

LESSON PLAN

Lesson Title: Ashcan Portraits inspired by Eugene Thomason

Grade Level: Adaptable 7th – 12th grades

Length of Lesson: 6 45-minute class periods

Task Description:

Students will study the life and work of Ashcan school artist, Eugene Thomason. Using inspiration and techniques employed by Ashcan artists, students will create a portrait inspired by Thomason.

Instructional Objectives:

Students will create a portrait exhibiting accurate facial proportions.

Vocabulary:

Ashcan School	Texture
Line	Proportion
Shape	Emphasis
Color	Brushstroke

Museum Connections:

Portrait of George Luks by Eugene Thomason

“From New York to Nebo: The Artistic Journey of Eugene Thomason”

Special Exhibit Gallery

Materials:

Paper	Acrylic Paint
Pencil	Paint Brushes (larger sizes)
Canvas	Images for Inspiration/Photograph of Subject

Questioning:

- The Ashcan School of painters was best known for depicting every day life on the streets of New York. How does this gritty approach to art differ from that of the Impressionists, who were working at the end of the 19th century?
- What Elements of Art and Principles of Design are evident in portraits by Eugene Thomason?
- How does Eugene Thomason apply paint to the canvas surface? What do you notice about his brushstrokes?
- When drawing or painting a portrait, it is important to capture the likeness of the subject. It is also important to convey the personality, character and feelings of the subject. How can an artist communicate these in a portrait? How did Eugene Thomason do this?

Instructional Procedures:

Preparation:

- Students should gather reference material (photographs, magazine pages, etc.) for use as a portrait subject. Advise students that this portrait, inspired by Eugene Thomason, should show some element of the Ashcan School philosophy. Remember, not all portraits show just a person’s face. Encourage students to find a subject that will show some element of personality or feeling to the viewer.
- Students should have preliminary lesson in facial proportions to complete this lesson. It is a good idea to have them create a practice portrait before introducing this lesson.

Process:

- Using reference images and previously studied facial proportions lesson, students will render their portrait subject on paper or canvas using pencil.
- Students will plan an appropriate color scheme for their portrait, consistent with the Ashcan school’s use of the dark, muted palette to convey the era’s social and political rhetoric.
- Students will add acrylic paint to their portrait, using broad brushstrokes to build color and texture on the canvas or paper surface.
- When the portrait is complete, students may choose to add a detailed background or to add a monochrome background to create emphasis on the subject.
- Make sure students sign their work!

Conclusion:

- What Elements of Art and Principles of Design are evident in your portrait inspired by Eugene Thomason?
- How did using broad brushstrokes change the appearance of the portrait? Would your portrait have looked different if you had used a smaller brush that allowed more detail?
- How does your portrait mirror the philosophy of the Ashcan school painters? What message does your subject send about his or her everyday life?



Florence County Museum
111 West Cheves Street
Florence, SC 29501



PEE DEE CONNECTIONS

Published by the Florence County Museum

Vol. 2 No. 6

with funding provided by the National Endowment for the Arts



ABOUT THIS POSTER

Eugene Healan Thomason (1895-1972) was a product of the industrialized New South. Like so many other aspiring American artists, he made the obligatory pilgrimage to New York to advance his art education and launch his career. He understood that the city offered unparalleled opportunities for a promising young painter in the early 1920s.

Under the patronage of one of the nation’s most powerful tycoons, Thomason gained entrance to the renowned Art Students League, where he fell under the influence of the leading members of the Ashcan School: Robert Henri, John Sloan and, in particular, George Luks. Thomason spent a decade in the city, adopting – and eventually adapting – the Ashcan movement’s gritty realistic aesthetic into a distinctive regionalist style that rendered simple subject matter using thick paint.

In his portrayal of George Luks (1867-1933), Thomason captures his mentor’s robust personality. The total impression is one of spontaneity – the haphazard clutter in the studio, Luks’ absorption in painting and Thomason’s own handling of paint. It was probably done in the room Luks used for teaching after he left the Art Students League, having been dismissed. Thomason served as Luks’ class monitor, and the two became close friends.

The Community Arts Program is part of an arts integration program through the Florence County Museum. Funding for this program is provided by the **National Endowment for the Arts** and the **Trustees of the Florence Museum**.



Florence County Museum | 111 West Cheves Street | Florence, South Carolina | 843.676.1200 | flocomuseum.org

Tuesday - Saturday: 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, Sunday: 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm



Eugene Healan Thomason (1895–1972)

Portrait of George Luks

1928

Oil on canvas

On Loan from the Johnson Collection,
Spartanburg, South Carolina.