

## What's in a Name?

Lesson Plan  
Grades K-5



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

## Summary

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
- Learn about the creation of an organic red lake pigment
- Prepare raw wool for dyeing
- Learn about the process of textile dyeing using prepared wool
- Learn about the creation of a red lake oil paint

## Lesson Outline

- Discussion
- Demonstrations of red lake pigments and their production
- Activities focused on making organic pigments for a red 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. Can you list examples of these names?
- 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.
- Demonstrate the process of extracting dye (see “Historical Materials and Technical Terms” on the Kress Reconstruction website) or describe the process using a slide or video presentation.
- Have the students wash raw wool with dish soap in warm water.
- Allow them to dip wool in pre-made red dye.

- Use the same red dye to make a pigment for paint. Demonstrate the process of making oil paint (see “Historical Materials and Technical Terms” on the Kress Reconstruction website) or describe the process using a slide or video presentation.

## 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 made from the dried bodies of the beetle *Coccus cacti*, which is found on several species of cactus in Mexico and elsewhere

Dye – A compound that colors another material

Lake – An organic pigment made by attaching a dye to a powder

Pigment – A dry solid that is crushed to a fine powder then mixed with oil or wax to make paints or crayons

Lanolin – a waxy, greasy material in raw wool that must be cleaned away before the wool can be colored

## Resources:

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

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