

Exploration: Temple of Flora



Temple of Flora

In this activity sheet you will learn about the study of plants and early botanical art. You will also look at a beautiful example of this type of illustration, *The Temple of Flora or Garden of the Botanist, Poet, Painter & Philosopher*, which is featured in the Mirror of the World website.

In the spotlight

The Temple of Flora or Garden of the Botanist, Poet, Painter & Philosopher

Robert John Thornton
1799-1807

Words to know

Botany, flora, habitat, background, foreground, temple

Pages to visit

http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/exploration/capturing_nature/temple_of_flora.php

Flower power

Robert Thornton loved the natural world from a very young age. When he had money of his own, he decided he was going to make an incredible book of illustrated flowers. *The Temple of Flora* was a huge project. Thornton needed many people to help him make the book and it took many years to finish.

The study of plants is called **botany**, so Thornton was a botanical artist. Usually in botanical art, there is no natural **background** to show where plants live – just a plain white background. Thornton didn't want a plain background. He wanted people to see where and how flowers lived. So he made the flowers very big in the **foreground**, and showed many details in the background about their **habitat** – such as seas, mountains, forests. Many people now think that his book is a worldwide treasure.

Activity 1 – Get interactive!

Go to the Mirror of the World webpage and have a look at Thornton's beautiful floral illustrations.

http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/exploration/capturing_nature/flora/online.php

Use the Zoom & Pan interactive device to identify the plants shown. Make a list.

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5. How many more colour names can you think of?

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6. Choose a picture from The Temple of Flora. Make a list of all the colours that you can see in the picture. Give them your own made-up names.

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7. Use the glossary to find these meanings:

(a) temple

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(b) flora

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8. Why do you think Thornton chose this name for his book?

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9. There is something funny about Thornton's name. What is it? (Think about the roses, which Thornton painted himself for his book)

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Activity 2 – Creating a Temple of Flora

- Choose your favourite picture from The *Temple of Flora* and draw it on the next page.
- First draw the outline of the flower and the background in a light grey-lead pencil.
- Next, colour in your picture. Choose your colours carefully. Look at Thornton's picture and write down the names of the colours. For example: moss green, blood red, egg-yolk yellow, sky blue.
- Try experimenting with mixing water-colour paints or mixing coloured pencils by shading one colour lightly over the other.

Did you Know?

Robert Thornton had a lot of trouble trying to get money to finish his book. He even tried to raise money for the books by having a lottery, but that didn't work! In the end Thornton was very poor because he had spent all his money making this wonderful book. It was worth it though – it is a treasured work of art.

