



# Art Alive!

## Program Description

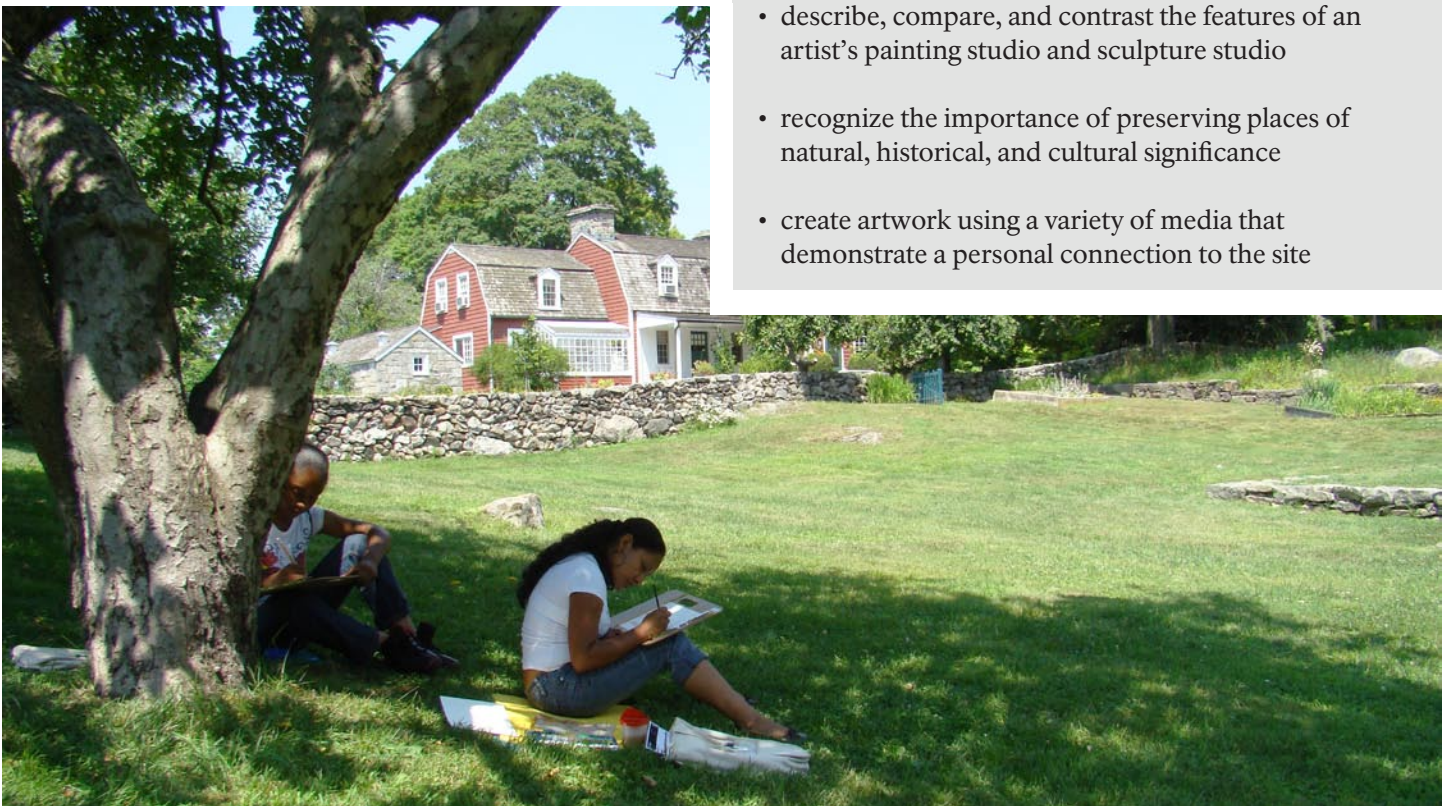
Grades 9-12

Students participating in this program learn about the three generations of American artists who lived and painted at Weir Farm National Historic Site, and experience the authentic, untouched landscape that inspired them. The program begins at the Burlingham House Visitor Center where students meet a park ranger who takes them on an interpretive tour of the landscape, the historic Weir painting studio, and the historic Young sculpture studio. Along the way, students are shown artwork of the site, and discuss connections between the artwork and the modern landscape. Following the tour, students are given an opportunity to follow in the artistic tradition of Weir Farm National Historic Site by sketching in the landscape using chalk pastels, graphite pencils, and colored pencils. This experience of creating art *en plein air* allows the students to become part of a unique and enduring artistic tradition and to forge their own personal “impression” of Weir Farm National Historic Site.

## Instructional Objectives

The student will be able to:

- describe the natural and cultural characteristics of Weir Farm National Historic Site and relate them to the larger context of the National Park Service
- explain the progression of artists at Weir Farm National Historic Site and describe each artist’s contribution to the site’s history
- compare and contrast American Impressionism to other art movements and styles
- compare and relate artwork of the site to the modern landscape
- reflect critically on the works of art presented
- describe, compare, and contrast the features of an artist’s painting studio and sculpture studio
- recognize the importance of preserving places of natural, historical, and cultural significance
- create artwork using a variety of media that demonstrate a personal connection to the site



# Ties to the Connecticut Curriculum Framework

## Visual Arts Content Standards Met

- 1.B Conceive and create original works of art that demonstrate a connection between personal expression and the intentional use of art materials, techniques, and processes
- 2.A Judge the effectiveness of different ways of using visual characteristics in conveying ideas
- 3.B Use subject matter, symbols, ideas, and themes that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, and cultural and aesthetic values to communicate intended meaning
- 4.A Analyze and interpret artworks in terms of form, cultural and historical context, and purpose
- 4.C Compare works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using these conclusions to inform their own art making
- 5.B Reflect critically on various interpretations to better understand specific works of art
- 5.C Defend personal interpretations using reasoned argument
- 6.A Analyze and compare characteristics of the visual arts within a particular historical period or style with ideas, issues or themes of the period or style

## Social Studies Content Standards Met

- 9.11-12.1 Explain and describe the natural and cultural characteristics of one place to distinguish it from another
- 9.9-10.1 Explain and describe the natural and cultural characteristics of one place to distinguish it from another
- 9.11-12.2 Explain why places and regions are important to human and cultural identity and stand as symbols for unifying society

## Pre-Visit Activities

- Preparatory readings: Excerpts from “The Life and Letters of J. Alden Weir,” readings from “Teaching with Historic Places” lesson plans, scholarly essays from “A Connecticut Place: Weir Farm An American Painter’s Rural Retreat” and “J. Alden Weir: An Appreciation of His Life and Work.”
- Quick write/journal: The Branchville farm was Weir’s retreat—his refuge away from the industrializing city; a place where he could pursue all of his favorite activities like painting, hunting, and fishing. Where do you go to relax and what do you like to do?
- Quick write/journal: Describe a place that has inspired you. This could mean anything from being inspired to take a picture, or being inspired to write, sing, research, etc. What was powerful to you about this place? Why did this place cause you to take action?



# Post-Visit Activities

## *Minds-On*

- Write a letter to Weir Farm National Historic Site reflecting on your visit. Please send letters to the following address:  
Weir Farm National Historic Site  
Attn: Park Ranger  
735 Nod Hill Road  
Wilton, CT 06897
- Write a persuasive essay calling for the preservation of a place important to you. Make a case for your place: Why is it significant? What about it is worth preserving? Why will it be important for future generations to experience?
- Weir Farm National Historic Site is currently the only National Park Service site in Connecticut. Write a persuasive proposal for the next National Park Service site in the state. Think about a place that you feel needs to be preserved. Address these questions in your proposal: Why does it have national significance to the American people? What about the place is historically, naturally or culturally important to preserve?
- Research a landscape painting from another artist or art movement. How does this artist's style or art movement compare to Weir's style and American Impressionism?
- Imagine you are an Impressionist artist and Weir has invited you to his farm in Branchville for the weekend. Write a letter back to your family detailing your experience at the farm. What did you do? How were your accommodations? Were your hosts hospitable? Use specific examples about Weir Farm National Historic Site's history as well as details and examples from your visit to give your letter authenticity.
- Imagine that you are Weir, and that you are trying to get your reclusive artist friend out of New York City for the weekend to visit the farm. Write your friend a letter persuading him or her to come visit you at the farm. How would you describe the farm? What could you say that would convince your friend to come? Use specific details and examples from your visit to enhance your letter. Weir and his first wife Anna also exchanged many letters during their courtship and marriage, many of which were compiled by their daughter Dorothy and published in a book called "The Life and Letters of J. Alden Weir." Using these letters as a reference to Weir's writing style, compose a fictional letter from

Weir to Anna about a day at the farm. Imagine Anna had to be in New York City for the weekend, and Weir wanted to update her on the happenings at Branchville while she was away. Use specific examples about the farm's history as well as details and examples from your visit to give your letter authenticity. Try to capture Weir's emotions as well! (This letter could also be written vice-versa, from Anna's point of view to Weir in the city).



# Post-Visit Activities Continued

## Hands-On

- The symbol of the National Park Service is the Arrowhead, which represents all of the natural and cultural resources that the National Park Service protects and preserves. Design a symbol specifically for Weir Farm National Historic Site, making sure to include examples of what is protected and preserved at the site.
- J. Alden Weir liked to paint in the Impressionist style, which included using thick, loose brushstrokes and bright colors, and focused on the landscape and scenes of everyday life for subject matter. In the spirit of Weir, paint your own Impressionist style painting use these techniques. If possible, paint outside, or *en plein air*, as the Impressionists did.
- Weir liked painting outside, but sometimes, it wasn't possible. As a solution, Weir invented a small portable studio he called the "Palace Car." This studio was dragged around the landscape by oxen and was equipped with the features of a studio, including a woodstove. Using this invention, Weir could continue painting the landscape, but without getting cold or wet. In this tradition, design your own "Palace Car" or portable studio.
- Here at the farm, the sculptor Mahonri Young wrote that he "saw pictures everywhere," and as a result, he carried a sketchbook around the grounds with him. For a week, carry around your own sketchbook and record views and sights in the landscape that make an impression on you.
- Although Mahonri Young sketched, painted and did printmaking, he is known primarily for his sculpture. His subjects were often people engaged in hard physical work, such as farmers, laborers and even athletes. His sculptures portray these people in a very realistic way, which is why his style is referred to as "Social Realist." In this tradition, sculpt your own Social Realist figure by portraying a person engaged in some type of hard work.
- Another form of artwork besides painting occurred often at the farm—printmaking. J. Alden Weir, his daughter Dorothy, and Mahonri Young all enjoyed printmaking. Dorothy was especially skilled at it, and would make Christmas cards using the woodblock printing technique. Using foam, linoleum, or wood, try your hand at printmaking by designing a greeting card using this technique.

## Art-In-Your-Community

- The American Impressionist movement was centered on the New England countryside and reflected the popular back-to-nature movement. Research and discover local artists who depict images of their region's landscape. These works do not need to be traditional landscapes. Some abstract painters respond to the landscape in unique ways and many Native American, Hispanic, and African American artists imprint their own interpretations of place on their works. Invite educators from local art museums, historical societies, galleries or libraries to the classroom to discuss and show slides of the different styles of art popular in the region. If possible, arrange a field trip to a gallery or museum. When your research is completed, make a short presentation about the artist or artists studied. The class can discuss what is artistically unique about your region and how the artists were inspired by that uniqueness.

