



John Raphael Smith, after James Northcote, *A Visit to the Grandmother*, 1785, mezzotint, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

An English mezzotint engraver and painter, John Raphael Smith (1752–1812) spent his early years working as an apprentice to a linendraper in his hometown of Derby. Around 1767 he settled in London and worked as a shopman, spending his spare time practicing miniature painting and engraving. Smith produced plates of paintings by prominent artists such as Joshua

Reynolds (1723–1792) and George Romney (1734–1802), and quickly became well known as a master of mezzotint engraving. His work *A Visit to the Grandmother* (1785) is a mezzotint engraving of a painting by English artist James Northcote (1746–1831) of the same title. Published in London on May 14th, the engraving is dedicated to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. It depicts two women, presumably sisters, sitting in a semi-circle with their grandmother. The middle figure helps her grandmother with her intricate sewing while her sister reads aloud to the group. A basket of sewing materials lies at the grandmother's foot, while a cat rests on the ledge of a small table near her shoulder. Symbolizing domestic bliss, the cat oversees the scene as it looks out at the viewer. Group reading was a common activity for women to engage in during this period, when status, education and wealth came to be associated with "leisured wives." Nevertheless, anxiety arose around the female reader and the detrimental consequences of reading inappropriate literature alone, unsupervised by the female members of her family.

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