

# Portrait of Mlle Claus

## Teachers' notes

Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus, 1868  
Edouard Manet (1832-1883)

oil on canvas 111 x 70cm

A zoomable image of this painting is available on our website to use in the classroom on an interactive whiteboard or projector

[www.ashmolean.org/learning-resources](http://www.ashmolean.org/learning-resources)



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These guidance notes are designed to help you use this painting as a focus for cross-curricular teaching and learning. Questions like these may be useful as a starting point for developing speaking and listening skills with your class.

### Starting questions

- What are your first impressions of this painting? How does it make you feel?
- Where is Fanny sitting? What clues did you use?
- What do you think she is thinking and feeling?
- What do you think the weather is like? How can you tell?
- How would you describe Fanny's clothes to someone who couldn't see the picture?
- How are her clothes similar to or different from our clothes today?
- How would you feel if you dressed like this?
- If you were copying this painting, which colours would you need? Can you think of new names for the different greens?
- Manet was different to other painters at the time who tried to disguise their brush strokes. Hold an imaginary paintbrush and copy his brush strokes. How does your hand move and feel?
- Look closely, do any parts look unfinished to you? If you completed this picture, what else would you add?

# Background information

## Mademoiselle Claus

Fanny Claus was a professional musician, which was unusual for an upper middle-class woman at the time. She played both violin and viola. After training at the Paris Conservatoire she became a soloist and founding member of the first all women string quartet. A friend of Manet's wife, Suzanne Leenhoff, she was part of Manet's large group of friends, who gathered for twice-weekly soirées at his apartment. She married Manet's friend, the artist Pierre Prins, and died of tuberculosis eight years later, aged 30.



'Le Balcon'  
Edouard Manet, 1868  
© Musee d'Orsay, Paris

## The painting

The 'Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus' was a study for one of Edouard Manet's most famous paintings 'Le Balcon'. (The Balcony). As a first sketch it has a spontaneous quality. Her features are brilliantly drawn and are more defined than they are in 'Le Balcon' where Mlle Claus has retreated into the background. The play of light across the dress, the use of obvious brush strokes and limited colour palette are typical of Manet's style and particularly striking in this work.

Fanny Claus is accompanied by Berthe Morisot who has been cut off the picture. The inspiration for both paintings was the sight of people on a balcony, during a summer spent in Boulogne-sur-mer with his family in 1868. In 'Le Balcon' Berthe Morisot takes the central position. Morisot was also unusual for being a professional Impressionist artist. She was a lifelong friend of Manet, who painted her many times.

## The artist

Manet was born into a prosperous family in Paris in 1832. He married Suzanne Leenhoff in 1863 and lived and worked in Paris throughout his life, as well as travelling widely in Europe.

Manet's choice of contemporary subjects together with his bold handling of paint led to much criticism from the establishment. However, his groundbreaking approach to art also won him much support from contemporary artists. He was friends with many of the key Impressionist painters: Degas, Renoir, Monet, Cézanne, Pissarro, but didn't exhibit with them. Manet himself believed future audiences would better understand his work claiming 'their vision will be better than ours'. Today he is credited as the 'founding father of modern art'.

## The historical context

Inspired by changes happening in Paris, Manet recorded images of modern and contemporary life in the cafes, parks, theatres and gardens of Paris. He lived the life of the *flâneur*, watching and enjoying the vibrant life of the city, but taking the role of a detached observer. He is famous for depicting his subjects as detached from each other, the viewer and the artist. Audiences at the time found this challenging and disconcerting. Manet had a wide circle of friends from artistic, literary and musical communities and many of them appear in his paintings.

## Ideas for creative planning across Key Stage 1 & 2

You can use this painting as the starting point for developing pupils critical and creative thinking as well as their learning across the curriculum. You may want to consider possible 'lines of enquiry' as a first step in your cross-curricular planning. Choosing a line of enquiry area may help you to build strong links between curriculum areas.

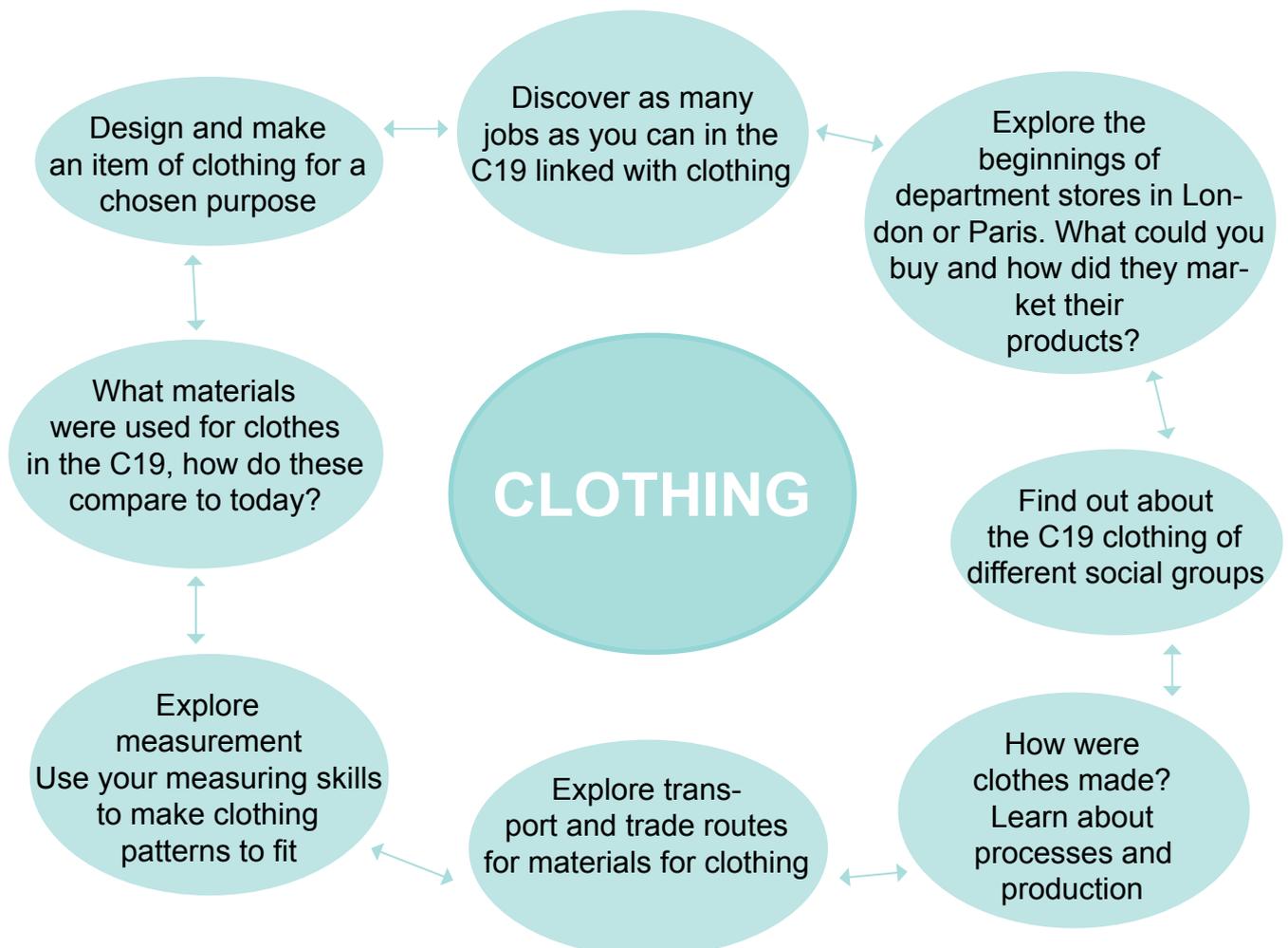
After using strategies to aid looking and engagement with the painting and by using questions to facilitate dialogue about the painting, you can work with the children to develop lines of enquiry that will build cross curricular links.

Here are a few suggestions of possible 'lines of enquiry' using this painting:

- Nineteenth century women
- Holidays and leisure
- Portraits
- Clothing and fashion
- Music and the arts
- Manet and the Impressionists

### Using clothing as an example of a line of enquiry

Here are a few ideas of how you can develop a range of learning opportunities to engage pupils with this line of enquiry. Each activity can link with the others to build on pupils' learning across the theme.



## Further activities

Teachers can use the painting to develop culturally enriching, relevant and practical learning opportunities across the curriculum. Here are some possible lines of research.

- Look at the colours used in the painting and recreate part or all of the painting using digital or mixed media e.g. collage.
- Listen to music played by Fanny Claus such as Haydn's string quartets.
- Create a portrait of yourself on holiday. Where would you and be and what would you be doing? What would you be wearing? How would you pose?
- Use Google Earth to locate Boulogne-sur-mer and Paris. Discover more about the changes taking place in Paris during Manet's time, the 1860s.
- Explore the development of holiday destinations by the seaside. Discuss the benefits of holidays, entertainment, fresh air and outdoor living.
- Write a postcard from Fanny or Manet, describing their holiday.
- Use 'Le Balcon' to create a play, acting out what happens between the two scenes.
- Write a monologue for Fanny, exploring her thoughts and feelings in the painting.
- Work with a partner to write and record an interview with Fanny, finding out more about her life and interests.
- Label the picture using French words e.g. la chaise (chair), le balcon (balcony), la robe (dress)



*'I was pleasantly surprised by how much you can learn from a painting. To see the children react in such a positive way was inspirational. The children stepped into the world of Mademoiselle Claus and explored everything from clothing and fashion, the role of women in society, and the life of an artist. Exceptional, thank you so much!'*

*Yr3/4 class teacher, Hanwell Fields Community School, Banbury*