

## Berthe Morisot



*The Cradle*, 1872  
oil on canvas, 22 x 18 in  
The Louvre, Paris, France



*Self-Portrait*, 1885  
oil on canvas,  
Private Collection

## The Artist

### Berthe Morisot

Born Bourges, France 1841, died Paris, France 1895

Born into a wealthy and successful family, Berthe Morisot grew up to be a gifted painter and printmaker. When Morisot's family moved to Paris, her mother saw that she received conventional lessons in painting and drawing. Although she studied the academic style, Morisot developed an approach opposite of what she was taught. For a time, Morisot studied under Camille Corot before becoming the first woman to join the circle of the French Impressionists. She befriended many of them, including Manet, Degas, and Renoir. Her paintings appeared in the Impressionists' shows in France despite protests from friends and family. Unlike the other Impressionists, Manet and Morisot adopted a more conservative approach by using a more natural color palette as opposed to the other impressionists' experiments with intense color schemes. Berthe married Manet's Brother, Eugene, and had a successful professional career while also being a wife and mother. Morisot's paintings are studies of women either outside or in a domestic setting. Although fellow artists respected Morisot as one of the founders of Impressionism, and despite her having multiple pieces accepted by the Salon in Paris, Morisot never held great critical acclaim during her lifetime.

## Art Movement

### Impressionism

The artistic movement of Impressionism stemmed from a group of artists called the Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors, Printmakers, etc. This group held an exhibition in Paris, 1874 that launched the movement. The style is characterized by short and broken brushstrokes barely conveying a form, bright-unblended colors, and showcasing the effects of light. The casual style they painted in, using loose brushwork, gave an effect of spontaneity and effortlessness. Most paintings in the Impressionism movement were set and painted outdoors (plein-air compositions). The Impressionists organized their own exhibitions and received little support from the public.

## The Artwork

### *The Cradle*

Painted in 1872, *The Cradle* demonstrates the inseparable bond between a mother and child. Morisot liked to use her family as models and this piece is no exception. The painting shows Morisot's sister, Edma, watching her daughter Blanche sleeping peacefully. Soft and airy lines mixed with dramatic

light and dark colors give the piece a feminine touch, evoking a mother's love. The mirror image of the mother's and daughter's bent arms form a diagonal also in line with the curtain behind the mother, all of these are meant to show the protective love and intimacy a new mother has for her child. The Louvre bought the work in 1930 from Edma's family where it hung after Berthe was unsuccessful in selling the work after it showed in the Impressionist exhibition of 1874.

## Discussion Suggestions

### Discussing the Painting:

- *Look at the picture, what do you see?*
- *What kind of a room do you think they are in?*
- *Can you see the baby's face?*
- *What do you think is the purpose of the lace netting surround the baby's crib?*
- *How is this nursery (baby's room) different from one you see today?*
- *What is the Mother in the picture doing?*

## Activity Idea

### Re-create Berthe Morisot's *The Cradle*

- Give Students a copy of *The Cradle*.
- Supply them with crayons, colored pencils, chalk, or pastels.
- Tell the students to color the line drawing (included in this folder) of *The Cradle* as Berthe Morisot herself would do. Paying close attention to color (light vs. dark) and lines (straight vs. curvy).

### Materials Needed:

- Scrap paper
- Pencils
- Copy of *The Cradle* line drawing
- Colored pencils, crayons, chalk, or pastels

### Alternative Activity Ideas:

- Fill in the blank worksheet on Berthe Morisot.
- Berthe Morisot crossword puzzle.