

# REYNOLDA

DISCOVERY LESSON (AGE 3-5)

## A Home in the Woods



Thomas Cole, *A Home in the Woods*, 1847. Oil on canvas. Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Gift of Barbara B. Millhouse, 1978.2.2

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## WHAT YOU NEED

- **Discovery Lesson:** Thomas Cole's *Home in the Woods* on this card or on your computer screen. To zoom in and learn more about the artwork, visit [reynoldahouse.org/collections/object/home-in-the-woods](http://reynoldahouse.org/collections/object/home-in-the-woods)
- **Literature Connection:** *The Little House*, by Virginia Burton in print, or as read on YouTube in Mrs. Clark's Reading corner, [youtube.com/watch?v=TqkM6QwajXM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqkM6QwajXM).
- **Hands-on Activity:** For play and designing: Building toys such as magnetic blocks, Lego® bricks, Duplo® bricks, Lincoln Logs®, etc.

For art making: Items from the recycle bin like cereal and cracker boxes, other cardboard boxes, toilet paper tubes, and yogurt cups; glue stick; pencil, markers, or crayons; drawing or construction paper; scissors; found natural items like pine cones, leaves, rocks, seed pods, moss, etc.

## DISCOVERY LESSON

Introduce these two keywords to the child:

**Home** - a place where one lives; homes look different, but each is special

**Woods** - a place where many trees live and grow (a small forest); wildlife like deer, squirrels, birds, and rabbits live in wooded areas

Begin by asking if the child knows what each word means, or what he or she thinks it means. Help build on the child's understanding as needed and try to find an example of each in the child's life, whether from experience or from a story.

Next, look together at the painting [\*Home in the Woods\*](#), painted by Thomas Cole in 1847.

As you look at the work of art, ask some of the following questions to encourage careful looking and see what you can find together. Allow the children time to scan the image and begin to make some initial connections with the painting.

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- Ask “What is happening in this picture?” Name some of the things you see. Here, you might focus on the home and relate it to how you may be in a ‘home’ now. Consider how the home in this painting is **similar** or **different** to the child’s home.
- What story do you think the artist is telling us about the people? Who are they and what are they doing? As you talk, discuss what life may be like for the people represented in the painting and look for details in the image that might give clues. For example, notice the clothesline and consider how people might have washed and dried clothes without washing machines and dryers.
- Where do you think this family gets its food? Why?
- Are there any animals in the painting? What are they doing?
- What do you notice about the area around the cabin? If the child notices trees, bring back the title, being a home in the “woods.”

As appropriate, share information about the art, found on Reynolda’s website and below.

## ABOUT THOMAS COLE

- Thomas Cole is a famous American artist. He painted *Home in the Woods* in 1847.
- He is best known as an American landscape painter. (Consider what “landscape” might mean. In art, “landscape” is a category of art focusing on outdoor scenes of nature.)
- Cole painted this view of the White Mountains of New Hampshire, showing a family who cleared the land themselves. Can you see anything that shows they might have chopped down trees?
- The family in this picture had no grocery stores, no electricity, nor indoor running water. This means no bathrooms, nor washer, nor dryer nor dishwasher!

## LITERATURE CONNECTION

Continue thinking about the ideas from the painting while you read or listen to the literature.

1. Listen to *The Little House* by Virginia Lee Burton at [youtu.be/TqkM6QwajXM](https://youtu.be/TqkM6QwajXM) or borrow the book from your local library. NC library patrons can also borrow a virtual copy from the Libby app ([overdrive.com](https://overdrive.com)).

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2. While reading, pause and ask questions to extend on the ideas you have been discussing.
  - In this story, we meet a little house in the country. What changes about the area around the house? What happens during each different season?
  - How is the city different from the country?
  - As the story continues, look at the “face” of the house. How do the windows and doors change throughout the story? At the end of the story, how do you think the house feels? Why?

## CONNECTION

After reading the book, compare and contrast by revisiting both images in the book and the painting by Thomas Cole. How are *The Little House* and *Home in the Woods* similar? Prompt the child if needed to help him or her make connections between the two:

- Do you see lots of green in the book and in the painting?
- Do both the book and the painting have trees?
- Is there a family in each picture?
- Do you see cars or buildings in either the book or the story?
- Did the setting around the little house change during the story? Do you think the area around the cabin in *Home in the Woods* changed from when the family first moved there?

What things might you find in the country?

What things might you find in the city?

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## HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

Create a home in the woods using items around the house or natural elements found outdoors. This can be an open-ended, child-driven art project. Let the child brainstorm using toys at hand (maybe there are wooden blocks, cardboard blocks or boxes, magnetic blocks, Lego® bricks, Duplo® bricks, Lincoln Logs®, etc.) to create a home in the woods. Or, you may choose to make a home with paper and other recyclable items (like boxes and yogurt containers). After you have a home with blocks or recyclables, look for natural elements to create “woods” around your home. Here’s just one example of how you might make a home.

1. Gather an empty box and a sheet of paper.
2. Line up the paper against the box and help the child glide a writing utensil against the box to mark where the paper needs to be cut.
3. If the child would like a door, ask him or her to draw where they would like the door to go. Cut it out for the child. (“You are the architect and I can be your builder with the tricky parts—just tell me where you want this door to go and I’ll cut it for you!”)



[steps 1 and 3]

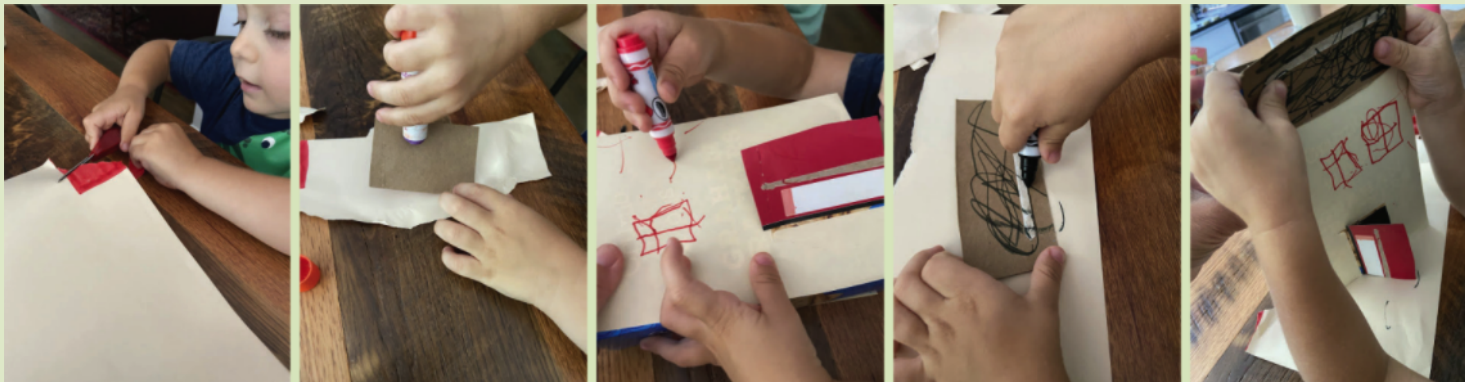
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4. Help the child cut the paper with safety scissors, or cut for the child if needed. Note: learning and practicing scissors skills helps build hand strength and dexterity and can be helpful for pre-writers.
5. Guide the child to spread glue on the box so the paper will adhere to it. Attach.
6. If you cut out the door, cut the paper along the lines so it can swing open and shut.



[steps 5 and 6]

7. Assist the child in finding a door and windows and other features for the house. Use recyclables, paper, or drawing materials to create these features.



[step 7]

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In this open-ended activity, the child can express his or her creativity while exploring different shapes, colors and patterns. This activity also builds fine motor skills. The child will be selecting, cutting, pasting and pressing as the child works to create his or her own home.

The child may need scaffolding in recalling features of a home. Ask questions such as “Would you like to add a door to your house?” “What color would you like it to be?” It may also be necessary to prompt them with support such as “be sure you press the roof on really tightly so it can stick” if they are newer to using items such as glue.

You may also ask the child if he or she would like to add anything else to the house to make it unique. In making this example, the child wanted to add bushes. The child identified an image that resembles bushes on a recyclable material. The adult cut the leaves out for the child and the child pasted them on the home he was creating.

The finished product will represent the child’s current development. It is appropriate if a roof is not completely colored in solid black or a door has a white stripe on it because that is the piece of recyclable material the child chooses to use. Children grow by having the opportunity to explore and navigate the world around them.



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For example, the house below was designed by an older child and completed independently.



## EXTENDING PLAY

- Now, the child can continue the ideas from the story and the painting by playing with the house. Invite the child to find or create a setting like the “countryside” (from the first part of the story and like in the painting.)
- Then, contrast the “countryside” by creating a landscape that happens when people change and develop woods and land, like the city that was built in the story.
- Help the child compare and contrast these landscapes. Ask questions such as “In which landscape do you notice the house more and why?” Guide the child in orally retelling what they recall from observing the painting *Home in the Woods* and from the story of *The Little House*. Add in additional accessories to each scene, such as pretend people, to help the child create his or her own play scenarios using the landscape and home the child created.

