Abby Ellsworth and her artistic perspective on history

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Dr. Angela Diaz was leaving her lecture hall last semester when she first saw Abby’s history notes. These weren’t your typical notes scribbled hastily in pen or pencil. They were something closer to art. A hand-drawn map beside notes on the Louisiana Purchase. Drawings of an American and British soldier accompanied notes on the American Revolution. Some text was written in elaborate cursive. Other text was in all caps. Abby takes notes like this because it helps her remember what she learns. Big letters indicate important ideas. Bright yellow lightbulbs serve as a reminder of new and surprising facts. The strategy also helps her access the information more deeply. “I’m a visual learner,” Abby says. “I like to put myself there and imagine what it would be like to be those people.”

Perhaps it’s not surprising that Abby is also an artist. Inspired by nineteenth-century Impressionists such as Claude Monet, she likes to paint landscapes—not just of places she’s been but also of places she wants to go. In anticipation of her recent trip to Boston, for example, she painted a picture of Boston Common. Abby hasn’t declared a major yet, but she’s interested in history, art history, and education, and she hopes to merge all these passions one day, perhaps as a high school teacher. She has also been thinking about writing a graphic history textbook for junior high or high school students.

Abby has been kind enough to let us display a few pages from her notebook. Swing by the display case outside the History Department in Old Main to see them in person.