

James Whistler Reading Comprehension

Name _____

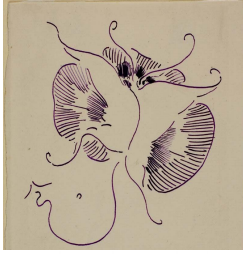
James Whistler was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1834. He moved to Russia with his family at a young age, as his dad got a job working on railroad construction. While in Russia, Whistler began drawing at the Imperial Academy of Science, piquing his interest in art. In 1849, Whistler and his family settled down in Connecticut, and Whistler enrolled at West Point. He took a particular interest in a drawing class taught by Robert W. Weir. When Whistler was dismissed from West Point in 1854, he began pursuing the arts via the drawings division of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey. From there, Whistler knew his passion was in painting.

Whistler moved to Europe and studied art in Paris, connecting with artists in the area. He began working on paintings as well as etchings when he moved again to London in 1859. In 1863, one of his paintings finally gained popularity at a Salon after many of his previous works were rejected. Whistler's name was finally out in the world. He designed a unique signature for his paintings in the shape of a butterfly using his initials, and began using it more frequently in 1869.

"Art for art's sake" was a phrase that Whistler used to inform much of his art style. While he indulged in the realism style that was popular during the time period, his own art style strayed from it. Whistler often used a limited color palette and experimented with perspective in his art work, often emphasizing the flat but more abstract techniques of painting. He was one of the leaders of the Post-Impressionist Movement—a revolution in art that shied away from Impressionism's obsession with natural light and color. Whistler, along with other Post-Impressionists, used vivid colors and real-life subjects, but incorporated geometric forms, and even unnatural coloring of objects. Whistler would often title his works with names that related to music: for example, "symphony," "arrangement," and "nocturne." These names were meant to suggest the relationship between music notes and color, and encouraged viewers to look at the nuance and variation in his paintings rather than the subjects.

Unfortunately, Whistler accrued a high degree of criticism against his work—for which he had very little tolerance. In 1877, Whistler sued John Ruskin, who had compared Whistler's art to "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." While Whistler won the case, he made very little money off of it, and had to declare bankruptcy in 1879. Whistler died in 1903, and to honor his memory, memorial exhibitions were put on in Boston, London, and Paris. Whistler's unorthodox art style earned him international notoriety, even though he faced backlash while he was alive.

1. Based on the information in the article, identify James Whistler's unique signature for his art.



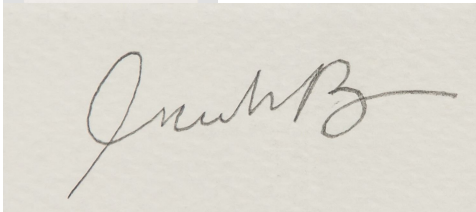
a.

Henri-Matisse

b.



c.



d.

2. Which of the following events first showed Whistler his passion for art?
- His paintings becoming popular at the Salon.
 - His time at the Coast and Geodetic Survey.
 - His time at the Imperial Academy of Science.
 - His study of art in Paris.
3. What is the relationship between music and artwork, shown by the titles of Whistler's works?
- Music, like art, has many different individual parts that come together as one cohesive whole.
 - Both music and art are exclusively about the subjects on which they are based, and not technique.
 - Both music and art contributed very little to the Post-Impressionist movement.
 - Music, like art, can incorporate geometric shapes, unnatural colorings, and natural light.
4. With which of the following painting techniques would a Post-Impressionist disagree?
- Bold colors
 - Use of natural light
 - Study of geometry
 - Human subjects

5. Which characteristics best describe Whistler?

- a. Talented, but easily offended
- b. Lazy, but quietly genius
- c. Artistic, but shy
- d. Visionary, but largely undiscovered

6. Why might Whistler's work have accrued criticism?

- a. Whistler himself was largely unpopular.
- b. It relied too heavily on the human geometry.
- c. It contested the previously-established style of Impressionism.
- d. It was largely unimaginative and boring for the time period.

7. Which was the third location in which Whistler lived?

- a. Massachusetts
- b. Paris
- c. Connecticut
- d. Russia