

## The Power of Art to Create Controversy and Inspire Poetry

Go to the West Pavilion, Upper Level, Gallery W203, and find the image identified below.



Title: Man with a Hoe  
Artist: Jean-François Millet (French)  
Date: 1860–1862  
Medium: Oil on canvas

*"To tell the truth, the peasant subjects suit my temperament best; for I must confess, even if you think me a socialist, that the human side of art is what touches me most."* —Jean-François Millet

*Man with a Hoe* was among the most famous and controversial paintings of the 19th century. When it was displayed in France at an 1863 exhibition, Jean-François Millet's painting caused a storm of controversy. The exhausted, hardworking peasant was considered brutish and frightening by the largely *bourgeois* (middle-class) Parisian audience.

Millet's thick, unblended brush strokes, together with his mundane subjects, earned him the label of "Realist." Realism was an art movement in France from about 1850 to 1875 that rejected the idealized style and subjects of earlier movements with its frank, even harsh, picture of everyday life.

The Industrial Revolution had caused a steady exodus from French farms. Accordingly, *Man with a Hoe* was interpreted as an expression of socialism (a social theory in which the producers possess political power and the means of producing and distributing goods). Because Millet portrayed the hardship and dignity of common agricultural laborers, his paintings were seen as a protest against the peasants' working conditions. Though his paintings were judged in political terms, Millet declared that he was not interested in stirring a peasant revolt against the *bourgeoisie*.

1. Write the name of a movie, TV show, song, or artwork considered controversial today and explain why it is considered controversial.

**Millet's painting inspired the American poet Edward Markham to write a poem about forty years later in 1899 titled "Man with a Hoe."** In the poem, Markham used **metaphors** to describe the man in the painting. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another, without making the comparison explicit. The following phrase is an example of a metaphor: "Life is a yo-yo. It's a series of ups and downs." Read the passage below and find the metaphor:

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans  
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,  
The emptiness of ages in his face,  
And on his back, the burden of the world.  
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,  
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,  
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?  
—excerpt from Edward Markham's "Man with a Hoe"

2. As you may have noticed, Markham compares the man to an ox that carries a tremendous burden. Now, create your own **metaphor** to describe the man with a hoe.
  
3. A **simile** is a phrase that uses "like" or "as" to compare two dissimilar objects. One example would be: "His feet were as big as boats." Devise your own simile that might describe the man in Millet's painting.
  
4. Some writers use **alliteration**, the repetition of an initial consonant sound, to draw the reader's attention. An example of alliteration is "**P**eter **P**iper **p**icked a **p**eck of **p**ickled **p**eppers." Write a sentence using alliteration to describe *Man with a Hoe*.
  
5. Many authors use **sensory language** to help a reader visualize what is happening in a story or poem. Pretend you are the man with the hoe. Write a sentence to describe each of your five senses—feel free to include **metaphors**, **similes**, and **alliteration**.
  - a. Sight:
  
  - b. Sound:
  
  - c. Taste:
  
  - d. Smell:
  
  - e. Touch/Feel: