

Art Activity

Vermeer's Portrait of Wealth and Trade
1492-1734, Early Encounters

Background Information

The trade empire created by the Dutch Republic in the 1600s was far-reaching and lucrative, and women were involved in every phase: as traders, manufacturers, consumers, and more (see [Life Story of Johanna de Laet](#)). Johannes Vermeer captures this in his painting *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher*. He embeds symbolic references and imported goods into this quiet domestic scene, reflecting the prevailing influence of global trade on Dutch society and the private sphere.

Four hundred years later, global trade is still essential to the success of many national economies, including that of the United States. Imported products are prevalent in American homes and reflect our reliance on goods from abroad. Now, as then, many women are actively engaged in global trade.

click [HERE](#) for the full resource



Young Woman with a Water Pitcher

Johannes Vermeer, *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher*, ca. 1662.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, Marquand Collection, Gift of Henry G.
Marquand, 1889.

Task

- Students will...imagine they are twenty-first century artists who are commissioned to create a portrait of wealth and trade for the United States.
- Students will...conduct research to determine popular items imported to the United States, specifically items produced by women.
- Students will...create a collage of an interior space similar to Vermeer's to showcase these items and how they impact their everyday lives.

Materials

- Drawing paper (9" x 12" or larger)
- Pencils
- Collage materials: construction paper, magazines, fabric, printed images, tissue paper, catalogues, advertisements, etc.
- Elmer's glue or glue sticks
- Scissors

Steps

- Look closely at Vermeer's painting [Young Woman with a Water Pitcher](#). On a piece of paper, write down some of the details that stand out to you.
- Next, make a list of the different objects you see in this painting.
- These objects represent goods traded from across the globe! What might they be made of? Where do you think these materials come from?

go to the next slide to find out!



Johannes Vermeer, *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher*, ca. 1662. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Marquand Collection, Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1889.

WOMEN
the AMERICAN
STORY

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Linen spun from
flax imported from
Scotland, Greece,
or the Americas

Silk imported from
China

Dyed with indigo
imported from
India or Japan

Carpet made in
India

Holland is at the
center of this web
of commerce

Silver mined in
South America

What do you
think this
painting would
look like if it
depicted a home
in the U.S. today?



Steps

- Take some time to conduct research to discover significant items imported to the United States today and from where they originate (e.g., computers, cars, sweaters, diamonds, telephones, coffee, leather, medical instruments, tropical fruit, etc.).
- Based on the objects you discovered in your research, create a collage that depicts a contemporary portrait of wealth and trade. Your piece should include:
 - Four or more examples of imported goods discovered in your research
 - References to how each item is used (e.g., person talking on a cell phone or a television playing in the background)
 - Use of perspective (the inclusion of a background, middleground, and foreground)
- To begin, try searching for images of imported objects in magazines or online. Once you have collected enough images, map out your composition lightly in pencil on a sheet of drawing paper. Place your images on the paper and move them around within the interior until you are satisfied with the composition. When you are, glue everything down.

Example



**mapping out the
composition**



**arranging the
images**



**glueing the
images in place**

Final Product

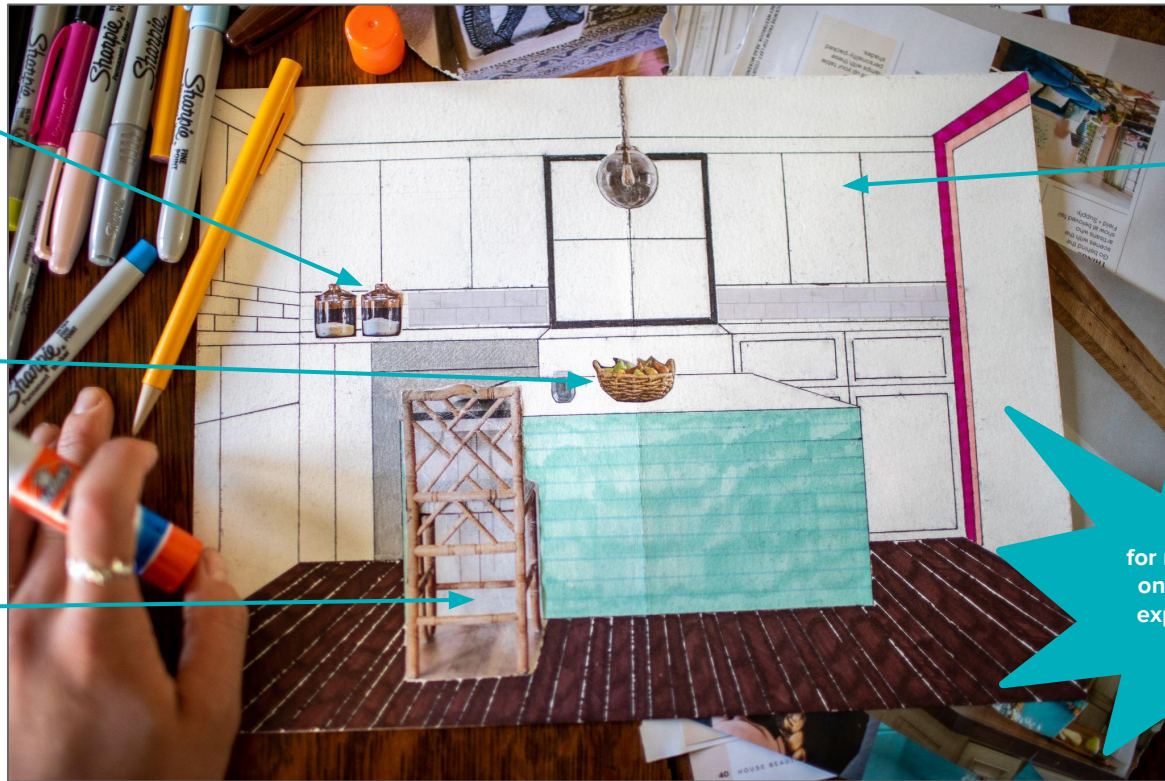
Plastic Jar
(import: plastics)

Fruit Bowl
(import: tropical
fruit)

Island or Bar
Stools
(import: furniture)

make note of the use of
perspective with the
background, middleground
and foreground

for more information
on US imports and
exports click [HERE](#)



Material Modifications

- Painting was the predominant artform during the Dutch Golden Age. Today, many artists create art digitally using computer-based design programs. If technology is available, collages can also be created using [Sketchpad](#), a free online drawing program, or other art software such as Adobe Photoshop, Corel Painter, or Microsoft Paint.
- If you are having trouble completing your image, or if you do not have access to a printer or enough magazines, you may want to create a collage rather than a complete “painting.” Your local library may also have the ability to print images for you or have magazines that they are no longer keeping on the shelves that you can use.

if you are having trouble with perspective, [HERE](#) is a short video to help you map out your composition

Art Vocabulary

- **genre painting:** Art that depicts everyday life.
- **collage:** A two-dimensional work of art made by gluing pieces of pictures, paper, and/or found objects.
- **layering:** Building up a surface.
- **perspective:** The illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface. This includes background, middleground, and foreground.

Historical Vocabulary

- **bodice:** The vest part of a woman's dress.
- **Dutch Republic:** The name of the country of the Dutch in Europe from 1581 to 1795.
- **flax:** A blue flowered plant.
- **indigo:** A tropical plant used to make dark blue dyes.
- **linen:** A type of cloth woven from fibers from flax.

Reflection Questions



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Conclude the project with a written artist statement using the following prompt:

Your portrait of twenty-first-century wealth and trade has been selected to be exhibited in a renowned art gallery. Write a press release informing the public about your artwork:

- What objects did you choose to represent?
- Where do they come from?
- How do they impact our lives today?
- How does your work of art connect to American and Dutch histories of trade?
- How does this connect to women's history?

Share your work!

We would love to see your artwork!

Consider sharing your work with the Education Division at the New-York Historical Society. Please send it to:

wams@nyhistory.org

Include your grade level and location. You can also send us feedback, questions, and thoughts!