



# Benjamin West

## Picture Study

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Pylades and Orestes Brought as Victims Before Iphigenia

Benjamin West, 1766





# The Death of General Wolfe

Benjamin West, 1770







# Self-Portrait

Benjamin West, 1770





# Penn's Treaty with the Indians

Benjamin West, 1771-1772



Isaac's Servant Tying the Bracelet on Rebecca's Arm

Benjamin West, 1775







Portrait of George, Prince of Wales, and  
Prince Frederick, Duke of York  
Benjamin West, 1777





# The Battle of LaHogue

Benjamin West, 1778



# King Lear in the Storm

Benjamin West, 1788





# The Death of Nelson

Benjamin West, 1806







# Benjamin Franklin Drawing Electricity from the Storm

Benjamin West, 1816





# Benjamin West (1738-1820)

## ARTIST BIO NOTES

*These notes are provided to aid the teacher's own background research on the artist and his or her works. This is not meant to be presented to students as a list of facts and dates. When you first introduce the artist, tell students where the artist fits into the timeline of history, and where the artist lived and worked. Add a few more details with each new picture, but the information you share should be short and simple unless your students ask questions or wish to know more. Keep the main focus of your Picture Study time on observation and narration of the details of the picture.*

*Note: if a footnote appears with a fact that is not a direct quote, the fact comes from ONE source only.*

Benjamin West was born in 1738 in Springfield, Pennsylvania. His early life is chronicled in Marguerite Henry's delightful, [\*Benjamin West and His Cat Grimalkin\*](#). We highly recommend this excellent biography!

West began his career as an artist by painting portraits in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. However, one of his customers—a gunsmith named William Henry—believed West was wasting his time painting portraits and convinced him to focus on painting historical scenes. West's first historical painting, depicting the death of Socrates, won him the admiration of the Provost at what is now the University of Pennsylvania. The Provost, Dr. William Smith, invited West to study with him at Philadelphia. West remained with him in Philadelphia for a time, furthering his art education. Afterwards, West journeyed to New York City, where he spent a year painting portraits before traveling to Italy. West became the first American painter to study in Italy, where he honed his art skills in the Neoclassical and Romantic styles of art that were popular in Europe.

In 1763, West moved to England, where he eventually married and had two sons. After securing the patronage of King George III, West went on to paint *The Death of General Wolfe*, one of his most well-known works. West painted other historical scenes from America as well, including *Penn's Treaty with the Indians* and *Benjamin Franklin Drawing Electricity from the Sky*. However, he also painted classical scenes such as *King Lear in the Storm* and *Pylades and Orestes*, portraits of the royal family, and religious scenes. During his later years, West became president of the Royal Academy of Arts and established the National Gallery in London. He also taught aspiring American artists, helping to cultivate a refined American art style

in his pupils. Benjamin West died in 1820. He is widely known for utilizing the Neoclassical and Romantic styles to depict dramatic historical and classical scenes, as well as for his influential role in shaping American art styles through his education of American artists.

### ARTIST BIO LINKS FOR FURTHER STUDY

[https://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/west\\_\\_benjamin](https://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/west__benjamin)

<https://www.nga.gov/collection/artist-info.1970.html>

### PICTURE SOURCE LINKS

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin\\_West\\_-\\_Pylades\\_and\\_Orestes\\_Brought\\_as\\_Victims\\_before\\_Iphigenia\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin_West_-_Pylades_and_Orestes_Brought_as_Victims_before_Iphigenia_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin\\_West\\_005.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin_West_005.jpg)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Benjamin\\_West#/media/File:Benjamin\\_West\\_self\\_portrait\\_1770.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_West#/media/File:Benjamin_West_self_portrait_1770.jpg)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Treaty\\_of\\_Penn\\_with\\_Indians\\_by\\_Benjamin\\_West.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Treaty_of_Penn_with_Indians_by_Benjamin_West.jpg)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin\\_West\\_-\\_Isaac%27s\\_servant\\_tying\\_the\\_bracelet\\_on\\_Rebecca%27s\\_arm\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin_West_-_Isaac%27s_servant_tying_the_bracelet_on_Rebecca%27s_arm_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George\\_IV,\\_when\\_Prince\\_of\\_Wales,\\_with\\_Frederick,\\_Duke\\_of\\_York.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_IV,_when_Prince_of_Wales,_with_Frederick,_Duke_of_York.jpg)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Battle\\_of\\_La\\_Hogue\\_c1778\\_Benjamin\\_West.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Battle_of_La_Hogue_c1778_Benjamin_West.jpg)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin\\_West\\_King\\_Lear\\_Act\\_III\\_scene\\_4.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin_West_King_Lear_Act_III_scene_4.jpg)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin\\_West\\_-\\_The\\_Death\\_of\\_Nelson\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin_West_-_The_Death_of_Nelson_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:West\\_-\\_Benjamin\\_Franklin\\_Drawing\\_Electricity\\_from\\_the\\_Sky\\_\(ca\\_1816\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:West_-_Benjamin_Franklin_Drawing_Electricity_from_the_Sky_(ca_1816).jpg)