

16-A House by the Railroad, 1925

Edward Hopper (1882–1967)



16-A Edward Hopper (1882–1967), *House by the Railroad*, 1925. Oil on canvas, 24 x 29 in. (61 x 73.7 cm.). Given anonymously (3. 1930). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.

The Art

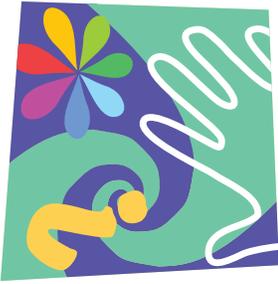
Edward Hopper used oil-based paint on canvas to create this picture of an old, gray, French-style house in 1925. The big house, in a style called Victorian, was built years earlier for a large family, but in the painting, the house sits alone on the side of a railroad track. The light and shadows in the picture show that it is either morning or the end of the day when the sun is low. There are no people, stores, or other homes in the neighborhood, no street lights or wires for telephones, and no trees. The big sky behind the house is soft and more than one color. The railroad track is a reminder that times are changing and American life is becoming more modern and less simple. The painting is quiet and still. There are no signs of life in the house or in the picture.

The Artist

Edward Hopper used oil-based paint, watercolor, and printmaking to create his art. Hopper knew he wanted to be an artist at a young age. His parents were store owners. They supported his choice to become an artist and helped him. Hopper went to school in New York City, to become an illustrator for businesses that needed drawings and labels. Later, his wish to study art in Paris, France, came true. When Hopper returned to the United States, he had successful art shows and people began to buy his paintings. His paintings became famous for the real-life way they showed how Americans lived in the years between World War I and World War II. His paintings told stories that made people use their imaginations. Many showed places where people would gather, like restaurants, theaters, and offices.

The Historical Perspective

Hopper's painting tells the story of an America that was changing. More and more factories, towns, and cities were popping up where there had been farms and empty land. In the middle of the 1920s, when Hopper painted this picture, modern progress and the growth of cities were making America richer. People were suddenly able to move around from place to place more easily because of trains. The growing number of cities changed how America looked and the way people lived. People started moving to the Midwest and the West, and many towns lost their populations to the great rush west. Scenes like this house standing alone in Hopper's picture were a result of times that were changing.



Conversations and Teaching Activities

Head Start Children ages 3 to 5

Encourage children to look closely at this painting—the objects, the background, the colors used. Ask questions, introduce new vocabulary, and find books that relate to the artwork.

Describing



✓ This house has a big porch. Do you see the pillars? What do you think they do? Do you see the chimney? What does a chimney do? How many windows do you see on the house? Do you think these are all the windows in this house? Why?

✓ Describe the sky. Does the sky look the same every day? What does the sky tell you about the weather?

✓ Do you think it is morning or evening? Why?

✓ Do you see the railroad track in front of the house? A railroad track is a long special road built just for trains. It looks like a ladder lying down. Have you seen a train going fast down the track? Where do you think the trains that run this track are going? What do you think they are carrying?

✓ Do you see vertical lines? Where are they? Horizontal? Where are they? Diagonal? Where are they? How about parallel lines? Do you see any of them? Where?

Analyzing and Interpreting

Ask the following questions to stimulate thinking and discussion:

- How can you tell this house is old? Why does this house look older than houses we see built today?
- What do you think the house looks like inside? Do you think it has stairs? Where do they go? Where is the top of the house? What is a basement? Where would the basement be? How would you get there? Do you think the house has a back door? It is hard to see the front door. Is it in the shade? How can you tell?
- Why do you think there are no people in this picture?
- Where are the people that live in the house?
- Why do you think the land is so flat?
- Do you know the names of any railroad cars that might be part of the train that goes along this track? How does a train let people know it is coming down the track?
- Have you ever been to a railroad crossing? What happens? What does it tell you to do? Did you have a long wait or a short one? Do you remember the names of any of the cars you saw?
- What do you think happens before a train begins its journey?
- Do you think people would like living so close to a railroad track? Why?
- Some trains can go fast! Have you heard the sound of a train when you are close to it? What sounds does the train make when it is going slowly? When it is going fast? When it slows down? When it is stopped and standing still?



Connecting and Extending

Introducing Vocabulary

box car	passenger car
caboose	porch
deserted	railroad tracks
diagonal	rumble
engine	train
horizontal	vertical
journey	

Related Family Literacy Experiences

Parents and children can:

- ✓ draw a picture about a train ride they took and talk about the experience.
- ✓ look up local train schedules and maps of routes on the Internet.
- ✓ imagine what the inside of the house looks like and draw a few rooms.



Books

Building a House by Byron Barton (Harper Trophy, 1990)

The building of a house is described through the roles of various construction workers.

Houses and Homes by Ann Morris (Mulberry Books, 1992)

This book offers photographs of houses and homes around the world, from the plains of Asia to the shores of Nigeria to the bustling downtown of London and Buckingham Palace.

How a House is Built by Gail Gibbons (Holiday House, 1990)

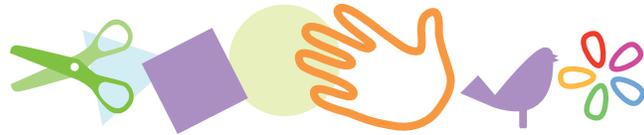
The activities that construction workers perform in building a house are explained.

My House: A book in Two Languages (Mi casa: un libro en dos lenguas) by Rebecca Emberley (Little Brown, 1990)

Illustrations, accompanied by captions in English and Spanish, identify items found in a house.

The Little House by Virginia Lee Burton (Weston Woods, 1991)

A small country house experiences changes as a city develops around it.



Related Educational Experiences

- ✓ If possible, visit a train station. Listen to the sounds (rumble of train wheels on the tracks, the train whistle) and have children imitate them. Maybe you are close enough to railroad tracks to hear these sounds outside your windows.
- ✓ Draw or build a house with blocks. Try to draw or build balconies, interesting windows and different kinds of roof lines.
- ✓ Walk through your community and see if you can find examples of new and old houses. If this is not possible, look through magazines, find and mount pictures, and use them for sorting and/or other games.

- ✓ Use the painting to introduce opposite concepts such as dark/light, top/bottom, loud/quiet, standing tall/lying flat, in front/in back.
- ✓ Use counting windows and pillars to draw attention to the painting and encourage recognizing and learning about different shapes.

The ideas listed are just a few of the many activities that could be used to introduce or extend children's learning. Your knowledge of your children and families supports your ability to ensure positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. As an educator, you probably have ideas for books, songs, finger plays, and activities that you have thought of when introducing or extending children's learning related to the "A Head Start on Picturing America" artworks. We encourage you to confer with your colleagues, visit the local library or bookstore, and share your ideas with others.