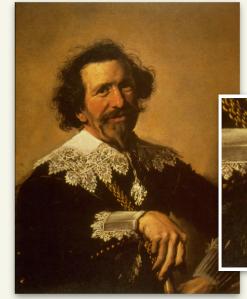# Experiencing Impressionism

Frans Hals, *Pieter van den Broecke*, 1633, Kenwood House, London, UK

Light is very important in both drawing and painting. A light source will determine where the shadows fall and where the darks and lights appear. It is essential when defining the surface of an object or the planes of a face.

The subtle changes in light on a portrait help to make a face look real. Without an effective description of light, surfaces can look flat.

Examine the way light describes the forms in the portrait by Frans Hals to the left and especially in the closeup of the hand. Notice the shadows between each finger and the bright light on the protruding knuckles and lengths of the fingers. The way the light is used in the painting of the hand tells us a lot about the contours on the surface. That is, we can see where the surface rises from an otherwise flat plane or dips below it; thus, the 3-dimensional quality of an object can be described by the way the light plays about the surface.

Light can be a powerful force. In the Bible, light refers to our Savior, Jesus. When a light appears, we are drawn toward it. It captures our attention. In that way, light can be used in art to draw attention to an area in a painting and to emphasize a focal point.

Notice how Rembrandt used light to emphasize the two figures in the foreground of *The Night Watch*. These two figures draw our attention because they are bathed in light.

Rembrandt, *The Night Watch*, 1642, Rijksmuseum