

The Afterglow in Egypt 1861  
by William Holman Hunt

oil on canvas 82 x 37cm

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)



These guidance notes are designed to help you use paintings from our collection as a focus for cross-curricular teaching and learning.

A visit to the Ashmolean Museum to see the painting offers your class the perfect 'learning outside the classroom' opportunity.

## Starting questions

Questions like these may be useful as a starting point for developing speaking and listening skills with your class.

What catches your eye first?

What is the lady carrying?

Can you describe what she is wearing?

What animals can you see?

Where do you think the lady is going?

What do you think the man doing?

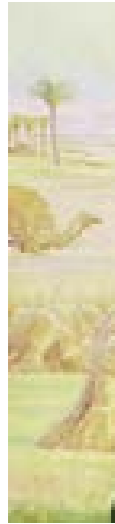
Which country do you think this could be?

What time of day do you think it is? Why do you think that?

If you could step into the painting what would you feel/smell/hear...?

## Background Information

### The painting



Hunt painted two versions of 'The Afterglow in Egypt'. The first is a life-size painting of a woman carrying a sheaf of wheat on her head, which hangs in Southampton Art Gallery. The Ashmolean version is smaller and has always hung in Oxford, first in the Walton Street home of Thomas Combe, a great patron and collector of Pre-Raphaelite art. Combe died in 1873 and twenty years later, after the death of his wife, the painting came to the Ashmolean.

In this painting an Egyptian woman dressed in beautiful clothes and jewellery carries a crate of pigeons on her head and a beautiful green vessel in her right hand. She gazes out at us and stands barefoot in a fertile landscape close to the water's edge. The figure was read by Hunt's contemporaries as a kind of Egyptian goddess of plenty. Hunt believed that agriculture was the only aspect of the once-great civilization that had survived in Egypt.

In the background we see the desert. A camel is about to enter the scene on the left side and the palm trees on the horizon stand against a pinky glow in the sky.

The male figure, the cow and the calf only appear in the Ashmolean painting.

### The historical context

Hunt was one of the founder members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This group was formed in 1848 in London by four painters, Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, James Collinson and a painter turned art critic, Frederick Stephens, Thomas Woolner, a sculptor, and a writer, Dante's brother, William Michael Rossetti. All the artists were reacting against the conventions of the time, as taught at the Royal Academy, and turned to early Italian art, where Biblical and historical stories were used for inspiration. They experimented with a technique inspired by the fresco technique used by medieval and early Renaissance artists, painting on a wet white ground. This was slow, difficult work but gave a jewel-like quality to the colours typical of Pre-Raphaelite art.

### The artist

The son of a London warehouse manager, Hunt left school at 12 to work as a clerk. He didn't enjoy this and eventually persuaded his parents to allow him to attend the Royal Academy Art School. He was soon completely disillusioned by contemporary British art, but when he read John Ruskin's book about Modern Painters, he was inspired by the idea that contemporary artists should take the world of nature as their chief model. Hunt used Bible stories and poetry as a theme for much of his work. However, the focus in 'Afterglow in Egypt', is depicting nature in fine detail.

Hunt left England on January 13th 1854 to travel for two years in the Near East, funded by the sale of his paintings. He wanted to rediscover the landscape of the Bible and travelled to Palestine and Egypt. He found it hard to work in the heat and dust of Egypt. In a letter to Thomas Combe in 1854 he wrote that he had 'begun a study of an Egyptian girl the size of life which, however, what with the difficulty of getting the model every day and the horrible trials of wind and dust even in the best places I can find for painting in - is in danger of being abandoned - at least for the present.'

Hunt did abandon the project for a time and didn't finish the painting until 1861, back in England, when he painted the Ashmolean version.



William Holman Hunt (1827 - 1910):  
Self-portrait at the Age of 14

## Ideas for creative planning across the KS1 & 2 curriculum

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 interest them.

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

- Egypt
- Farming
- Animals and us
- Clothing
- Cultural diversity

### Using clothing as an example of a chosen 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 chosen theme.





## Take One Picture Inspires...

Take One Picture encourages teachers to use a painting imaginatively in the classroom, both as a stimulus for artwork, and for work in more unexpected curriculum areas. Work in many curriculum areas can be inspired by using a single image as a starting point.

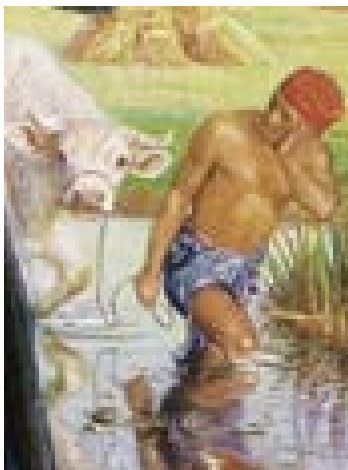
The challenge is for teachers to use the painting to develop culturally enriching, relevant and practical learning opportunities across the curriculum.

## Tips for introducing paintings to a class

- Reveal the painting section by section over a number of days. Each time a new detail is revealed the children can make predictions about what might be in the rest of the picture based on what they can see.
- Display the painting in the classroom for a number of days with a tape recorder or
- 'graffiti wall' for children to add comments or questions about the painting. Once the pupils' comments and questions have been gathered a class discussion can follow on.
- Introduce the painting to the whole class in a question and answer session designed to take the pupils into the painting as outlined on page one.
- Show the painting to the class for a minute or so and then cover it up or take it away. Ask the children to remember what they could see.
- Show the painting to one or two willing volunteers. They should then describe what they have seen to the rest of the class. Pupils could draw what they have heard described to them and then see how well the versions match up.
- Play 'painting eye spy' using the initial letter of details from the picture.

"I now understand the vast scope that a painting has and I feel able to develop a scheme of work surrounding a painting, using the line of enquiry approach."

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