

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

John, Fourteenth Lord Willoughby de Broke, and His Family

Johann Zoffany (German, 1733–1810)
About 1766
Oil on canvas
39 1/2 x 49 1/2 in.
96.PA.312



Background Information

In this painting, John Peyto (PAY-toh), fourteenth Lord Willoughby de Broke, appears with his wife, Lady Louisa North, and their three young children. Lady Louisa, who is sitting at a table set for tea, holds her daughter, also named Louisa, who stands on the table. The younger son, George, attempts to take a piece of buttered bread from the table while receiving an admonishing gesture from his father. In high spirits, the eldest son, John Jr., enters on the right, pulling a bright red toy horse. This painting was made before the boys were “breeched,” which refers to a turning point between babyhood and boyhood when a boy began to wear pants (or breeches) instead of a dress.

About the Artist

Johann Zoffany (German, 1733–1810)

The artist, Johann Zoffany, with his ability to portray lively figures interacting together in meticulously detailed settings, excelled at conversation pieces. These informal group portraits, introduced as a new genre of painting in England in the 1700s, vividly recorded the settings and social customs of the time.

Born Johannes Josephus Zauffaly in Germany, Zoffany apprenticed there, and then studied in Italy, developing a decorative style that incorporated minute, realistic details. Settling in England in 1761, he discovered his gift for painting small group scenes (informal conversation pieces) and portraits, gaining King George III's patronage. For the first time ever, an artist depicted the king's family with a new informality. George III himself nominated Zoffany to the new Royal Academy in 1769. Three years later Zoffany traveled to Italy and elsewhere in Europe, where his palette was enhanced by luscious reds, blues, and oranges. When he returned to England after seven years abroad, the vogue for conversation pieces was over. In 1783, he founded a market in India, returning to England in 1789 a rich man but never regaining his 1760s popularity.