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## Art Masterpiece: *Surprised! Storm in the Forest*, by Henri Rousseau

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**Keywords:** Color, texture, landscape

**Grade(s):** 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>

**Activity:** Mixed media jungle landscape



### About the Artist:

- Henri Rousseau was born in France in 1844. As a boy, he wasn't a very good student but won prizes for drawing and music.
- As a young man, he spent four years serving in the French Army but decided he was not a military man either.
- When he returned home he married his landlord's daughter. They had six children.
- Rousseau began his career as a civil servant working in a toll house. He collected money from the local farmers who brought their merchandise into the Paris markets.
- Rousseau continued to paint as a hobby and since his job allowed much spare time he would draw the surrounding scenery while the other workers played cards.
- On his days off Rousseau would paint pictures from his drawings. He painted many wildlife scenes. He said he imagined faraway countries where he had never been.
- Rousseau used to visit the botanical gardens and the zoo in Paris to help him draw exotic animals and plants. Rousseau claimed he had "no teacher other than nature."

- He never had a formal art education; instead, he taught himself by copying paintings in the art museums of Paris. In other words, he was self-taught and, in the art world, he is considered a “Folk” artist which means he had no education or formal training in art.
- He started painting seriously in his early forties, and by age 49 he retired from his job to work on his art full-time.[
- When Pablo Picasso happened upon a painting by Rousseau being sold on the street as a canvas to be painted over, the younger artist instantly recognized Rousseau's genius and went to meet him.
- After Rousseau's retirement in 1893, he supplemented his small pension with part-time jobs and work such as playing a violin in the streets.
- Rousseau died in 1910 at the age of 66 from blood poisoning. After he died he finally achieved the respect as an artist that he sought his whole life.

### **About the Artwork:**

*Surprised! Storm in the Forest* is the first of the jungle paintings for which the artist is best known. It shows a tiger, illuminated by a flash of lightning, preparing to pounce on its prey in the midst of a raging gale.

The tiger's prey is beyond the edge of the canvas, so is it left to the imagination of the viewer to decide what the outcome will be, although the word “surprised” in the title the tiger has the upper hand. (Rousseau later stated that the tiger was about to pounce on a group of explorers.) The tiger appears in at least three more of Rousseau’s paintings.

Despite their apparent simplicity, Rousseau's jungle paintings were built up meticulously in layers, using a large number of green shades to capture the lush exuberance of the jungle. He also devised his own method for depicting the lashing rain by trailing strands of silver paint diagonally across the canvas.

The painting received mixed reviews. Most critics mocked Rousseau's work as childish, but one critic said of it: “His tiger surprising its prey is a 'must-see'; it's the alpha and omega of painting....”

His work continued to be derided by the critics up to and after his death in 1910, but he won a following among his contemporaries: Picasso, Matisse, and Toulouse-Lautrec were all admirers of his work.

Around 1908, an art dealer purchased *Surprised!* and two other works from Rousseau for 190 francs. The painting was later purchased by the National Gallery, London in 1972 where you can see it today.

### **Vocabulary:**

Color is the element of art that is produced when light, striking an object, is reflected back to the eye.

Texture, another element of art, is used to describe either the way a three-dimensional work actually feels when touched, or the visual "feel" of a two-dimensional work.

A landscape is a painting or drawing showing a scene from nature, often including mountains, trees, rivers, fields and other outdoor scenery.

### **Possible Questions:**

1. Where does this painting take place? (In a jungle.) What sorts of things help you figure this out? (The plants and the tiger.)
2. What is happening? (A tiger is crouched down like it is ready to pounce. There is a big rainstorm with lightning.)
3. Who do you think is "Surprised!"? (Maybe the tiger is surprised by the lightning strike. Maybe the tiger's prey is surprised.)
4. What does the texture look like? (Experts say that it was his paintings had a polished quality about them, making them look smooth.)
5. Look at the size of the leaves. How do they look compared to the tiger? (They are big; most of the tiger is hidden behind the leaves.)
6. What colors do you see? (Point out all the different shades of green, but also the yellow and red and orange.)
7. Does the painting look realistic to you? Why or why not?

**Activity:** Mixed media jungle landscape

### **Materials Needed:**

- White construction paper, 9" X 13", one per student
- Crayons (or colored pencils), one set per student
- Tempera paint in traditional and exotic leaf colors: green (more than one hue of green, if possible), brown, blue, purple, yellow, red, etc.)

- Disposable paper plates, one per paint color
- Leaf stamps OR simple stamp shapes cut from sponges\*
- Newspaper (optional)
- One plastic spoon or spatula for each color paint

\*Individual leaf stamps can be purchased from many different sources or a simple leaf shape (football shape) can be pre-cut from household sponges. (Foam leaf stamp sets are no longer available from Oriental Trader.)

### **Preparation:**

Set up a table in the classroom to be the “stamping” table. Cover with newspapers (if you wish) and lay out the disposable plates. Squeeze different color paint onto each plate and spread it thinly across the surface with the back of a spoon. Paint can be thinned a bit with water to make it more translucent. Lay out the leaf stamps.

*An adult should supervise and assist at this table.*

### **Process:**

1. Pass out paper. Remind students to write their names on it.
2. Explain to students that they will be creating a jungle scene today using crayons (or colored pencils) and paint.
3. Using their crayons, have them draw an animal in the foreground, and draw the branches of the trees.
  - a. The animal doesn’t have to be a tiger; students can choose what type of animal they would like to draw.
  - b. Students can draw more than one animal if they wish.
  - c. Explain to the students that they shouldn’t draw any leaves on their trees because they will be printing the leaves onto the branches with paint when their drawing is done.
4. When students are done with their crayon drawing, have them come to the table that you’ve set up.
  - a. Explain that they will be pressing the foam leaves into the paint and then pressing the stamp onto their paper.

- b. Remind the students that once a leaf has been dipped in one color paint, it should not be dipped into any other color. If time allows, an adult can rinse off a stamp, dry it with a paper towel, and return it to the table.
  - c. Encourage them to use mostly green for their leaves, but use at least one “exotic” color too.
  - d. Also, explain to students that they should not overlap different colors too closely, or the paint colors on the plates will become “muddied” for the rest of the students.
5. As a courtesy to other Art Guides, please rinse off the spoons and leaf stamps, pat dry, and return them to be re-used!
6. Once dry, pictures can be displayed!

**Examples:**





**Parent Note:**

Henri Rousseau (1844 – 1910) was a French Post-Impressionist painter in the Naïve or Primitive manner. Ridiculed during his lifetime by critics, he came to be recognized as a self-taught genius whose works are of high artistic quality.

Today in Art Masterpiece, students created their own imaginative mixed media jungle fantasy by ink-stamping leaves over their crayon animal drawings.



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Extra Help Needed Note:

# We need extra hands!!

The next Art Masterpiece lesson could use some extra helping hands. If you can, please come and lend your hands on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.  
(date) (time)

## Thanks so much!

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