



MacDowell: An American Artists' Colony – Viewing Guide

Episode One - Living at the Colony

Grades 7-12

Curriculum Applications

Social Studies

Arts Appreciation

Language Arts

Overview

In the woods of southwestern New Hampshire, there is a magical place where artists go and create. The MacDowell Colony, located in Peterborough, was founded by Marian MacDowell, the widow of composer Edward MacDowell, on the farm they purchased in 1896. The Colony consists of 32 one-room studio cottages where poets, playwrights, composers, painters, authors, sculptors and others artists come to stay in this 450-acre haven of quiet beauty to create their works away from the hubbub of everyday life. Through its natural surroundings, studios, living conditions, and simple rules, the Colony is a nurturing environment which inspires and enables artists to create great works of art.

Focus

Students viewing *Living at the Colony* will develop a sense of place by understanding how havens like the MacDowell Colony can enhance the creative process.

Previewing Activities

1. Ask students to outline the environment in which they work best when trying to develop something creative. What is it about those environments that motivate and inspire them?
2. Have students research examples of work by a MacDowell artist. (Examples: Willa Cather, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Thornton Wilder, Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland.)

Focus for Viewing

Direct the students to listen to the artists-in-residence describe how their stay at the Colony influenced their lives and their work.

Post-Viewing Activities

1. Have students read the beginning of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and then compare Grover's Corner to their own community. Encourage students to describe their community for an outsider or during a particular historic time period.
2. Have students compare various descriptions of Northern New England from MacDowell colonists. For example, compare Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* with Carolyn Chute's *The Beans of Egypt, Maine* and student's personal experiences.
3. Have students debate the merit of artist colonies and how they should they be supported.



Episode Two - Edward & Marian MacDowell

Grades 7-12

Curriculum Applications

Social Studies

Arts Appreciation

Overview

Edward MacDowell was the first American composer of classical music to be acclaimed by both Europeans and Americans. Born in 1861 and raised in New York City, Edward began his piano lessons at the age of eight. He learned quickly and showed great promise. For any gifted young musician with adequate funds, proper training could only be found in Europe. Edward finished his five years of studies at the Frankfurt Conservatory at the age of twenty. He supported himself in Germany teaching private piano lessons and was introduced to a promising young student, Marian Griswold Nevins, from Waterford, Connecticut. She studied with Edward for three years and they developed a warm friendship. They married in 1884, and eventually settled in Boston. Edward's teaching and performing schedule left him little time for his own creative work. Marian rented a vacation house in Peterborough where Edward found success composing. In 1896, they bought a house called "Hillcrest" in Peterborough. Edward's finest music was composed in Peterborough--music that exhibits less European influence and incorporates many American traditions in music such as Indian chants, Negro spirituals, and American folk songs. Edward was offered the first professorship of the department of music at Columbia University. He used his platform to advocate that artists are enriched by association with artists in other disciplines. While Edward was on sabbatical in 1902-1903, the President of the University replaced him, in part because of his integrated art philosophy. This devastated Edward. His health deteriorated and he died at the early age of forty-six in January 1908.

Focus

Students viewing the Edward & Marian MacDowell episode will be introduced to Edward MacDowell and his development as a composer and artist, along with his philosophy of interdisciplinary integration of the arts.

Previewing Activities

Have students develop a timeline from 1861-1908 for New Hampshire, the United States, and Europe, focusing on major events and artistic works created during that period.

Focus for Viewing

Direct students to the issue of Edward and Marian MacDowell's education. How did they receive their education? Does every successful artist need formal education? What was the conflict that caused Edward to lose his job at Columbia University?

Post-Viewing Activities

Hold a class discussion or have students write an essay on the pros and cons of "affiliation of the arts." The MacDowell Colony was founded on this philosophy, which is also the reason that Edward lost his professorship. MacDowell was applauded for his philosophy, however, and various MacDowell clubs started just before the turn of the century and continue today.



Episode Three - The History of the Colony

Grades 7-12

Curriculum Applications

Social Studies

Arts Appreciation

Overview

Marian MacDowell, creator of the MacDowell Colony, has been identified as a "significant figure in American cultural history." She invited her first colonist to Peterborough in 1907, and lived to 1956, when she died at age 98. She had vision and purpose and was a tireless worker, fundraiser and builder for the Colony. Unlike most other late 19th Century colonies which were developed around a charismatic figure, the MacDowell Colony with its rules and routines was the result of a specific plan carried out by Marian and a New York-based board of directors. They developed a colony to provide artists with tranquility and fellowship regardless of social status or income. Artists are chosen with consideration of talent and seriousness of purpose. A common question is: "Who is at MacDowell now who is famous?" and the reply is "We don't know... yet."

Focus

Students viewing the History of the Colony episode will recognize the effort it takes to build something worthwhile and lasting through the qualities demonstrated by Marian MacDowell and the support that she gained through the community of Peterborough.

Previewing Activities

1. Have students discuss the qualities (strong, visionary) of a person who develops something that is worthwhile and lasting. Ask how those qualities compare to those demonstrated by artists as they develop a work of art.
2. Have students brainstorm: "What is an artist?" and "In what different mediums might an artist work?"

Focus for Viewing

1. Direct students to find examples of the various personality traits that helped Marian MacDowell successfully develop the Colony.
2. Why is Marian MacDowell considered a "significant figure in American cultural history" and who else would join her on that list?
3. What various mediums do colonists work in?

Post-Viewing Activities

Hold a class discussion or have students write an essay on the pros and cons of "affiliation of the arts." Ask students to do a reflective writing on a task they think is "worthwhile and lasting," and to which they could consider dedicating a lifetime, even if it means "doing without."