparked any interest in the young man. In school, he was fond of creating caricatures; and it was from these caricatures that he first developed a reputation as an artist. By the age of fifteen, he was receiving commissions for his work.

In 1856, Monet met a painter by the name of Eugène Boudin in Le Havre, who played a critical role in the education of Monet. Boudin, the first major artist to paint...
under the open sky, painted the coastal scenes along the Normandy beaches for many years before working with the younger Claude Monet (1840-1926). He persuaded Monet to become a landscape painter, helping to instill in him a love of bright hues and the play of light on water later evident in Monet’s Impressionist paintings. His influence is clearly evident in Monet’s work “View of Rouelles” (1)."

In 1859, Monet left for Paris. There, to the aggravation of his family, he rejected formal art training at École des Beaux-Arts. Instead, he studied at the Académie Suisse, where he met Camille Pissarro and pursued informal training. Because his family provided him with an allowance, he had few responsibilities and was free to enjoy life’s luxuries.

In the Spring of 1862, Monet was forced to interrupt his informal training at the Académie Suisse because of a call to military service. He went to Algeria for a year with a prestigious regiment, les Chaussures d’Afrique. The landscapes and colors of Algeria presented an entirely different perspective of the world, which was an inspiration to Monet for many years to come. Due to an illness, his time in Algeria ended sooner than expected.

Despite an agreement with his aunt, Madame Lecadre (2), that Monet return to Paris and make a serious attempt at completing a formal artistic tuition course, Monet
did not enroll in École des Beaux-Arts. Instead, he joined the studio of the Swiss-born academician Charles Gleyre, where he remained for two years. It was here that Monet met three very close and influential friends: Frédéric Bazille, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Alfred Sisley. The force that bound the group over time was the commitment and intense dedication to their new approach to art, “Impressionism.”

In 1874, Monet and his colleagues – Manet, Degas, Cézanne, Renoir, Pissarro, and Sisley – organized their own exhibition. Although they called themselves “independents,” the press sardonically labeled them “impressionists” as their work resembled a first impression, imprecise and unfinished, and because one of the paintings Monet exhibited was entitled “Impression: Sunrise” (3). The technique Monet used during this time was intended to imply that he had captured a spontaneous impression of nature. During the 1870s and 1880s, Monet gradually refined his technique (4).

After the completion of “Impression: Sunrise,” Monet moved back to Paris and rented a house at Argenteuil on the Seine, where he and his wife, Camille Doncieux, lived for six years. This period represents the height of the Impressionist movement. Frequently joined by Renoir and other friends from his days as a student, Monet painted...
every aspect of life and the world outdoors. At official exhibitions, he began to have some success.

By the mid-1880s, generally regarded as the leader of the impressionist school, Monet had achieved significant recognition and financial security. He was recognized as a master of meticulous observation, despite the boldness of his color and the extreme simplicity of his compositions.

Monet’s first wife, Camille, died in 1882, at the age of 32. In 1883, Monet settled in Giverny, where he remained until his death. He began to construct a water garden consisting of a lily pond arched with a Japanese bridge.

In 1892, Monet married Alice Hoschedé. In that year, he painted his series of the Rouen Cathedral (5). It was also at Giverny that he worked on several series of paintings, including haystacks (6), the lily pond (7), water lilies (8), poplars (9), and the River Seine (10). Each of these series were painted in varying light, at different times of the day or seasons of the year. Monet continued to paint almost up to the time of this death at Giverny on December 5, 1926.
W O R K S   R E F E R E N C E D

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(6) Grain Stack at Giverny
1888-89; oil on canvas

(7) The Bridge in Monet’s Garden
1895; oil on canvas

(8) Water-Lilies
1987 – 99; oil on canvas
"I have no other wish than to mingle more closely with nature, and I aspire to no other destiny than to work and live in harmony with her laws, as Goethe prescribed. Nature is greatness, power, and immortality; compared with her a creature is nothing but a miserable atom."

Claude Monet