

Henry Mosler



CONCEPT

The Quadroon Girl allows students to realize that the freedom to tell a story in a convincing manner is fundamental to the arts. Freedom to communicate can affect beneficial change. Surely history is directly influenced by what and how art communicates the wonders and crises of life. Mosler's art gave him a platform to illustrate the opinions of his time.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Henry Mosler's talent for art was recognized early in life. His father apprenticed him to a wood engraver when he was ten years old, and through his teens, he established himself in that profession. His training as a painter began in 1859 with James Henry Beard, a life-long friend and gifted genre and portrait painter. Beard encouraged his students to be meticulous in portraying everyday objects within the composition and to use their art to cause the audience to contemplate social and political issues.

After two years as a war correspondent in the Civil War, Mosler followed Beard's advice and used the money he had earned to continue his art training in Dusseldorf, Germany, a popular art center for American artists. He trained with Mucke, an important history painter, and Kindler, a genre painter known and recognized for using authentic costumes and artifacts. After two years in Dusseldorf he traveled to Paris where he studied under the renowned Ernest Hebert.

Mosler returned to Cincinnati in 1866 at age twenty-five and was received as a celebrity, quickly establishing himself in the art world as a portrait painter. He married Sarah Cahn in 1869, and they started their family the following year. Domestic themes became more prominent in his work. But after eight years Mosler made plans to return to Europe, first to Munich as a professional artist. He wanted to advance his career, and by then Munich and Paris were considered the major international art centers.

Returning to the United States in 1894, Mosler's late career success was due to his sensitivity to contemporary taste, his thoroughness in studying his subjects, and his diligence in artistic skills. He took stories of peoples' lives and communicated their struggle in such a way that the observer responded with empathy and sympathy.

ABOUT THE ART

Mosler spent two years documenting the Civil War for *Harper's Weekly*, a northern journal. Abolitionist feelings ran high, and even after the war, during Reconstruction, there was much interest in what had happened and what would happen to the newly freed people. *The Quadroon Girl*, based on a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow of the same title, was a close-up, three-quarter length image of a beautiful, helpless girl who was one-quarter African and about to be sold into slavery by her white father.

The Quadroon Girl
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Slaver in the broad lagoon
Lay moored with idle sail;
He waited for the rising moon,
And for the evening gale.

Under the shore his boat was tied,
And all her listless crew
Watched the gray alligator slide
Into the still bayou.

Odours of orange-flowers, and
spice,
Reached them from time to time,
Like airs that breathe from
Paradise
Upon a world of crime.

The Planter, under his roof of
thatch,
Smoked thoughtfully and slow;
The Slaver's thumb was on the
latch,
He seemed in haste to go.

He said "My ship at anchor rides
In yonder broad lagoon;
I only wait the evening tides,
And the rising of the moon."

Before them, with her face
upraised,
In timid attitude,
Like one half-curious, half-
amazed,
A Quadroon maiden stood.

Her eyes were large, and full of
light,
Her arms and neck were bare;
No garment she wore save a kirtle
bright,
And her own long raven hair.

And on her lips there played a
smile
As holy, meek, and faint,
As lights in some cathedral aisle
The features of a saint.

"The soil is barren, -the farm is
old,"
The thoughtful Planter said:
Then looked upon the Slaver's
gold,
And then upon the maid.

His heart within him was at strife
With such accursed gains;
For he knew whose passions gave
her life,
Whose blood ran in her veins.

But the voice of Nature was too
weak;
He took the glittering gold!
Then pale as death grew the
maiden's cheek,
Her hands as icy cold.

The Slaver led her from the door,
He led her by the hand,
To be his slave and paramour
In a strange and distant land!

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Make connections between the visual and verbal arts. Consider a study of other paintings inspired by the power of poetry. Write a poem about the subject of a painting. Paint an illustration of another poem. Study the illustrations of great genre painters and discuss its effect upon the story and/or the painting. Consider the mood, the character development, the setting, and Mosler's masterful attention to all these.

SCIENCE

By the end of the Kindergarten to second grade program, students must be able to explain that to construct something requires planning, communication, problem solving, and tools. Let's pretend that Abolitionist John Parker has heard about this girl's plight and wants to take her across the Ohio River to freedom. He decides to build a secret room in a house half way between the girl's residence and the Ohio River. Describe how he will need to plan, communicate, problem solve, and use tools to achieve his goals.

MATH

Often problems can be resolved by voting for a solution or for the people who will find a solution. Visualize the concept of more and less (majority vote) by having the class vote on an issue, such as having math before or after recess. Each child will staple his circle to a "Yes" poster or a "No" poster. The length of the chains are then compared to determine which poster represents the majority vote.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Read the poem, *The Quadroon Girl* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow with your class. Upon completion and further study of slavery, discuss other options the father could have chosen instead of selling his daughter into slavery.

ART HISTORY

Compare and contrast Thomas Buchanan Read's *The Harp of Erin* and Mosler's *The Quadroon Girl*. Answer the following questions:

- 1) How was the person depicted as "enslaved"?
- 2) How could each one become a free person?
- 3) How are Erin and the quadroon girl alike?
- 4) How are they different?

CRITICAL THINKING

- Describe the connection between poetry and visual art.
- How does narrative and metaphor stimulate poetry and visual art?
- Compare *The Harp of Erin* by Thomas Buchanan Read with *The Quadroon Girl*. How do they compare? How do they contrast? Consider ideas, feelings, cultural context and style.

VOCABULARY

quadroon
poem
painting
slavery
freedom
avarice

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