

Language through Art: An ESL Enrichment Curriculum (Beginning) Information for Teaching

Still Life: Tea Set

Jean-Étienne Liotard (Swiss, 1702–89)
About 1781–83
Oil on canvas mounted on board
14 7/8 x 20 5/16 in.
84.PA.57



Background Information

Chinese porcelain and tea drinking were popular in Europe when Jean-Étienne Liotard was born. In this painting of teatime disarray, a tray is set with a teapot, lidded vase (perhaps containing an extra supply of tea leaves), plate of bread and butter, sugar bowl with tongs, milk jug, and six cups, saucers, and spoons. A large bowl holding a teacup and saucer could also be used for dumping the slops of cold tea and used tea leaves. By the time Liotard painted this work in the late 1700s, tea drinking had become fashionable among the middle class as well as the upper class. This is one of five known depictions of china tea sets that he created around 1783.

About the Artist

Jean-Étienne Liotard (Swiss, 1702–89)

Liotard first trained as a painter in Geneva. While in his twenties, he sought his fortune in Paris, where he studied in a prominent painter's studio. Later he traveled to Italy and throughout the Mediterranean region and finally settled in Constantinople for four years. Intrigued by the native dress, he grew a long beard and acquired the habit of dressing as a Turk, earning himself the nickname "the Turkish painter." While in Constantinople, he painted portraits of members of the British colony.

For the remainder of his life, Liotard traveled throughout Europe painting portraits in pastels. He gained an international reputation in this medium for his care and skill in achieving an accurate likeness of his sitters.