Essay 3: Compare & Contrast Two Paintings

Write a two-to-three-page (500-800 words) essay that describes and analyzes a pair of paintings on a similar subject matter.

Choose ONE of the following pairs of paintings to analyze:

- 1. Family Portrait by Rembrandt & Family Group by William Glackens
- 2. The First Steps by Marguerite Gérard & First Steps by Vincent van Gogh
- 3. Paris, A Rainy Day by Gustave Caillebotte & Rainy Day on Fifth Avenue 1893 by Childe Hassam.

Describe the two paintings in detail so that your readers can easily visualize them without actually seeing them. Explain how the perspective, technique, and compositional features of each painting help create contrasting rhetorical effects. In your analysis, focus on two or three specific points of contrast. Support your analysis by referring to specific details from each painting.

Questions for Visual Analysis	
Perspective	What point of view does the painting take toward its subject? Does the perspective seem subjective or objective, positive or negative, emotional or detached? How do the details of the painting create a specific impression?
Technique	What artistic techniques does the painting display? Does the painting seem realistic or expressionistic? Are its colors vibrant or subdued? Does the brush work look polished or messy?
Compositional Features	How are the details of the painting arranged? What do you notice about the colors, the lines, and the relationships among the people and objects portrayed? How do the individual figures relate to each other and to their setting? What visual parallels and relationships do you see?

Your analysis should present both your own observations and library research. The essay must include at least FOUR sources documented in proper MLA format, with in-text, parenthetical references and a list of Works Cited. Two of your sources will be *primary* sources—the two paintings you analyze—and two will be *secondary* sources—historical or critical commentary relevant to the paintings. (Please note: encyclopedias—including on-line encyclopedias like Wikipedia—do not count as sources for this assignment.)

Give your essay a thesis and a clear, logical organization. Your first paragraph should start with a strong lead, provide any necessary background information, and end with a clear thesis statement. The next

paragraph should establish the similarities between the two paintings and describe them. Then, in two or three paragraphs, present the points of contrast between the two paintings. Be sure to support your analysis with specific details from the paintings. In your final paragraph, summarize your main points and clearly present the significance of your analysis. Each paragraph should have a strong topic sentence.

Outline for Analysis of Two Paintings	
Introduction (1 paragraph)	 Hooks the reader's interest. Provides background on the two paintings. Ends with a thesis statement.
Description (1 paragraph)	Sets up similarities.Describes each painting in turn.
Analysis (2-3 paragraph)	 Analyzes and contrasts each painting in turn, using ideas generated from research and close examination.
Conclusion (1 paragraph)	 Returns to the big picture for a sense of closure. Makes final comments about the significance of your analysis.

Write your essay in a classic prose style: clear and concise, specific and engaging.

Make every word count.

Due: November 4

(Bring THREE copies of your essay to class for Peer Critiques.)



Rembrandt. Family Portrait. 1665. Oil on canvas . Herzog-Anton-Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig. $(126 \times 167 \, \mathrm{cm})$



Glackens, William. *Family Group*. 1910. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington D. C. (183 x 213 cm)



Gérard, Marguerite. *The First Steps.* 1788. Oil on canvas. Yuspuov Palace Museum, Leningrad.

(45.5 x 55 cm)



van Gogh, Vincent. First Steps. 1890. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. $(72.4 \times 91.1 \, \text{cm})$



 ${\it Caillebotte, Gustave.}\ {\it Paris, A\ Rainy\ Day.}\ 1877.\ {\it Oil\ on\ canvas.}\ {\it Art\ Institute\ of\ Chicago,\ Chicago.}$

(212 x 276 cm)



Hassam, Childe. *A Rainy Day on Fifth Avenue*. 1893. Oil on canvas. The John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota.

(36 x 51 cm)