



I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold, 1928
Charles Demuth (American, 1883–1935)

heART | History Explored through Art

presented by Friends of the West Chicago City Museum

Overarching Goals of the heART program:

- **Explore** local history through **creative** expression
- **Reflect** on historical or contemporary art and **extend** themes of historic or contemporary art into one's own art
- **Use** art processes to **create** a work of art
- **Use** correct art vocabulary during the **creation** and sharing process

Objectives of the "I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold" heART lesson:

- **Interpret** the artist's use of shape, color, and line in the painting
- **Compare** Williams' poem to the painting
- **Identify** the main influence on the formation of West Chicago as a community
- **Create** a work of art that expresses West Chicago's railroad history using shapes, color, and line
- **Use** art vocabulary when discussing, planning, and making art
- **Use** art techniques as presented by the instructor

As with any creative expression, there are **NO RULES** as to what the final product will be, only ***guidelines***. It is only natural for students to make a project their own, and the more personalized they make a project, the more they are using higher-level thinking skills. Students should **NOT** be discouraged from taking a modified or different approach to the project, as long as they are *engaged* in art making and *thinking* about the information presented.

Art History Brief

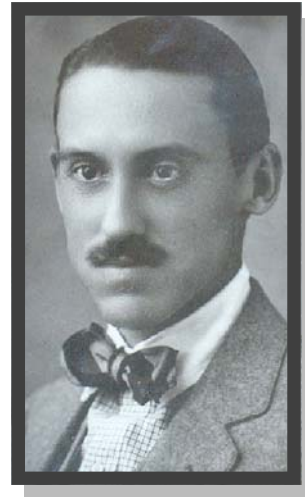
I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold

1928

Charles Demuth

(American, 1883–1935)

Oil on cardboard; 35 1/2 x 30 in



Born and raised in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Charles Demuth studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia intermittently between 1905 and 1908. It was in Philadelphia that the artist first met the American poet and physician William Carlos Williams, the subject of this painting.

The Figure 5 in Gold is one of a series of eight abstract portraits of friends that Demuth made between 1924 and 1929. This particular painting pays homage to a poem by William Carlos Williams. This portrait consists of not a physical likeness of the artist's friend but an accumulation of images associated with him—the poet's initials and the names "Bill" and "Carlos" that together form a portrait.

Williams' poem "The Great Figure" describes the experience of seeing a red fire engine with the number 5 painted on it racing through the city streets. While Demuth's painting is not an exact illustration of the poem, we can certainly sense its "rain/and lights" and the "gong clangs/siren howls/and wheels rumbling."

From <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/49.59.1>

West Chicago History Connections

Transportation + Town Founding

West Chicago is the first community in Illinois that was formed by the coming of the railroad.

In 1850, the first railway junction was formed in what is now West Chicago. At that time, the town was called "Junction". Over the years, West Chicago was also known as "Turner Junction" and "Turner".

The Pioneer was one of the first steam locomotives to make the journey from Chicago to Turner, and then on to Aurora.

The coming of the railroads to West Chicago allowed the community to grow. Jobs were available on the railroad. But, also, industries brought their businesses to the area because they could easily ship their goods by train.

Many immigrant groups came to West Chicago because of these jobs. The first groups were English, Irish, German, and Mexican. They brought their language and cultures, and helped to form West Chicago as we know it today.

The Great Figure

by William Carlos Williams

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city



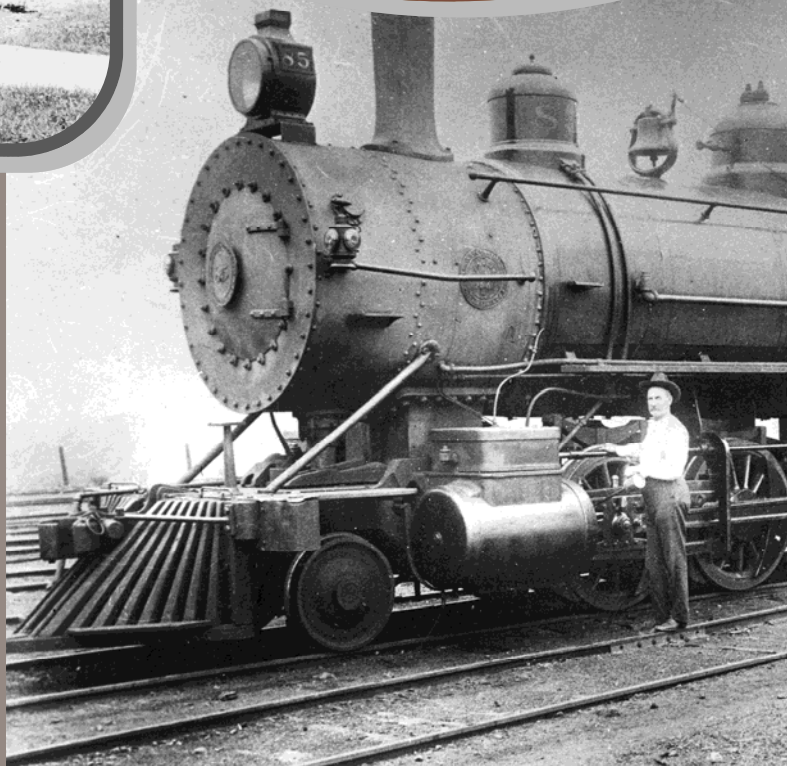
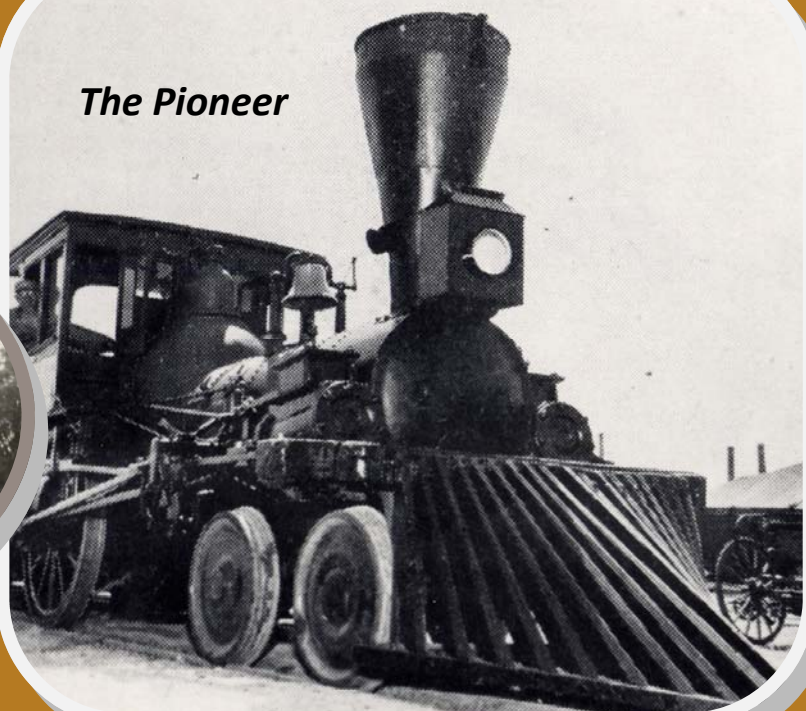
William Carlos Williams



Roundhouse Workers

West Chicago's Railroads and Locomotives

The Pioneer



Instructor's Guide

Introduction/History

1. Share “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold” with the students. Allow them a few minutes to look at the painting and simply reflect.
2. Ask the students to share what they see: colors, shapes, figures, etc.
3. Ask the students to guess the subject of the painting. Give evidence from the painting.
4. Share information from the Art History Brief.
5. Read “The Great Figure.” Explore the connections between the poem and the painting.
6. Ask students what the most important method of transportation is for West Chicago’s history as a community.
7. Share information from West Chicago History Connections and the historic photographs.

Art Vocabulary, Concepts, and Process

Vocabulary + Concepts:

expressive colors: colors can be expressive. What colors seem more exiting? Which seem calm? What moods do each of the colors evoke?

geometric shape: square, circle, rectangle, triangle, cube, cone are examples

line: the path of a dot through space; can be thick or thin and go in different directions; can express movement or mood

organic shape: shapes that are free-form; shapes found in nature

overlapping: placing one objet over the top of (or underneath) another object; can help to give a sense of depth and/or texture to the art.

Process:

Students will be creating an art piece inspired by “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold”. However, they will be relating their artwork to the locomotive history here in West Chicago. Final projects may vary depending on the instructor and/or individual student, but the basic concept will weave through each creative approach.

1. Have students close their eyes and imagine a horse racing towards them full speed. Before locomotives, horses were the fastest means of transportation.
2. Now, students close their eyes and imagine a train racing towards them. They should try to imagine what it must have been like to see a train running for the first time ever.
3. Think: What colors, shapes, or types of lines might suggest the form of a train? The movement of a train? What letters or numbers could be included in an artwork related to West Chicago’s railroad history?
4. Plan: Do a rough sketch of what you might do for your art project to express the idea of transportation by trains.

Potential Art Experiences

A variety of art experiences are outlined here to allow for varying comfort levels on behalf of the instructor, as well as to allow for a varying availability of materials and/or budget. These experiences are designed for use with elementary-aged children.

Experience #1: Collage

Supplies:

- ☐ Images of The Pioneer and other locomotives
- ☐ Image of “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold”
- ☐ Blank paper sized between 9x12 and 12x18 (larger for older children, perhaps)
- ☐ Variety of colored papers to cut up
- ☐ Variety of magazines to cut up
- ☐ Optional: other items to include in collage, such as yarn, other tactile or relief objects
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Glue or glue stick
- ☐ Markers, crayons, or colored pencils

Art Vocabulary:

collage: an art-making method where elements are attached to a support (paper or other) usually using glue or other adhesive

Process:

1. Using their sketch as a guide, artists will collect papers of different colors and begin to cut them into shapes to create their collage.
2. Numbers, letters, and words may be hand-written or they may be cut from magazines or colored paper and attached to the collage.
3. Encourage overlapping and layering of collage materials.

Experience #2: Drawing

Supplies:

- Images of The Pioneer and other locomotives
- Image of “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold”
- 9x12 paper
- Pencils
- Color medium of choice

Art Vocabulary:

variety: a principle of design; using different visual elements (like lines) to make a composition more interesting to look at

Process:

1. Using their sketch as a guide, artists will create a contour line drawing, outlining the shapes and letters/numbers they have included in their composition.
2. Artists can then go back and vary the thickness/thinness of the lines they’ve made in order to give a variety of edges in the artwork.
3. Color can be added with marker, colored pencil, etc.

Experience #3: Painting

Supplies:

- ❑ Images of The Pioneer and other locomotives
- ❑ Image of “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold”
- ❑ 9x12 heavyweight paper
- ❑ Pencils
- ❑ Tempera (or acrylic) paint
- ❑ Brushes, water, paper towels

Art Vocabulary:

hard-edge painting: a painting style where fields of color meet along a sharp line; often, shapes are one solid color with no blending or shading; sometimes hard-edge paintings have outlines around shapes

Process:

1. Using their sketch as a guide, artists will create a contour line drawing, outlining the shapes and letters/numbers they have included in their composition.
2. Paint each section one color. Paint touching sections different colors.
3. Outline shapes with paint after the first layer is dry, or with marker once the whole painting is dry.

Standards Met

Fine Arts

25.A.1d Visual Arts: Identify the elements of line, shape, space, color and texture; the principles of repetition and pattern; and the expressive qualities of mood, emotion and pictorial representation.

25.A.2d Visual Arts: Identify and describe the elements of 2- and 3-dimensional space, figure ground, value and form; the principles of rhythm, size, proportion and composition; and the expressive qualities of symbol and story.

25.B.2 Understand how elements and principles combine within an art form to express ideas.

26.A.1e Visual Arts: Identify media and tools and how to use them in a safe and responsible manner when painting, drawing and constructing.

26.B.1d Visual Arts: Demonstrate knowledge and skills to create visual works of art using manipulation, eye-hand coordination, building and imagination.

26.B.2d Visual Arts: Demonstrate knowledge and skills to create works of visual art using problem solving, observing, designing, sketching and constructing.

27.B.1 Know how images, sounds and movement convey stories about people, places and times.

Social Science

16.A.1a Explain the difference between past, present and future time; place themselves in time.

16.A.1c Describe how people in different times and places viewed the world in different ways.

16.A.2c Ask questions and seek answers by collecting and analyzing data from historic documents, images and other literary and non-literary sources.

Science

13.B.2b Describe the effects on society of scientific and technological innovations (e.g., antibiotics, steam engine, digital computer).

13.B.2c Identify and explain ways that science and technology influence the lives and careers of people.