

EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

PLEIN AIR PAINTING PIONEER
SPOTLIGHT ON WILLIAM RAPHAEL

Our latest Teacher Resource Guide publication explores plein air painting through the work of William Raphael.



William Raphael, painter, c.1900.



LEARN ABOUT
PLEIN AIR PAINTING
through the art of
WILLIAM RAPHAEL

Cover of ACI's newest Teacher Resource Guide.

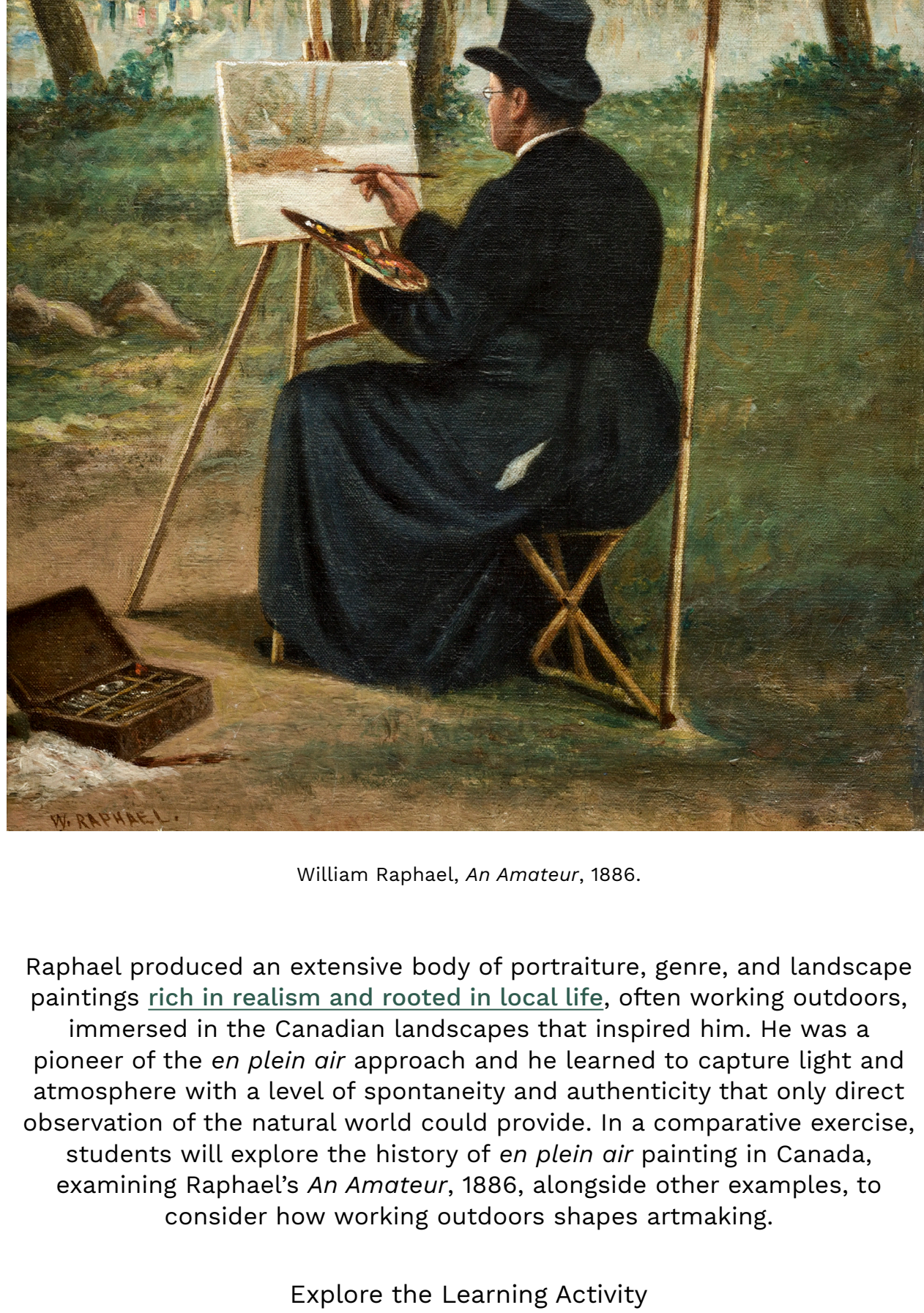
April is Earth Month, a time for reflecting on our relationship with the natural world, and an opportunity to engage students in conversations about climate, landscape, and environmental stewardship. To mark the occasion, the Art Canada Institute's latest Teacher Resource Guide highlights the work of William Raphael (1833–1914). Born in Nakel, Prussia (present-day Poland), Raphael moved to Montreal in 1857 and became active in the city's art community as a painter, teacher, and founding member of the Art Association of Montreal. He was also among the earliest artists in Canada to embrace painting *en plein air*, a practice where artists create works outside the studio. Read on to find inspiration from Raphael and guide your students to sketch, observe, and create art outside the classroom—an invitation to see the environment with fresh eyes.

[Download the Teacher Resource Guide](#)

—The Art Canada Institute Education Team

AVENUES TO EXPLORE

The Plein Air Approach

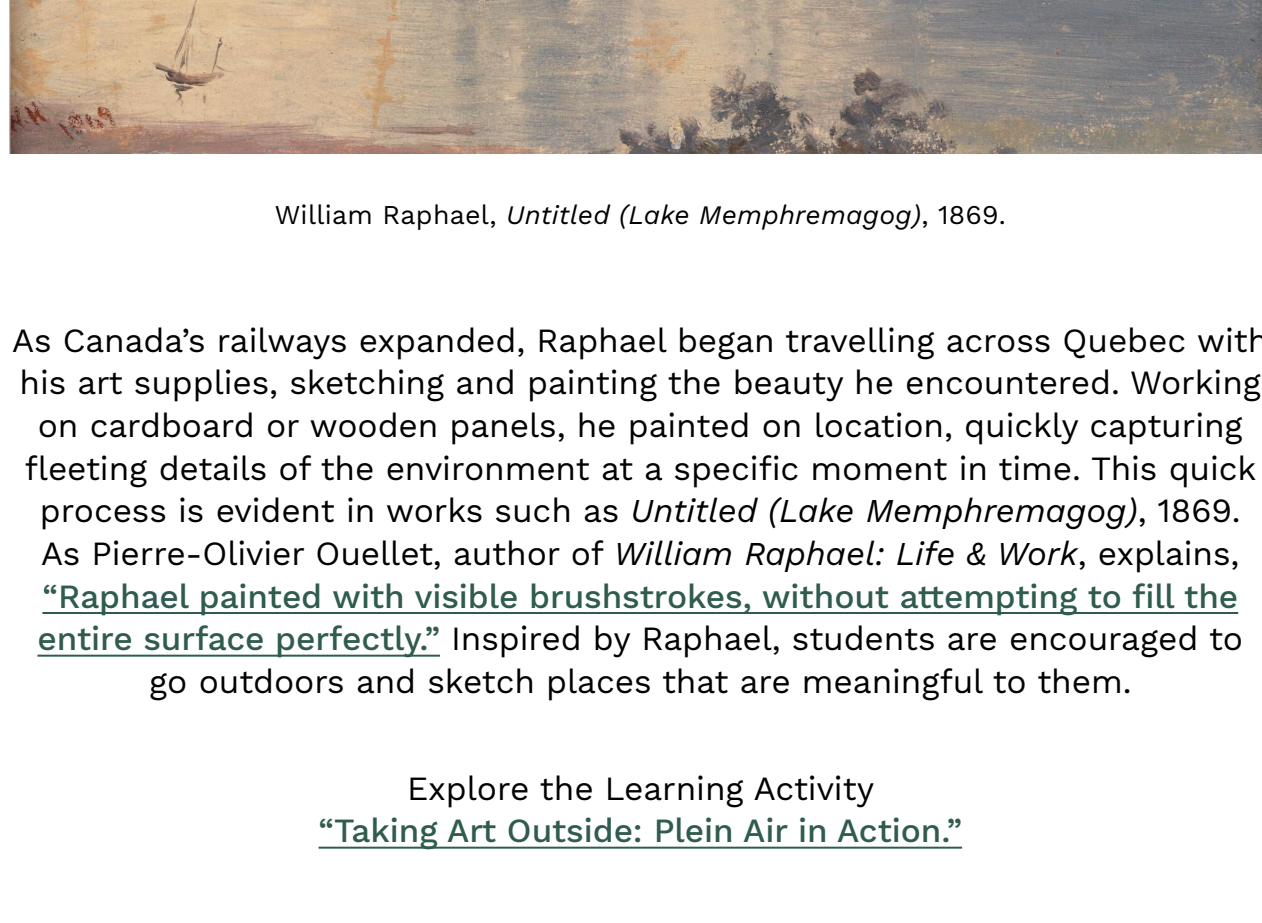


William Raphael, *An Amateur*, 1886.

Raphael produced an extensive body of portraiture, genre, and landscape paintings [rich in realism and rooted in local life](#), often working outdoors, immersed in the Canadian landscapes that inspired him. He was a pioneer of the *en plein air* approach and he learned to capture light and atmosphere with a level of spontaneity and authenticity that only direct observation of the natural world could provide. In a comparative exercise, students will explore the history of *en plein air* painting in Canada, examining Raphael's *An Amateur*, 1886, alongside other examples, to consider how working outdoors shapes artmaking.

Explore the Learning Activity
[“Painting the Great Outdoors: The Plein Air Approach.”](#)

Taking Art Outside

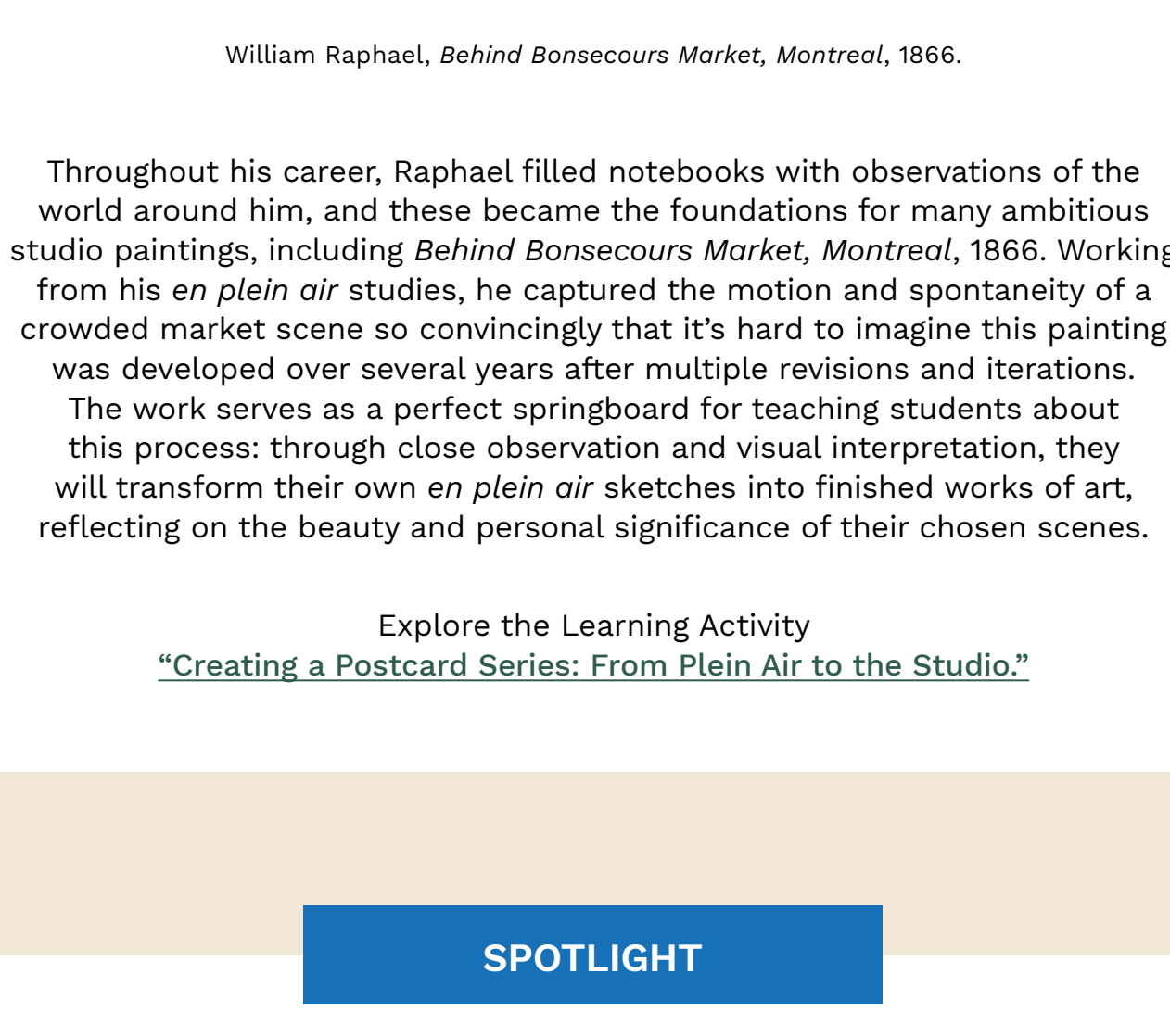


William Raphael, *Untitled (Lake Memphremagog)*, 1869.

As Canada's railways expanded, Raphael began travelling across Quebec with his art supplies, sketching and painting the beauty he encountered. Working on cardboard or wooden panels, he painted on location, quickly capturing fleeting details of the environment at a specific moment in time. This quick process is evident in works such as *Untitled (Lake Memphremagog)*, 1869. As Pierre-Olivier Ouellet, author of *William Raphael: Life & Work*, explains, [“Raphael painted with visible brushstrokes, without attempting to fill the entire surface perfectly.”](#) Inspired by Raphael, students are encouraged to go outdoors and sketch places that are meaningful to them.

Explore the Learning Activity
[“Taking Art Outside: Plein Air in Action.”](#)

Back to the Studio



William Raphael, *Behind Bonsecours Market, Montreal*, 1866.

Throughout his career, Raphael filled notebooks with observations of the world around him, and these became the foundations for many ambitious studio paintings, including *Behind Bonsecours Market, Montreal*, 1866. Working from his *en plein air* studies, he captured the motion and spontaneity of a crowded market scene so convincingly that it's hard to imagine this painting was developed over several years after multiple revisions and iterations.

The work serves as a perfect springboard for teaching students about this process: through close observation and visual interpretation, they will transform their own *en plein air* sketches into finished works of art, reflecting on the beauty and personal significance of their chosen scenes.

Explore the Learning Activity
[“Creating a Postcard Series: From Plein Air to the Studio.”](#)

SPOTLIGHT

Submissions Now Open

Submissions are now open for ACI's [annual student challenge](#)! We invite students in grades 7 through 12 from across Canada to submit original works inspired by the country's greatest historical and contemporary artists. Winners receive attention from leading figures in the Canadian art world, cash prizes, and opportunities to show their work at Art Toronto, Canada's most prominent art fair, from October 29 to November 1, 2026.

Watch and share a [promotional video](#) about the student challenge.

For new and inspiring art activity ideas, download the [2026 Student Creativity Booklet](#)

As a bilingual organization, we are proud to offer our materials in both French and English, including this newsletter. Use the sign up links below to receive emails in your preferred language.

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Art Canada Institute

Launched in 2013, the Art Canada Institute is the only national institution whose mandate is to promote the study of an inclusive, multi-vocal Canadian art history to as broad an audience as possible, in both English and French, within Canada and internationally. ACI works with more than fifty of Canada's leading art historians, curators, and visual culture experts who create authoritative original content on the people, themes, and topics that have defined Canadian art history.

We are creating a central digital resource to tell the world about Canada's most important works of art and where they are located. By functioning as an online art museum, a [digital library](#), and an interactive Canadian art encyclopedia, ACI is an indispensable resource on Canada's visual heritage.

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