LEAVING FOR THE COUNTRY:
GEORGE BELLOWS AT WOODSTOCK

Bellows – the artist
- Letter of introduction
- A Rugged Poet in Paint
- Photograph of the Bellows family
- The World According to Bellows
- The Woodstock Whirl
- *The boy who chose the brush over baseball* (Smithsonian, June 1992)

Transparency of *Evening Group* and *Autumn Brook*

*Evening Group*
- Information about the painting
- Learning to Look: What is going on in this picture?
- Looking to Learn about Families, Communities, People and Place
  - * Social Studies: Gathering Information
  - * ELA: Looking and Writing
  - * Art: Making a Picture
  - Photocopy of artist’s sketch for *Evening Group*

*Autumn Brook*
- Information about the painting
- Learning to Look: What is going on in this picture?
- Looking to Learn About Places in New York State
  - * Social Studies: Gathering Information
  - * ELA: Looking and Writing
  - * Art: Making a Picture

*Lesson for the classroom – for use with transparency*
Leaving for the Country: George Bellows at Woodstock
April 13 – June 22, 2003
The Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester

George Wesley Bellows (1882-1925), the most famous American artist of his generation, is the focus of a major touring exhibition organized by the Memorial Art Gallery.

Bellows was associated with the Ashcan School – a group of artists noted for brash, unglamorized views of city life. He was instrumental in organizing the 1913 Armory Show, a showcase for radical developments that changed the American art scene forever. But as this exhibition shows, he also painted extraordinary portraits and visionary landscapes.

From 1920-24 Bellows spent summers and falls with his family in the artists’ colony of Woodstock, New York. There, he painted his family and his neighbors and the surrounding beauty of the Hudson Valley region.

Thank you for your interest in the Memorial Art Gallery and the exhibition Leaving for the Country: George Bellows at Woodstock. We are pleased to present this exhibit, and we hope that you and your students will enjoy your visit to the Gallery. The Memorial Art Gallery is grateful to the exhibition sponsors and underwriters for the opportunity to showcase the work of George Bellows.

Enclosed please find a variety of materials for classroom use. Please contact us if you have any questions regarding this information, or the exhibit.

Most sincerely,

Marlene Hamann-Whitmore
Curator of Education
473-7720, x3025

Carol S. Yost
Assistant Curator of Education
473-7720, x3051
A RUGGED POET IN PAINT

In 1904, 22-year-old George Wesley Bellows (1882–1925) left Ohio State University and a promising baseball career to study painting in New York City. Bellows’s career took off as meteorically as a fly ball; his fight scenes and urban paintings garnered sales, awards, and public recognition. He quickly became part of a dynamic community of artists, which included painter and teacher Robert Henri, who became Bellows’s mentor and lifelong friend.

Bellows's brilliance was not confined to oil on canvas: drawing and lithography were related passions. His works appeared in publications as diverse as the radical *Masses* and the upper crust *Vanity Fair*. He is credited with having transformed lithography from a commercial process into a fine art, and his nearly 200 prints, ranging from portraits of his daughters to depictions of the barbarism of World War I, reveal his mastery of the technique.

Bellows's expansive personality and artistic acumen made him a memorable teacher. He taught at the Modern School in New York City, founded by anarchist Emma Goldman, as well as at the Art Students League. He responded graciously and enthusiastically to letters sent to him by students interested in becoming artists. When questioned about his views on art education, he wrote: “The first thing a student should learn is that all education that amounts to anything is self-education.”

While his art absorbed him always, his family was equally important to him. In 1910 he married fellow-artist Emma Story, and they moved into a New York City brownstone near Gramercy Park that housed Bellows's studio as well. By 1915, the family included two young daughters, Anne and Jean, who quickly became models for their father’s paintings.

George Bellows's quest for compelling subjects took him to varied locales: Monhegan Island, Maine; Carmel-by-the-Sea, California; Middletown, Rhode Island; and finally, Woodstock, New York. There, his nomadic summer travels ended, as he had found a spot in which the beauty of the landscape was matched by the vibrancy of an artistic community. The idyllic existence that he had created for himself and his family ended abruptly in January 1925, when he died of complications of a ruptured appendix.

Repro of *Stag at Sharkey's*
Repro of *Cliff Dwellers*
The World
According to Bellows

You do not know what you are able to do until you try.

Try it in every possible way.

Be deliberate, and spontaneous.

Be thoughtful, and painstaking.

Be abandoned, and impulsive.

Learn your own possibilities.

George Bellows, 1921
THE WOODSTOCK WHIRL

While Woodstock was an artistic sanctuary for Bellows, it was equally important to him as a community of friends and colleagues. In the course of the summer and fall, he juried exhibitions, hosted family and New York City visitors, and managed as well as played on the baseball team. Swimming lessons were offered to the neighborhood children at the Bellows pool. Friendly games of poker and singing in four-part harmony were regular evening activities in the Bellows-Speicher-Rosen neighborhood. Charles Rosen reminisced about his friend:

"Above all else Geo was a vivid person and one not easily forgotten. He left the imprint of his personality on any person, group or community that he was associated with. He made friends easily and seemed to be particularly loyal. He had great enthusiasms for people—they could be, and were—the village carpenter—the man who ran the garage—the boys with whom he played baseball or almost any “individual” and he could and did go to bat for them on many an occasion.

He was greatly loved by all the boys on the baseball team on which he played and was also an important factor in organizing. This friendship was on a man to man basis and in no sense did the fact that he was a great artist affect the relationship. As far as they were concerned he was just a grand guy and they liked him—while his feeling for all of them was just as warm and generous."
George Bellows
Evening Group, 1914
Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 47.13
Evening Group  (1914)

LEARNING TO LOOK: WHAT IS GOING ON IN THIS PICTURE?

• Who are these people?
  What are they doing?
  How are they dressed?
  Where are they?
  How did they get there?

• When do you think this picture was painted?

• Are these people a family?
  Are they here together?
  Do they know each other?
  Are they talking to, or looking at, each other?

• What is going to happen next?

• Where is the artist?
  Does he know these people?

• What has the artist arranged in the foreground, the middle ground and the background?

• Describe the composition, the colors, the shapes and the lines used by the artist.
  How many shades of blue has the artist used?

• Is this a realistic picture or one invented from his imagination?
Evening Group  (1914)

LOOKING TO LEARN ABOUT FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, PEOPLE AND PLACES

Social Studies: Gathering information
- Interview an older member of your family about a favorite vacation.
- Make a family photo time line.
- Research activities that families of the past engaged in. (See photographs from Rochester’s past at Rochester Images, (www.libraryweb.org/rochimag/rochpublib)
- Compare and contrast family activities of the past with those of the present.
- How has technology changed communication, transportation and recreation?

ELA: Looking and Writing
- Put yourself into the picture. What are you doing? How does it feel to be there? Write a journal entry about one day on vacation at Monhegan Island.
- Choose a figure from the painting. What is he or she thinking? Write a journal entry for him or her.
- Who are these people and why are they together in this place? What is going to happen next? Write a narrative that tells their story.
- What is your favorite vacation memory? Keep a journal when you go on your next vacation. Include some sketches of places, people and activities.
- Make a list of the words that come to your mind as you look at Evening Group. Create a poem that uses some or all of those words.
Evening Group (1914)

Art: Making a Picture

- Where is your favorite place? Describe it in words and draw a picture of yourself there. What colors capture your feelings about the place?

- Study how Bellows has organized Evening Group. Which is the main figure and how does he emphasize this through placement, gestures, color, size or reaction of the other people? How has he arranged the other figures in the foreground? What is in the middle ground? What is in the background?

- Do you have a community of friends, perhaps from summer camp or a sports team? Draw a “portrait” of this group. Organize the drawing or painting so that it reveals the important details about your group.

- Make a tableau vivant (living picture) of Evening Group. What do you learn by enacting the scene? Were the poses natural or awkward? What is the relationship among the people? Where is the artist? What props do you need?

- The next page is a photocopy of George Bellows’s sketch for Evening Group. A sketch is a type of “first draft” that an artist uses before beginning a painting. What are the similarities and differences between the sketch and the finished painting?
George Bellows
*Autumn Brook, October 1922*

Bequest of Muriel Englander Klepper and Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 2001.27
Autumn Brook  (1922)

LEARNING TO LOOK: WHAT IS GOING ON IN THIS PICTURE?

- What do you see?
  What time of day is it?
  What is the weather?
  What is the season?
  What do you hear and smell?
  What textures can you see?
  What colors do you see?
  How many shades of green can you find?

- Where is the artist standing?
  Where is the viewer?
  How does the artist lead you into the painting?
  Trace the path your eye travels into and across the painting.

- How does this painting make you feel?
  How has the artist used line, color and texture to evoke a particular mood?

- Is this a painting of an actual scene or invented from Bellow’s imagination?
  How can you tell?
Autumn Brook  (1922)

LOOKING TO LEARN ABOUT PLACES IN NEW YORK STATE

Social Studies: Gathering Information

• Locate Woodstock on a map of eastern New York State. How far is it from New York City where Bellows lived during the winter? How did people travel in the early 1900s? Why would artists and other New York people go to Woodstock in the summer and autumn?

• Use a topographical map to locate the Catskill Mountains, Overlook Mountain, Guardian Mountain, the Sawkill and Beaverkill Creeks, Lake Hill and Cooper Lake. All these geographic features were painted by Bellows while he was at Woodstock. Are any of these places recognizable in Autumn Brook?

• What evidence has Bellows included that this is an autumn scene?

Looking to Learn: ELA: Looking and Writing

• What words would you use to describe the colors, the lines and the shapes in Autumn Brook? Use these words to create a poem that captures what you see when you look at this picture.

• Describe a landscape that has special meaning for you. If you were to paint this place what colors would you use? What kind of lines and shapes? How is an artist similar to a poet?
Autumn Brook (1922)

Looking to Learn: Art: Making a Picture

- Go outside and carefully observe a landscape; record or sketch the important details.

Once inside, make a drawing or painting by exaggerating certain elements to create an emotion. Select colors, lines and forms that convey meaning and feelings.

What did you leave out from the scene you observed? What did you add?

Give your painting a title.

- Make two black and white copies of Autumn Brook.

Choose colors to express a different season. Color on the photocopy using colored pencils. What colors are most expressive of the season?

Select different colors to express your feelings about nature or the land or this particular landscape. Color on the second photocopy to create a picture of your mood or feelings about nature.
George Bellows
American, 1882–1925

*Autumn Brook*, October 1922
Oil on panel
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester
Bequest of Muriel Englander Klepper and Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 2001.27

*Autumn Brook* contains all the elements present in Bellows’s finest Woodstock landscapes, including water, rolling hills, mountains, animal life, vegetation, and a dramatic sky. Bellows’s choice of vivid colors celebrates the magnificence of nature and the artist’s joy at finding himself immersed in it. The active brush strokes prove his ability to paint with a controlled sense of abandon.
George Bellows
American, 1882–1925

Evening Group, October 1922
Oil on board
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester
Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 47.13

While George Bellows was based in New York City during much of the year, in the summer he searched for new views of the natural world. The harsh beauty of Maine’s Monhegan Island provided him with subjects that contrasted dramatically with his acclaimed scenes of city life. He first visited the island in 1911 in the company of his teacher and mentor, Robert Henri, and wrote enthusiastically to Emma, his wife: “the Island is only a mile wide and two miles long, but it looks as large as the Rocky Mountains. It’s three times as high as Montauk [Long Island] and all black and grey rock. Beautiful pine forests and wonderful varieties of all kinds…” In the summer of 1914, he convinced Emma to return along with her young daughter, Anne. There he painted Evening Group. The scene, from the back of their rented house, overlooks the harbor and Manana Island. Emma Bellows and daughter Anne are on the left, and two neighbor children stand on the right.

In a letter from Monhegan, Bellows lamented, “My head is full of millions of great pictures which I will never have time to paint.” Ultimately, Woodstock, not Monhegan, would provide him a permanent summer retreat where he could do so.