

What's in a Name?

Lesson Plan
Grades 9-12



Domenico Tintoretto (Domenico Robusti)
Tancred Baptizing Clorinda
ca. 1586-1600
Oil on canvas
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Gift of The Samuel H. Kress Foundation

Introduction

Tintoretto means “the little dyer” in Italian. Domenico Robusti’s grandfather was a cloth dyer, and his father was a famous painter. All of them were called “Tintoretto.” The bright red color that the Robusti family used for cloth dye and paint come from the same source: a beetle found in Mexico. Today cochineal is used as a natural red dye in many food products and makeup. Learn to make red cochineal dye from crushed insects and use it to dye wool and make the same paint that Domenico Tintoretto used to make his artwork.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Discuss the family history of Domenico Tintoretto, the painter of *Tancred and Clorinda*
- Extract a colorant from cochineal insects
- Experience the creation of an organic red lake pigment
- Prepare raw wool for dyeing
- Experience the process of textile dyeing using prepared wool
- Experience the creation of a red lake oil paint
- Experiment freely with oil paint
- Compare and contrast organic dyes and pigments

Lesson Outline

- Discussion
- Demonstrations of red lake pigments and their production
- Activities focused on making organic pigments for dye and oil paint
- Compare and contrast

Discussion Questions

- Do you have a nickname? Where did it come from?
- Many family common names are based on jobs or specialties. List examples of these names. Compare similar types of names in other languages and cultures.
- How far back in time do you think these names go?
- The artist who made this painting had a father who was a cloth dyer, but he chose a different career path. Do you want to have the same job as your parents?

Activities

- Have the students take turns grinding cochineal insects with the mortar and pestle.
- Allow them to measure the required amount of alum and potassium carbonate for dye extraction. Lead them through the process of extracting the dye (see “Historical Materials and Technical Terms” on the Kress Reconstruction website).
- Divide them into two groups: one will dye wool, the other will make oil paint (see “Historical Materials and Technical Terms” on the Kress Reconstruction website).

- Have one group of students wash raw wool with dish soap in warm water. Then, allow them to dip wool in pre-made red dye.
- Lead the second group through the process of making oil paint using the same red dye (see “Historical Materials and Technical Terms” on the Kress Reconstruction website).
- Invite the class to experiment with oil paint on canvas surfaces.

Materials

Red Lakes

Cochineal insects
Mortar and pestle
Alum
Potassium carbonate
Glass beakers
Glass stirring rods
Hot plate
Funnel
Cheesecloth
Silk

Oil paint

Linseed oil
Dropper
Palette knife
Muller
Glass palette
Odorless mineral spirits
Assortment of brushes
Canvas board
Paper palette

Wool Dyeing

Raw wool
Dish soap
Washing bowl
Large pot or saucepan
Hot plate or kettle
Large tongs
Clothesline
Clothespins

Key Terms

Cochineal – A dye-stuff consisting of the dried bodies of the beetle *Coccus cacti*, which is found on several species of cactus in Mexico and elsewhere

Dye – A compound that absorbs into and colors another material

Lake – An organic pigment prepared by precipitation of a dye on a powdered, inorganic substrate

Pigment – An insoluble, dry solid that is pulverized to a fine powder then mixed with a binder to form a paint, ink or crayon

Lanolin – a waxy, greasy material in raw wool that must be removed before the fibers can accept a dye

Resources:

["Tintoretto Historical Reconstruction" on the Kress Reconstruction Website](#)

["Organic Pigments" on the Kress Reconstruction Website](#)