Jack B. Yeats
Schools Resource
Created by Bernie McGonagle
Jack B. Yeats was born in London, youngest son of John Butler Yeats, portrait painter.

He is the brother of poet W. B. Yeats who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

Jack and William had 2 sisters: Susan (Lily) Yeats, embroider and Elizabeth (Lolly) Yeats, printer and publisher.

John Butler Yeats was a very talented portrait painter. However, he often failed to complete commissions and was therefore left unpaid for his work. As a consequence, his family suffered financially and in the early years, the family moved between London, Dublin and Sligo.

When Jack was 8 years old, Susan moved with her family to Sligo and later returned to London leaving Jack in the loving care of his grandparents, William and Susan.

It was from this time that Jack developed his enduring fascination for the sea, boats and the lives of sailors. He also spent this time of his youth studying people on land; races, circuses, ballad singers and sporting events.

His grandfather William Pollexfen owned a shipping business in the town. He was a larger than life character and the young Jack saw him as a pirate, a companion and a hero who sailed the seven seas.

The metal man of Sligo (detail) 1912.

Jack's mother, Susan Pollexfen, was the daughter of a prosperous merchant in Sligo.

It was from this time that Jack developed his enduring fascination for the sea, boats and the lives of sailors. He also spent this time of his youth studying people on land; races, circuses, ballad singers and sporting events.
JACK B. YEATS

1887

• Jack returned to his family in London in 1887.
• Got a season ticket for the spectacular Buffalo Bill Cody show at Olympia, London.
• He was already familiar with circuses, fairs and races in the West of Ireland.
• Now he was seeing horses from every conceivable angle.
• For the next year he filled his diaries with sketches that were lively and dynamic.
• Horses were to feature in his painting up to 1951 when he was 80 years old.

AGE 16

BELLE OF THE BALL 1911-12

1894

• Once Jack had decided on marriage to Cottie he worked from 6 am to late at night in a fireless room producing black and white drawings for comic journals.
• At the end of 3 years he had enough money to marry and buy a comfortable house in Surrey.

ART SCHOOL

London

KENSINGTON 1887
CHISWICK 1888
WEST LONDON 1890-93
WESTMINSTER 1890-94

1888-1895

FROM THE AGE OF 17 UNTIL HIS DEATH AGED 96 JACK WAS ABLE TO SUPPORT HIMSELF FINANCIALLY AS A PROFESSIONAL ARTIST WITHOUT ANY OTHER FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

black and white illustrations

FROM THE AGE OF 17 UNTIL HIS DEATH AGED 96 JACK WAS ABLE TO SUPPORT HIMSELF FINANCIALLY AS A PROFESSIONAL ARTIST WITHOUT ANY OTHER FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

• Jack met Mary Cottenham White, his future wife at Chiswick Art School.
• She was affectionately known as Cottie.
• It was a friendship that lasted 59 years.

THE CAUSEWAY OF LETTERMORE 1905

• He also illustrated books, designed comics, made posters and menu cards.
• When he was 23 years old he began illustrating for "Punch" magazine.
• Between 1910 (Age 39) and 1941 (Age 70) he had made 500 drawings under the pseudonym "W. Bird."
Jack B. Yeats

Watercolour

1897
Jack and Giotto move from Surrey to Peyon in 1897
He decides to move away from illustrations to establish himself as a watercolour artist.
In the first 6 months he produced 43 watercolours of Peyon life.
He had his first one man show in London in 1897

Age 26

1899

Exhibition in Dublin 1899
First exhibition of Irish subject matter

Age 28

1900
Mother Pies 1900

National Gallery of Ireland
Jack B. Yeats

In 1905 Jack and his close friend J.M. Synge visited the West of Ireland, commissioned by the Manchester Guardian newspaper to investigate the poorest districts of the West. Synge was a playwright, writer, and collector of folklore. As a result of their visit, Synge published a book called "The Aran Islands" in 1907. Jack made 12 black and white illustrations from sketches he made on location.

1906

1901 Jack B. Yeats began cartooning for Punch in 1910 under the pseudonym W. Bird.

1909

1912

1913 In 1913, he published a book called "Life in the West of Ireland". The illustrations show the everyday lives of the people.

1914 He perfected popular entertainments circuses, fairs and the country shop. A record of a way of life, fast disappearing.

1923: MRS. JORDAN, BELMULLET 1905 SKETCHBOOK

1924: THE COUNTRY SHOP 1912

1925: A FOUR-DARED CURACH 1906

1928: THE MAN FROM ARANMORE 1905

1932: THE MAN FROM ARANMORE IS DEPICTED STANDING ON THE GULY SIZE ON THE MAINLAND OF GALWAY. HE IS PROUD AND SELF CONFIDENT. HE WEARS A WHITE BRIMMED HAT AND SHOES (NOT THE TRADITIONAL PAMPOUTIES) SEEN IN THE WATERCOLOUR A FOUR-DARED CURACH 1906

1939: In 1939, the National Gallery of Ireland had over 200 of Yeats's sketchbooks. They span almost his entire art career. He carried around a sketchbook with him wherever he went, from age 15 to 84. He drew to capture memories and ideas for later work.

1957

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NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND
Jack B. Yeats

ARMORY SHOW 1913
NEW YORK

- Consisted of 1,400 works of art by 300 artists from both European and American
- Europe was represented by the most important artists and styles
- Realism - Impressionism
- Post Impressionism - Cubism
- Fauvism and Expressionism
- Famous names: Manet, Monet, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse and Duchamp
- The show caused a sensation
- Audiences witnessed for the first time Europe's revolutionary art

Yeats and Politics

- Yeats lived during the Easter Rising, the Irish War of Independence (1919-1922) and the Irish Civil War (1922-1923)
- He was witness to turbulent political events during the Rising
- However, he did not depict conflict in his work
- What he does show is the results of conflict on individuals and groups

World War I 1914-1918

- A flower-girl lays flowers at the site of a tragedy during the conflict
- Yeats captures his restrained, dignified action as she tenderly lays the flowers
- She might also be a symbol of Ireland that endures great loss during famine, emigration, and war

Phase 1 - Oils Illustrative

- The Priest is one of 12 oil paintings that Yeats painted for a cast of Irish characters in a London publication called 'Irishmen All'
- There were 12 chapters in the publication and Yeats provided a portrait for each chapter
- Characters included a farmer, a politician, a publican, a shop assistant, a priest and each one presented against a backdrop of their own locality

Everyday Scenes

- Nervous jockeys and horses gather at the beginning of a race
- Horses reflect the personalities of the jockeys
- Yeats uses thick paint (impasto) which is contained within strong outlines

© Bernie McGonagle
Jack B. Yeats

Phase 2
Free Flowing Colour

1920s
Outline Vanishes

1923
Age 52

The Liffey Swim 1923

- He abandons the strong park outlines of his earlier oils. Paintings
- His brushwork is free and fluid
- Colours rich
- He applies highlights directly from the paint tube
- Emotion is expressed by the very rapid application of paint

- Yeats Painted 281 Pictures During the 1920s
- Surrealism 1920s-1940s
- Urban Life

1923
Age 52

In the Tram 1923

- In the tram, describes urban life in Dublin
- Three women are gathered together in a gossiping group
- At a distance, a man in a hat and coat sits on his own
- Yeats's style is free and confident reflecting the business of city life
- Gone is the firm outline
- Yeats is clearly enjoying the physicality of oil paint

1929 Two paintings purchased by James Joyce

- I believe that the painter always begins by expressing himself with line. That is, by the most obvious means. Then he becomes aware that line, once so necessary, is in fact hemming him in. And as soon as he is strong enough, he breaks out of its confines

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\NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND
1930s

During the 1930s Yeats' output dropped to 65 paintings. He was now in his 60s. He spent most of this decade concentrating on writing. He published his first novel 'Shigo' and wrote several plays.

1935

Yeats met Samuel Beckett in 1935 and they became lifelong friends. Beckett was 25 years old. He was very impressed by Yeats's work and bought 'A Morning' 1935-6 in installments. Beckett saw a solitude and isolation in his figures that would later appear in his own work.

Phase 3 - Oils

Universal Themes

- A young man clowns near a scarlet table with writing materials on it. The man's face is deathly pale behind him there's a green wall full of memories from the past.
- A painting of a lady stands out in silhouette.

1936

Techniques

His work in the 1930s becomes thoroughly painterly. Thick impasto is achieved with a heavily loaded brush and palette knife. Version on the sculptural.
- Paint is scored by the sharp end of the brush. Paint is also applied straight from the tube and paint is sometimes moved about using his thumb.

1931

A Morning 1935-36

1933

Age 65

- Samuel Beckett bought this picture in 1936. He bought it in installments because he couldn't afford the full payment at the time. A young man with a pack on his back is seen passing on a byre street. He is mounted on a horse and is looking westward.
- This is another 'about to' painting. Techniques range from thin application of paint to rapidly applied impasto.

Individual Style

- Jack B. Yeats had his own unique style of painting. He was aware of the many developments in modern art. He came closest in terms of vision to the Austrian painter Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980).

1939

- It is a triumph of colour over representation. Our eyes are drawn to the scarlet table not to the man. The painting is thoroughly painterly. It is based on a poem written in 1820 about a man who has chosen the apparitions of Drunk and Gobbling Over Love.
**Expressionism in Art**

- Expressionism in Art reflects the emotions of the artist rather than representing the external world.
- It has its roots in the work of Vincent Van Gogh but expressionism as an art movement began in Germany in 1905 with the work of E.L. Kirchner, who founded the Die Brücke ('The Bridge').
- Subjects are exaggerated and distorted.
- Colours intense.
- Colours mixed directly on to canvas with an assortment of tools.

YEATS'S WORK GRADUALLY EVOLVED FROM STRAIGHTFORWARD RECOGNISABLE ILLUSTRATIONS AND WATERCOLOURS TO HIGHLY PERSONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF HIS MEMORIES AND INNER WORLD.

YEATS'S MOST PROLIFIC PERIOD

- 196 paintings in ten years
- 1940s was a sorrowful time for Yeats
- One by one members of his family passed away
- Despite this, his deep sorrow, Yeats continued to paint

**Major Retrospectives**

- 1942 National Gallery London
- 1943 Yeats Honoured Years by hosting a Retrospective Exhibition of his work
- He was recognised as an International Artist
- Yeats greatly rejuvenated by this exhibition

- 1944 Yeats's oil paintings were a gradual evolution from sobriquet colour to powerful explosive colour in his later work
- His early oils, e.g., the priest iris used drawing and strong outline.
- Colour was toned down.

**1945**

YEATS'S OIL PAINTINGS WERE A GRADUAL EVOLUTION FROM SUBSPERED COLOUR TO POWERFUL EXPLOSIVE COLOUR IN HIS LATER WORK.

**1946**

MEN OF DESTINY 1946

- Yeats's oil paintings were a gradual evolution from subsupered colour to powerful explosive colour in his later work.
- His early oils, e.g., the priest iris used drawing and strong outline.
- Colour was toned down.

- The scene is ablaze with thickly plastered colours.
- Here, colour is used not naturally but as a means of expressing his emotions.

- The painting is not abstract.
- We can still make out people, land, sky, sea, a boat and a horse.
- Figures are at the same time transparent and solid.
- Yeats is reveling in the sheer physicality of oil paint.
- He scrapes twists and parts with his palette knife.
- In the profusion of Impasto, each individual comes through.

- Yeats would have remembered from his Greek childhood in 1940.
- The figures we see may well be fishermen but the themes here are not local but universal.
- Human beings moving towards whatever fate awaits them.
- They are heroes perhaps not Irish but universal heroes.

- YEATS'S OIL PAINTINGS WERE A GRADUAL EVOLUTION FROM SUBSPERED COLOUR TO POWERFUL EXPLOSIVE COLOUR IN HIS LATER WORK.
- His early oils, e.g., the priest iris used drawing and strong outline.
- Colour was toned down.

- IN THE LIFFEY SWIM' 1923 there began a greater freedom and spontaneity.
- Yeats became a national treasure.
- It was fashionable to own a Yeats painting.
- Yeats's oil paintings were a gradual evolution from subsupered colour to powerful explosive colour in his later work.
**Jack B. Yeats**

1871-1957

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**COTTIE DIES**
1947

- Jack had met Cottie, a fellow art student, back in 1898 at Chiswick Art School. They had been married for 55 years.
- Terence De Vere White, literary editor of the Irish Times (1931-77) wrote, 'I was always moved by the peasant Mrs. Yeats's talk in her husband's presence. They had been married for half a century but she was thrilled by him as if they had just returned from the honeymoon.'

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**1947**

- I THINK TO EVERYONE LEFT ON EARTH WHO HAS LOST SOMEONE THERE ARE THREE GREAT WORDS FOR EVER-AND-EVER, AND EVER, MY PEAR ONE IS FINISHED WITH SORROW.
  - Jack B. Yeats

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**Memories**

- No one creates. The artist assembles memories.
- Yeats's childhood in Sligo and his travels in rural Ireland were a source of powerful memories for him, which he returned to again and again as subject matter throughout his career. By the time he was in his eighties, he had amassed 3,000 sketches. Many of his later paintings are scenes he remembered sometimes at a distance of 40 years.

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**1950**

- His fluid painting style became a reflection of the finitude of memory itself.
- His relationship with memory evolved as he grew older. He developed what can be described as 'half memory.' His memory became overlaid with his imagination and therefore something new was born at the moment of painting.

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**1948**

- His sister Lily was the last member of his immediate family to pass away.

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**1949**

- Many ferries 1948

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**1939-1945**

- World War 2

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**1945**

- Retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery London 1945

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**1950**

- When I begin a painting I think I'm in control, but after a while the paint controls me and as I go on, we work together... the title comes later.

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**1948**

- When I began a painting I think I'm in control, but after a while the paint controls me and as I go on, we work together... The title comes later.

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**1950**

- In 1950 Yeats received a great honour from the French government for his contribution to painting. He was invested as Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur.
- The Legion d'Honneur is the highest decoration in France, the highest order of merit both civil and military.
- The Chevalier, or Knight, is one of 3 grades that can be awarded.
- This high decoration gave Yeats great delight.
Jack B. Yeats

**1949**
- A joyful image - a boy on a horse sings his heart out to the heavens.
- The horse in dazzling gold is semi-transparent.
- Despite the use of imasto, nothing is solid here.
- Boy, horse, sky and landscape are joined in ecstasy.

**1951**
- Yeats lived through one of the most troublesome periods in Irish history and two world wars.
- Group is a powerful anti-war statement.

**1954**
- Exhibited at the Galerie des Beaux Arts in 1954.
- It was an exciting occasion for him.

**1957**
- Moves permanently to Portobello nursing home in 1955.

**1950s**
- Horses are also depicted on their own, cantering free, or with man and horse together.
- They feature in over 100 of his paintings.
- Horses were commonplace in Yeats's life in the country and city.
- Horses were portrayed in their working lives, performing in the circus ring or at races.
- He delighted in the many forms of horse-drawn transport - long car, side car and jaunting car.

**1951**
- Exhibited at the Galerie des Beaux Arts in 1954.
- It was an exciting occasion for him.

- For the road shows a horse running through a tunnel of trees towards a figure at the end of a wood.
- The figure is bathed in yellow light.
- Yellow brings riper and horse together as it scatters along the woodland floor and spreads on to the horses face, mane and body.
- The horse is painted in slabs of white, blue and green giving it a dream-like appearance.
- There are strong vertical dashes of colour in the trees.

**1951**
- Around 1950 Yeats's health began to deteriorate.
- Started to spend winters in Portobello nursing home.
- Went back home in spring to paint.
- In 1950 painted 31 pictures.

**Age 80**

- Yeats is considered Ireland's greatest 20th century painter.
- He was largely unaffected by European developments in art from 1920 to 1930.
- He captured in sketchbooks and in his work, the characters and soul of Ireland.

- Gently evolved from illustrative watercolour to a powerful expressionist oil painter.
- His work spoke for him.
- He trusted the viewer to make up their own minds.

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\NATIONAL GALLERY of IRELAND
Bernie McGonagle has been teaching art in Clarin College, Athenry, Co. Galway for 33 years. She retired in September 2019.

The IPEA came directly from the classroom experience of teaching the history of art. A lot of students found word heavy books difficult to understand, so Bernie found herself making lots of visual summaries of key concepts and art styles to make the process of learning more enjoyable, especially for visual learners.

Students feedback was very positive and she could see a real improvement in the level of engagement and understanding of key concepts and different art styles.

Since 2019 she has devoted herself full time to producing these graphic illustrations and enjoying it enormously.

Jack B. Yeats is her second art chart in collaboration with the National Gallery of Ireland. Montravan was published in November 2020 and can be downloaded for free from nationalgallery.ie.

The life and work of Claude Monet is due to be published by Bernie in December 2021.

Art Charts are visual celebrations of the lives and works of the great artists.
- They explore the social environment of each artist and trace their creative development and influences.
- These charts are concise, colourful, quirky and memorable. Enveloped in them is the link, memory technique. Each panel is connected to the next using a variety of methods: visual connection, similarity, colour, shape and IPEA association for easier recall.
- They are aimed primarily at higher and ordinary leaving cert art students who are visual learners but can also be enjoyed by anyone who has an interest in the great artists.
- They tie in strongly with the new leaving cert visual culture syllabus with its emphasis on understanding the artist’s style, subject matter, rationale, use of media and social context.

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And now, in the tradition of the great Jack B. Yeats, this project is ready to fly away.