**Art Masterpiece: The Umbrellas by Pierre-Auguste Renoir**

**Pronounced:** Pea-air Oh-goost Ren wah

**Keywords:** Color, Canvas, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism

**Activity:** Umbrella Collage

**Meet the Artist:**

- Renoir was born in Limoges, France in 1841.
- As a little boy, he played in the streets of Paris near the Royal Palace. Sometimes he would see the Queen of France in the courtyard of the Louvre. The Louvre is a part of the palace that was turned into a museum. A young Renoir spent hours there studying great works of art. Today some of Renoir’s art hangs in the Louvre.
• At thirteen, Renoir worked in a dish factory painting china patterns. He painted designs and patterns on dishes for seven years until he became an art student.

• Along with his friend Claude Monet, Renoir was one of the leading artists of the Impressionist movement. Later in his career, he painted in the Post-Impressionist style.

• Renoir’s favorite subjects for his paintings were people. He painted many portraits, but also painted people in their natural, busy state (such as the people in his painting *The Umbrellas*, who are just going about their busy day in the rain).

• Renoir’s road to success as an artist was rocky at first, but eventually his artwork became popular. As he grew older he continued to paint, which became difficult because he also had painful arthritis. Renoir died when he was 78 years old.

• **Impressionism** - style of art developed in France during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These pieces of art were painted as if someone just took a quick look at the subject of the painting ("first impression"). They were usually in bold colors, using large amounts of paint, with less detail than previous styles of art. They would sometimes take their canvas (stretched fabric that artists paint on) outdoors so they could see the way sunlight made colors look different.

• **Post-Impressionism**: Post-Impressionists extended Impressionism while rejecting its limitations: they continued using vivid colors, often thick application of paint, and real-life subject matter, but were more inclined to emphasize geometric forms, distort form for expressive effect, and use unnatural or arbitrary color.
**About the Art:**

- *The Umbrellas* is a combination of both the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist styles. Renoir began painting *The Umbrellas* in about 1880, using the loose brushwork and bright palette typical of the Impressionist movement. However, in about 1886, after losing his attachment to Impressionism and drawing inspiration from the Post-Impressionists, he re-worked parts of the painting, using darker colors and more geometric shapes.

- *The Umbrellas* (French: *Les Parapluies*) depicts a busy street scene in Paris, with most of the people shown using umbrellas against the rain.

- On the right side of the painting, a mother looks down at her daughters, each fashionably dressed for their afternoon walk.

- The principal female figure to the left of the frame holds up her skirt against the mud and water on the road as she carries a hatbox, but has no umbrella to shelter her. Her simple clothing suggests she is a member of the working class.

- A young bearded gentleman on the far left seems to be about to offer the woman next to him some shelter under his umbrella.

- Unlike most artwork of the day, the focus of the painting is not at the center of the page, and many of the figures are cut off at the edge of the painting, as if the painting were a photograph. The composition appears natural, but the angles of the umbrellas are carefully arranged to form geometric shapes. The colors are largely blues and greys.

**Possible Questions:**

- How many umbrellas can you count?
- Are the colors used in the painting light or dark?
- Describe the people in the painting. How are they the same? How are they different from each other?
- Why do you think the main figure in the painting (the woman on the left) doesn’t have an umbrella? Do you sometimes get caught in the rain without an umbrella or rain jacket? How does it feel?
Activity:

1) Begin by passing out 1 ½ sheets of cardstock printed with umbrellas to each student. Students should receive 9 small umbrellas total.

2) Distribute the markers, and instruct students to color their umbrellas with any design that they choose. They can add lines, dots, squiggles, geometric shapes, solid color, etc. Encourage them to use a variety of colors. No two umbrellas should be exactly the same.

3) After students are done coloring, pass out the scissors. Students should cut out all 9 umbrellas. A few students might need help cutting if they are running behind.

4) After cutting is complete, pass out glue or glue sticks and one piece of black or dark blue construction paper. Students will then arrange their 9 umbrellas in any configuration they choose on their paper, and glue them securely into place.

5) Collect the markers, scissors, and glue, and remind the students to throw away any paper scraps.

6) Students should write their name on their paper with a white crayon.

Materials Needed:

- Cardstock printed with umbrella outlines (6 per page, 1 ½ pages per student)
- Colored markers
- Scissors
- Glue or glue sticks
- 9 x 12-inch black or dark blue construction paper
- White crayons (to write name on back)
Artwork Examples: