

Teacher Resource Guide

Napoleon: Power and Splendor

October 26, 2018—March 10, 2019

The
Nelson-Atkins
Museum
of Art

Workshop of Baron François-Pascal-Simon Gérard (1770–1837).
Bust-Length Portrait of Napoleon in Ceremonial Robes, ca. 1805–
1814. Oil on canvas. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Ben
Weider Collection. Photo MMFA, Christine Guest.

NAPOLÉON: AN OVERVIEW

Famed leader and military strategist Napoleon Bonaparte was born on the island of Corsica in 1769. After studying at military academies on the French mainland, he rose up the ranks of the army as revolution enveloped France. Napoleon achieved victory in several key battles against anti-revolutionary factions, and he capitalized on his ensuing popularity by taking control of France in a 1799 coup d'état. He further cemented his power in 1804 by crowning himself Emperor of the French. During his reign, Napoleon manipulated his public image to project a sense of authority, nobility, and legitimacy. Despite his skills in public relations, Napoleon's incessant military campaigns to expand the French Empire eventually turned both domestic and international opinion against him, and he was forced into abdication and exile. Nevertheless, Napoleon remains a legendary figure who looms large in European history.



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Napoleon: Power and Splendor explores the artistic, political and ideological significance of Napoleon's imperial court. It presents over 200 objects, including paintings, textiles and works of decorative arts, that were used to shape and propagate Napoleon's public image. Taken together, these works demonstrate the power and splendor of the Imperial Household, the 3,500-person institution responsible for managing the daily lives of the Emperor and his family. They also reveal the importance of both the Imperial Household and the visual arts in fashioning an identity for the Emperor.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Look inside for background information about the exhibition and its contents, questions and activities to engage your students both at the museum and in the classroom, and suggestions for where to learn more.

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To schedule a tour:
nelson-atkins.org/educators/school-tours/

EXHIBITION CONTENTS

Napoleon: Power and Splendor is organized into eight sections. Five of those sections are correlated with key members of Napoleon's Imperial Household—the Grand Officers who oversaw the staging of the Emperor's daily life. Other sections focus on specific efforts to shape Napoleon's public image and on his life in exile.

Section 1: The Emperor's Image

Early in his reign, Napoleon realized that works of art had the power to influence public opinion. He had numerous portraits made of himself, each filled with historical and contemporary references that would link him to authority and status.

Section 2: Napoleon's Architectural Vision

The Emperor's household was not limited to one physical home; Napoleon adapted many former royal palaces and chateaux as suitable residences for his court and staff. He intended to transform Paris into a modern metropolis adorned with monuments in his own honor. While most of these projects were never completed, the works in this section illustrate how power can be communicated through architecture.

Section 3: The Grand Equerry and the Grand Master of the Hunt

Items in this section relate to Napoleon's horses (the purview of the Grand Equerry) and his hunting grounds and supplies (the responsibility of the Grand Master of the Hunt). Well-bred horses and fine coaches helped Napoleon project an aura of greatness, while hunting linked him with past French kings, for whom the royal hunt was an important pastime.

Section 4: The Grand Marshal of the Palace

Responsible for the upkeep of the imperial palaces and the organization of court meals, the Grand Marshal of the Palace helped Napoleon demonstrate the pomp and splendor of his reign. The luxurious tableware and other furnishings on view in this section were meant to impress diners at official banquets.

Section 5: The Grand Chaplain

While the French Revolution had sought to downplay the role of Catholicism in society, Napoleon viewed the Church as a useful tool for maintaining social order. He appointed a Grand Chaplain to oversee religious ceremonies at court, and he commissioned ornate works like those shown here to demonstrate his religious devotion.

Section 6: The Grand Master of Ceremonies

Palace spaces used for official receptions and government business were the purview of the Grand Master of Ceremonies. He defined and enforced strict standards of court dress and behavior. This section explores how ceremonial protocol contributed to the sense of power and splendor surrounding the Emperor.

Section 7: The Grand Chamberlain

Works in this section relate to the private spheres of the imperial household and to official gift-giving, both responsibilities of the Grand Chamberlain. Even in private spaces and personal matters, Napoleon and his court were concerned with image and the way visual art could shape public opinion.

Section 8: Napoleon in Exile

After an initial period of exile and a short-lived return to power, Napoleon was exiled from France for good in 1815. This section includes items associated with Napoleon's fall from power and his later life, offering a poignant contrast to the confident self-fashioning shown in the rest of the exhibition.

TIMELINE: THE WORLD OF NAPOLEON

Napoleon's Life

1769: On August 15, Napoleon Bonaparte is born on the Mediterranean island of Corsica, a subject of King Louis XV of France.

1795: Napoleon fires into a crowd of Royalists, defeating anti-Republican forces.

1796: Hailed as a hero for defending the Directory, young general Bonaparte is appointed commander in chief of the French army. Seven days later, he marries Josephine de Beauharnais.

1799: Napoleon engineers the overthrow of the Directory in a coup d'état. A new government, called the Consulate, is established in December with Napoleon as First Consul.

1802: Napoleon becomes First Consul for life.

1804: The Consulate becomes the Empire, and Napoleon is proclaimed Emperor of the French.

1809: As Napoleon's dynastic ambitions grow, he divorces Josephine because of her inability to provide an heir.

1810-11: Napoleon marries Archduchess Marie-Louise of Austria in 1810. She gives birth to a son, Napoleon's heir, in 1811.

1814: Napoleon abdicates the throne and is banished to the Mediterranean island of Elba.

1815: Napoleon escapes from Elba and takes back the French throne during the period known as the "Hundred Days."

1815: Following his abdication, Napoleon is exiled to Saint Helena, one of the most remote islands in the world.

1821: On May 5, Napoleon dies on Saint Helena at the age of 51.

World & Military Events

1789: On July 14, Parisian mobs storm the Bastille, and the French Revolution begins.

1792-93: The French Assembly moves to abolish the monarchy and establish a republic. King Louis XVI is executed by guillotine.

1793-1794: During the Reign of Terror, the most radical period of the French Revolution, thousands are arrested and executed.

1795: A new French constitution is created, establishing the Directory (a five-member committee) as leaders of the new government.

1796-99: Napoleon defeats Austrian forces, and France acquires significant new territory. He also leads a campaign to conquer Egypt, eventually abandoning his army after a series of failures.

1803: France sells the Louisiana Territory to the United States, doubling the size of the young nation.

1805: Austria and Russia join Britain in a new anti-French alliance. At the Battle of Trafalgar, a British naval fleet destroys the bulk of the French navy.

1805: Napoleon defeats the forces of Tsar Alexander I of Russia and Holy Roman Emperor Francis II at the Battle of Austerlitz.

1807: Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I sign the Treaties of Tilsit, giving Napoleon control of an empire that encompasses most of Europe.

1812: Napoleon's troops invade Russia, but Tsar Alexander I refuses to surrender. By November, the Russian winter and lack of supplies cause the French army to retreat.

1813: At the Battle of Leipzig, the combined forces of Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Sweden defeat the remaining French forces.

1815: At the Battle of Waterloo, Napoleon's final army is decisively defeated. Four days later, he abdicates for the second time.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

The following activities can help younger students (in elementary and early middle school grades) and older students (in upper middle school and high school) prepare for a visit to *Napoleon: Power and Splendor*.

Consider Messaging in Art

To get students thinking about how political and social messages can be conveyed through art objects, lead a class brainstorming session on one of the following questions:

- What are some ways that people show off their wealth or status in today's world? (*for younger grades*)
- How do today's political leaders and others in power convey authority? (*for older grades*)

Once you have formed an extensive list, review it as a class and identify how many of the things you listed could be considered visual or decorative arts.

Explore Symbols of Power

In the exhibition, students will see works containing many symbols associated with Napoleon and his reign. Encourage students to familiarize themselves with the following symbols:



For younger grades: Look closely at each of these symbols. What ideas or qualities do they suggest to you? What do *you* think they might symbolize?

For older grades: Use web or library resources to research each of these symbols. See if you can determine their meanings for French people of Napoleon's time and/or their meanings in different historical and cultural contexts. Why might Napoleon have wanted to use these particular symbols?

Compare Portraits and Points of View

While Napoleon commissioned many works of art meant to legitimize his power and glorify the Empire, he could not completely control his public image. Some artists poked fun at the French leader by drawing caricatures—pictures in which certain characteristics or features are exaggerated for comic effect. Invite students to practice analytical skills by comparing Napoleon's image in a portrait and in a caricature.

Suggested portrait: Workshop of Baron François-Pascal-Simon Gérard, *Bust-Length Portrait of Napoleon in Ceremonial Robes*, about 1805-1814.

(View at: vmfa.museum/exhibitions/exhibitions/napoleon-power-splendor/napoleon_21).

Suggested source for caricatures: Napoleonic Period Collection at University of Washington Libraries (View collection at: content.lib.washington.edu/napoleonweb).

For younger grades: What is similar and different about these two images of Napoleon? Which of these two artists would you want making a picture of *you*?

For older grades: Which features from the portrait also appear in the caricature? How did the caricaturist exaggerate or change those features in order to send a message about Napoleon? What message is being sent?

IN-GALLERY ACTIVITIES

Observe, Write, and Draw

Students can engage their observation and critical thinking skills by writing and drawing in the exhibition.

For younger grades: Have students complete the challenges in the *Student Activity* booklet (available in the Educator Resource Center).

For older grades: Instruct students to select one of the galleries within the exhibition to write about. Have them write their observations of the following:

- The general impression or feeling they get from the objects in the gallery
- The message these objects seem to send about Napoleon and/or his reign
- A detailed description of a single object in the gallery, along with a sketch of the object

Create an Imperial Portrait

Students of all ages can stop by the digital interactive station inside the exhibition to create their own Napoleonic power portrait. They'll be able to act like Napoleon's PR director as they select a background, costume, and props to create a digital portrait of the Emperor or Empress that communicates power and splendor. After students try the interactive, discuss: What background, costume, and props would you want your own portrait to include? What message would you want the image to send about you?

AFTER YOUR VISIT

Examine Other Leaders

The use of art for political messaging did not stop with Napoleon. Invite students to consider how today's leaders use visual imagery to shape their public image.

For younger grades: Visit americaspresidents.si.edu to see images of U.S. presidents from the National Portrait Gallery. Ask students to choose a presidential portrait and consider what messages it sends about its subject. What might the pose, clothing, setting, and surrounding objects shown in the portrait say about the kind of leader this president was? How does this portrait differ from the depictions of Napoleon students saw in the exhibition?

For older grades: Instruct students to select a presidential portrait from the collections of the National Portrait Gallery (view online at americaspresidents.si.edu). Then, challenge them to find a depiction of that same president from a different point of view (for example, they might search for a caricature or political cartoon). Have students write a short essay comparing the two depictions of the same leader. How does the artist's purpose and point of view come through in each image?

Respond Through Art-Making

Students of all ages can make art in response to what they saw in the exhibition. Instruct students to consider their own public image—which of their personal qualities do they wish to celebrate? How do they want other people to think of them? Then, each student should identify 3-4 symbols that represent those qualities or characteristics. Finally, have students incorporate their chosen symbols into a self-portrait or a work of decorative art (such as a design for a piece of furniture or décor).

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Napoleon: The Imperial Household **Sylvain Cordier**

The catalog for *Napoleon: Power and Splendor* includes numerous photographs of the works included in the exhibition, plus informative essays on French art of the Napoleonic era.
Available in the ERC.

A Brush with Napoleon: An Encounter with Jacques-Louis David **Laban Carrick Hill**

This fictional account of a young man's experiences in Napoleon's army offers insights into life during the French Empire and the work of Napoleon's official court painter, Jacques-Louis David.
Appropriate for grades 7-9.
Available in the ERC.

Symbols of Power in Art **Paola Rapelli**

This illustrated guide outlines the symbols of power used by Western rulers since ancient times. One chapter is reserved for Napoleon, who is described as the ultimate master of symbolic display.
Available in the ERC.

Bonaparte and the British: Prints and Propaganda in the Age of Napoleon **Tim Clayton**

This catalog accompanied a British Museum exhibition that explored propaganda produced in Britain and in France during Napoleon's rule. It pairs satirical caricatures and cartoons with more sober portraits of the French leader.
Available in the ERC.

Napoleon Bonaparte: The Little Corporal Who Built an Empire **BBC** bbc.com/timelines/zg9kwmn

This digital timeline highlights key events in the life of Napoleon and includes links to multimedia content, including videos, audio clips, and articles.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Exploring *Napoleon: Power and Splendor* will afford your students the opportunity to make observations and interpretations of works of art while considering how art can send political messages in both historical and contemporary contexts. The following learning standards may be addressed through a visit to the exhibition and the activities suggested in this guide:

Visual Arts Standards (KS)

- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Visual Art Standards (MO)

- Analyze and evaluate art using art vocabulary.
- Explain the connections between Visual Art and Communication Arts, Math, Science or Social Studies.
- Compare and contrast artworks from different historical time periods and/or cultures.

History, Government, and Social Studies Standards (KS)

- The student will investigate specific beliefs, contributions, ideas, and/or diverse populations and connect those beliefs, contributions, ideas and/or diversity to contemporary issues.

Social Studies Standards (MO)

- Explain connections between historical context and peoples' perspectives at the time in world history.
- Using a government lens, describe how peoples' perspectives shaped the sources/artifacts they created.
- Evaluate factors that shape public opinion on elections and policy issues.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN THE EXHIBITION

Abdicate: To formally give up a throne or high office. Faced with military failures, growing unpopularity, and threats from foreign and domestic governments, Napoleon abdicated his throne in 1814. After a brief exile to the Mediterranean island of Elba, Napoleon returned to France in 1815 in a bid to regain power. He ruled for a period known as the Hundred Days, but was ultimately defeated and forced to abdicate once again.

Caricature: A picture in which the qualities or characteristics of a person or thing have been exaggerated to comic effect. Caricatures are a popular form of political commentary. During the French Empire, Napoleon was often depicted in satirical caricatures drawn by British or French artists who were critical of his rule.

Consul: One of the three highest officials in the French government from 1799 to 1804. The Consulate was established after Napoleon carried out a coup d'état that did away with France's previous governing body, known as the Directory. Upon the establishment of the Consulate, Napoleon was named First Consul, putting him at the head of the national government.

Coup d'état: The sudden, sometimes violent, overthrow of a ruler or government by a group of people. Napoleon orchestrated a coup d'état in 1799 that led to him being named First Consul.

Decorative arts: Forms of visual art that are functional and ornamental, such as furniture, textiles, and ceramics. Many of the objects featured in *Napoleon: Power and Splendor* are works of decorative art.

Emperor: The supreme ruler of an empire, which is a group of states or nations under the ultimate authority of one individual. Napoleon declared himself Emperor of the French in 1804.

Exile: To expel and bar someone from their own country or community, usually for political reasons or as punishment for a crime. Following his political downfall Napoleon was exiled from France twice—once to the Mediterranean island of Elba, and finally to Saint Helena, a tiny and remote island in the Atlantic Ocean.

Grand Couvert: A grand public dinner that was considered a royal ritual for French kings; Napoleon revived the tradition when he became Emperor as a way to showcase the brilliance of his reign. Grand Couvert dinners were opulent affairs that involved strict protocol and required the participation of Napoleon's Grand Officers, the highest ranking members of the imperial household.

Imperial Household: The staff and advisors that served Napoleon during his reign as Emperor. It was subdivided into six departments, each responsible for distinct tasks and overseen by a Grand Officer. Altogether, Napoleon's Imperial Household consisted of over 3,500 individuals.

Laurel wreath: A round wreath made from intertwined branches of the laurel tree, an evergreen native to the Mediterranean. Laurel wreaths were awarded as symbols of triumph and honor in ancient Greece and Rome. Napoleon adopted the symbolism of the laurel wreath into his coronation crown in order to identify himself with Roman Emperors.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN THE EXHIBITION (continued)

Porcelain: A strong, translucent ceramic material. It is prized for its delicacy and strength.

Portrait: A picture of a person. Napoleon had numerous portraits of himself made in order to propagate and shape his public image.

Propaganda: Information (oftentimes of a biased or misleading nature) that is disseminated or promoted widely and systematically in order to further the cause of an individual, political organization, or special interest group. Visual art has long been used as a form of propaganda.

Tapestry: A thick, woven textile with pictures or designs sewn into it. Tapestries may be used as wall coverings, decoration, or furniture covers. Napoleon revived the French tapestry-making industry, which had suffered during the French Revolution, by placing orders for tapestries to adorn his residences.



EDUCATOR RESOURCE CENTER

The ERC at the Nelson-Atkins can help you expand your pre- and post-visit activities to connect students' museum experience with your classroom curriculum.

The ERC offers:

- Curriculum consultations
- Circulating resources
- Professional development workshops

ERC Hours: Thursdays and Fridays, 3—7 pm / Saturdays, 10 am—2 pm / And by appointment

Visit nelson-atkins.org/educators/resources for info.



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