

Danger! Suspense! Heroism!

Artists often have exciting stories to tell. At the National Gallery of Art, you can see an action-packed painting of a young boy struggling against the dangers of the sea. Called *Watson and the Shark*, by John Singleton Copley, the painting is located in the West Building in gallery 60B.



1 Yikes! What's the story here?

Watson and the Shark is the story of an actual event that took place in the harbor at Havana, Cuba, in 1749. Brook Watson was a fourteen-year-old orphan who worked on a trading ship. One day, he went swimming in the harbor and was attacked by a shark. As his shipmates rushed to his rescue, the shark attacked Watson twice, wounding his lower right leg and biting off his right foot. What evidence can you find in the painting that Watson is hurt? What are the rescuers doing to help him?

What do you think happened next?

2 Did Watson survive?

Yes, he did, but because of his injury he had to use a wooden leg. Eventually, Watson moved to England where he became a successful politician and businessman. In fact, it was Watson who asked the artist John Singleton Copley to paint this picture. Later, he gave the painting to a boys' school, hoping his story of survival and bravery might inspire others. Who inspires you and why?

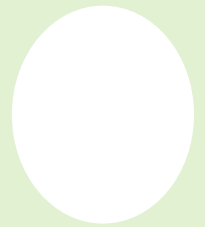


4 What makes this painting so SCARY?



A frightened shipmate
John Singleton Copley, *Watson and the Shark* (detail), 1778.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ferdinand Lamot Belin Fund

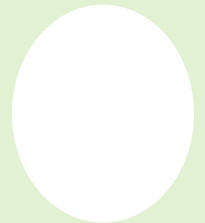
Copley painted the most suspenseful moment—right before the third bite, as Watson’s shipmates try to rescue him. Now look at the faces of the people in the picture. How do you think they feel? The expression of terror and shock on their faces is one way Copley made this painting seem so frightening. Want to try it yourself? Create your own expressive faces using the ovals below. A pen or pencil works best.



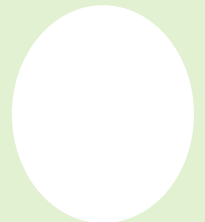
Scared



Excited



Angry



?
you choose

3 Tell me more about the artist.

John Singleton Copley was an American painter from Boston who settled in London, England, with his family in 1775. Copley had never been to Cuba and had probably never seen a shark. He had to use maps and prints of Cuba and possibly a set of shark jaws in order to paint the scene.

Does Copley’s shark look like other sharks you’ve seen? Why or why not? Where could Copley find pictures or information about sharks today?



The Copley family portrait
John Singleton Copley, *The Copley Family*, 1776/1777. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Fund

book nook

These books about adventure and discovery can be found in the Children's Shop located on the Gallery's concourse level, or at your local library or bookstore.

Mouse Paint

by Ellen Stoll Walsh
Baby to preschool

When three clever mice find jars of red, yellow, and blue paint, they set off on a colorful adventure. By mixing paint and creating new colors, these mice make outsmarting the cat a work of art.

The Raft

by Jim Lamarche
Ages 4 to 8

Nicki is not looking forward to spending the summer at his grandmother's house. But when he discovers a mysterious raft floating along the river, he begins to explore the wonders of nature. Soon, he is drawing otters, deer, and other wildlife encountered on his river adventure.

The Odyssey

by Adrian Mitchell,
illustrated by Stuart Robinson
Ages 9 to 12

In this retelling of the classic adventure of the Greek hero Odysseus, you will encounter terrifying giants, powerful gods and goddesses, and other mysterious creatures. Photographs, maps, and facts, provided in the margins, will help guide your journey through the ancient world.

try this!

activity 1

Action — Adventure — Art

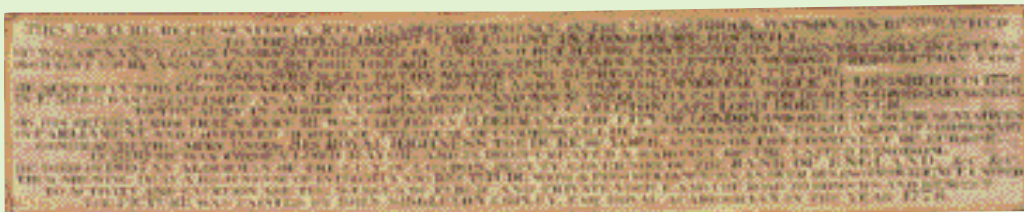
In the painting *Watson and the Shark*, Copley shows us an extraordinary event in the life of a young man. How would you illustrate such a story? Every day fantastic real stories of courage and daring are in the news. Choose a story and draw one image that shows the most important part of the event. To make a painting as exciting and action-packed as Copley's, ask yourself some planning questions.

How many people will you show?
What is the action?
Where is it taking place?



1 Copley suggests movement by arranging the objects along diagonal lines—the sailors' arms reaching toward Watson, the harpoon thrusting forward, and so forth. Try using diagonals to create movement in your drawing.

2 On the frame of the painting Copley wrote an inscription that explains how the painting came to be (see below). Include a statement about your illustrated story right on the frame or somewhere in your drawing.



activity 2

Flip Books

You are probably familiar with cartoon strips that tell a story in several pictures or frames. If you create enough drawings showing the movement of an object little by little, you can make a moving cartoon. When you watch the flipping cards, the movements seem to blend together and your eyes read them as one continuous movement.

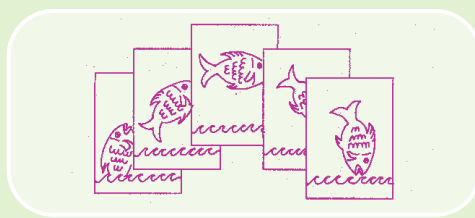
Details on how to make an electronic flip book can be found at <http://www.nga.gov/kids/stella/activityflip.htm>.

For additional activities and information about John Singleton Copley and his art, go to <http://www.nga.gov/kids/watson/watson1.html>.

Here's how to make a flip book:



1 Use heavy paper or card stock like index cards. Decide on your image—a jumping frog, a flying fish, a setting sun...it's up to you.



2 Draw a sequence of slight movements, one on each card. You will need at least twenty drawings. Be sure to keep them in order.



3 Fasten all the cards together with a clip or staples.

4 Now flip the cards with your thumb from bottom to top!