Art Alive!

Grades 5-8

Program Description

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
- describe characteristics of American Impressionism in comparison with other art movements, styles, and contexts
- compare and relate artwork of the site to the modern landscape
- describe, compare, and contrast the features of an artist's painting studio and sculpture studio
- recognize a studio as an artist's workspace
- 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 Use different media, techniques, and processes (2-dimensional) to communicate ideas, feelings, experiences, and stories

2.B Recognize and reflect on the effects of arranging visual characteristics in their own and others' work

3.B Consider and compare the sources for subject matter, symbols, and ideas in their own and other's work

4.A Know and compare the characteristics and purposes of works of art representing various cultures, historical periods, and artists

4.C Analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, natural resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art

5.B Describe and analyze visual characteristics of works of art using visual art terminology

5.C Compare a variety of individuals responses to, and interpretations of, their own works of art and those from various eras and cultures

5.D Describe their own responses to, and interpretations of, specific works of art

6.A Compare the characteristics of works in the visual arts and other art forms that share similar subject matter, themes, purposes, historical periods or cultural context

Social Studies Content Standards Met

9.7-8.1 Describe human and natural characteristics of places and how they shape or place identity

9.5-6.1 Describe human and natural characteristics of places and how they shape or place identity

9.7-8.8 Locate natural and cultural features in their own and nearby communities, in the United States and in other regions of the world

9.5-6.5 Locate natural and cultural features in their own and nearby communities, in the United States and in other regions of the world

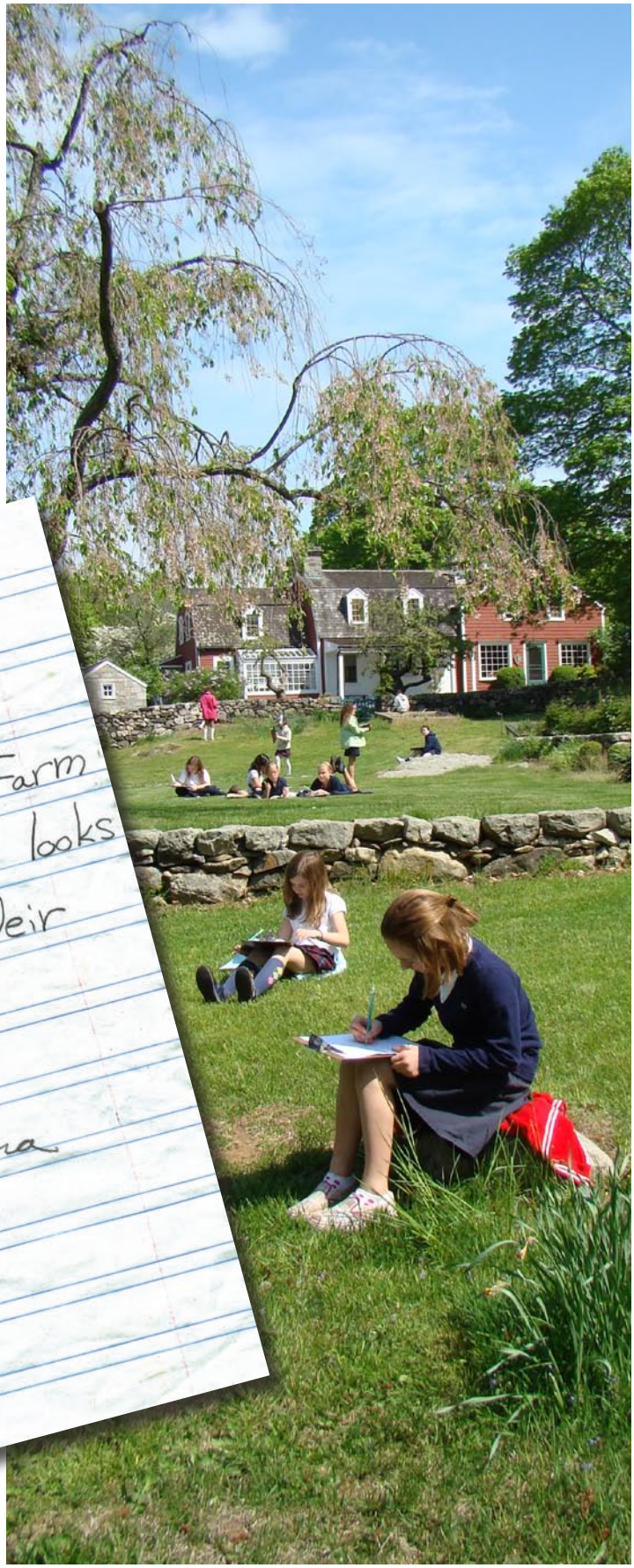
9.7-8.8 Demonstrate how personal knowledge and experiences influence an individual's perception of place

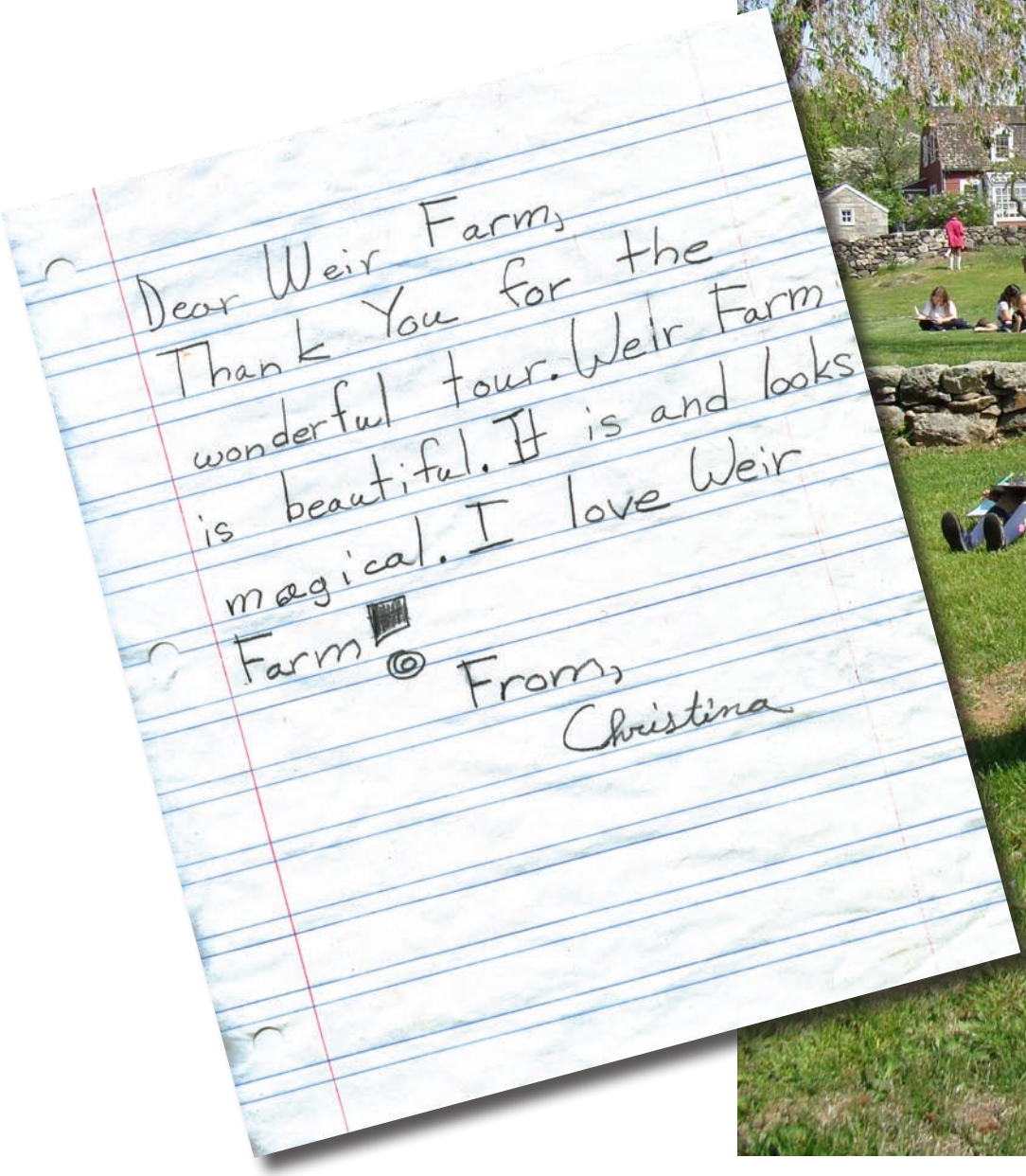
Pre-Visit Activities

- Quick write/journal: The Branchville farm was Weir's retreat—a place he went to escape the busy life of New York City and relax with his family. Imagine where you would like to have a retreat. Describe where it would be, what it would look like, what you would do there, etc.

- 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?

- Look at art images of Weir's/Young's/Andrews' work and creatively write about the artwork. What might the subjects be saying or thinking? What might be happening? Create a "back-story" for the image.





Dear Weir Farm,
Thank You for the wonderful tour. Weir Farm is beautiful. It is and looks magical. I love Weir Farm!
From,
Christina

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 letter to a local government representative calling for the preservation of a place important to you. Tell him or her why the place is special to you and why you think it is important for future generations to experience.

- Create a "name that style"-type game where students identify particular types of artwork as belonging to a certain movement, period, or artist, and defend their responses using visual art terminology. The game should include paintings from Weir, American Impressionism, and the Hudson River School.

- 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 the farm'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.

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 using 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.

Post-Visit Activities Continued

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.