

NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM



Norman Rockwell - Process and Product

Norman Rockwell - Process and Product

Subject Areas: Visual Arts

Grades: 9-12th Grade, 6-8th Grade, 3rd-5th grade

Theme: Artists Process

Key Terms

Subject: The person or people who are shown in a work of art

Costume: What the subject wears on their body

Facial expression: The look or feelings expressed on a subject's face

Pose: How a body is positioned

Composition: The way the different elements in the painting have been arranged

Foreground: The area of the picture space that appears to be closest to the viewer

Background: The area of the picture space that appears to be furthest from the viewer

Viewpoint: The position of the artist (and the viewer) in relation to the subject or scene

Commission: To request and pay an artist to produce the creation of an artwork

Note to Teachers: Please take a moment to review this lesson before sharing with your students. *The Problem We All Live With* includes a racist slur and a reference to the Ku Klux Klan.

Step 1: Look and discuss the paintings

Describe what you see going on in the artwork.

- Look closely at the facial expressions of the subjects in these paintings. How do you think these people are feeling?
- Look closely at their poses. What can you tell about the subjects from their body language?
- Some subjects in these paintings are shown in

such a way that the viewer cannot clearly see their expression or pose. Look closely at these subjects. What can you imagine their pose or expression might look like? What do you see in the painting that gives you that idea?

- Clothing, accessories, and hairstyles can also give you information about a subject and the time when an artwork has been created. Look closely at what the subject is wearing. What ideas does this give you about them?
- Look at the elements in the background of the paintings. What do you think is going on? Look at the elements in the foreground. Why do you think that the artist might have chosen which details to put in the background and which to put in the foreground?
- Where does the artist position the viewer (you) in this image? How does this viewpoint affect the way you see the piece and understand its story? If you were seeing this scene from a different point of view, how might you have a different interpretation?

Norman Rockwell's Process

Norman Rockwell used a complicated and multi-step process to create his artworks. He would create sketches to formulate his ideas, find models to appear in his paintings, take photographs to capture information, create detailed studies, and sometimes try out several different compositions before creating the finished piece.

After coming up with a concept or idea, he would set up his scene with models, costumes, and props. Next, he would take a series of black and white photographs. He would then use these photographs to create detailed drawings, a full-size rendering done entirely in charcoal, as well as color studies, before beginning the final painting. Once he had decided on a final composition, he would trace the outlines of his finished study onto canvas as a guide to create the final work in oil paint.

Look around the gallery (and on the tabs) for different studies that show the steps Rockwell used to create these paintings.

- What do you notice about how Rockwell used photography in his process? What are some things that you think the artist might have done in order to set up the photograph?
- What other types of studies did Rockwell create before painting the finished piece? How might the notes and details that he included in these studies have helped him develop the final painting?
- Compare and contrast the finished work and the different studies. Consider the position of the subject, the background and foreground, the viewpoint, and how any objects have been arranged. How have these elements changed?
- In what ways is this version different from the original painting? How would the experience of seeing it be different than seeing the original painting on the wall or in a museum?
- Rockwell's paintings were created for publication and were intended to be photographed and reproduced. How does this change the way you think about the painting?

Step 2: Learn More

After the 1920s, Norman Rockwell used photography as a critical part of his artistic process. Before making a painting, Rockwell would stage images and take photographs to explore his ideas, sometimes taking over a hundred photographs to create a single work. Rockwell would stage each scene like a movie director to find just the right characters, props, and settings that would most effectively communicate the story he wanted to tell.

His photographic subjects were not usually professional models, but friends, family, and neighbors who were chosen to portray the characters he had in mind. He would show the models his rough sketches and describe his ideas for the finished piece, coaching them through the process by acting out the poses and facial expressions that he wanted them to portray. A session could last anywhere from minute to several hours, and his models, even the children, were always paid for their time. Some of his favorite models were used repeatedly; certain neighbors and friends appear in multiple works over the years. Norman Rockwell often posed and included himself in paintings.

The props Rockwell used to stage these scenes were also carefully chosen and sourced. Rockwell would conduct extensive research to find objects that were historically accurate and buy, borrow, or rent them before photographing them from all sides and capturing all details.

Although he would not take the photographs himself, he would work with the photographer much like a director of a film works with a cinematographer. He would position the camera, decide when to take the photographs, and even coach the models to help them best portray his characters. After the photographs were taken, Rockwell would choose which ones he wanted to use to tell his story.

Publishing the Painting

Many of Rockwell's artworks were done on commission. A magazine or a company would hire Rockwell to create artwork for a specific purpose or to communicate a certain idea. Rockwell's work would often be reviewed by an art director or editor who might request changes, approve, or at times, even reject an idea. Over the course of his career, Rockwell produced over 4,000 artworks for magazines, books, and advertisements, and he produced art for more than 150 companies, including advertisements for Jello, Kellogg's Cornflakes cereal, Crest toothpaste, and Ford automobiles. Rockwell paintings were turned into greeting cards, calendars, large-scale posters and even postage stamps. Unlike other artists whose works are only found in galleries and museums, Rockwell's illustrations reached a mass audience through publication.

- Look around the gallery (and on the tabs) to find examples of how these paintings were presented to the general public. What different kinds of reproductions can you find? Where might people have seen these images in their everyday lives?

Often the art editor or art director would design the page with Rockwell's image and add text such as the name of the magazine, advertising copy about a product, or the article that Rockwell's art was intended to illustrate.

- Look around the gallery (and on the tabs) to find images that are accompanied by text. How does the combination of text and image change the way you view this painting?

The Problem We All Live With

Although Rockwell based the painting on actual events that took place in New Orleans during the fight to desegregate the city's schools in the 1960s, the models for *The Problem We All Live With* were three schoolgirls from the rural town of Stockbridge, MA where Rockwell was living at the time. The final painted image features six-year-old neighbor Lynda Gunn, though he also referred to photographs of the other two girls when creating this piece. Rockwell carefully documented details in photographs including a study of the girl's pigtails, with someone's hand behind gently holding her hair up at his direction. Rockwell also made photographs of the girls and the male models who posed as U.S. Marshalls using raised boards to support their feet to create the action of them walking mid-step. Rockwell's eye for detail extended to every aspect of his compositions. In order to create realistic drips of the over-ripe tomato that was thrown against the wall, he and his photographer raided his wife Mollie Rockwell's garden only to smash and photograph all the tomatoes they picked.

Rockwell knew photographs of his paintings would often be scaled down to fit the smaller sizes of magazine covers and spreads, so he always worked to create a strong composition that would be effective even when reduced in size. *The Problem We All Live With* was originally commissioned for two-page spread in a 1964 issue of *Look* magazine focusing on the issue of school segregation. In Rockwell's studies for the painting, he initially placed the young girl at the right side of the composition. He soon realized that when the image was reproduced in the magazine, it would look like she was walking into the "gutter" between the two pages. So, Rockwell moved the figure of the girl to the left so she could "walk" with no barriers across the page.



Freedom of Speech

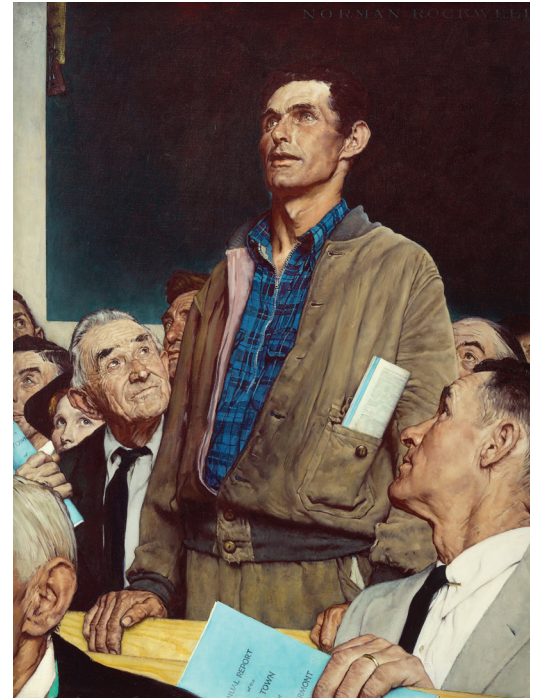
In 1942 Rockwell received an important commission from *The Saturday Evening Post* to create a series of paintings representing the Four Freedoms, which President Franklin Delano Roosevelt described as basic human rights that all people deserve to have: freedom of speech, freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom of worship. Although he was very excited to be working on the project, Rockwell



struggled at first to figure out how he would be able to translate the words expressed by Roosevelt into powerful visual images. Rockwell always said that his best ideas came from his own observations and experiences.

The inspiration for *Freedom of Speech* came from a meeting Rockwell attended in the small town in Vermont where he lived. The local high school had recently burned down, and the town came together to vote whether they would raise taxes to pay for the rebuilding of the school. A farmer (who was one of Rockwell's neighbors) stood up to speak. He told the townspeople that he couldn't afford any additional tax payments and would be voting against the measure. Rockwell recalled the townspeople listened with respect even though they disagreed with him. "They let him have his say. No one shouted him down. ...I thought, that's it... Freedom of Speech... I'll express the ideas in simple, everyday scenes."

As was his practice, Rockwell made numerous sketches and studies for the painting. His original idea, represented in early studies, was to portray the farmer standing among the townspeople at eye-level. However, Rockwell ultimately changed the composition so that the speaker is seen from below making him look larger and even more heroic. Rockwell also zoomed in on the figure and the



townspeople; in the process he brings the viewer into the scene and makes us feel like we were there. The model for the figure of the farmer was another neighbor who looks a bit like Abraham Lincoln, a president whom Rockwell greatly admired. The jacket the farmer wears in the painting was selected by Rockwell. After the modeling session, Rockwell gave the jacket to his studio assistant and fellow illustrator, Gene Pelham, who wore it for years; his family later donated it to the Museum's collection.

After the publication of Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* in *The Saturday Evening Post*, the magazine received thousands of requests for reprints. You could say it went "viral." Over four million posters and prints featuring Rockwell's Four Freedoms were issued by the Post and the Office of War Information. Produced in several sizes and styles as single images or composites with boldly lettered messages, the reproductions were displayed in government buildings, factories, offices, stores, and schools. Larger posters were intended for display in post offices where people purchased war bonds and stamps to support the war effort. The paintings also traveled with other artworks to sixteen cities across the nation in the *Four Freedoms War Bonds Show*, and reproductions (posters) of Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* were given to people who purchased war bonds in support of America and its allies during World War II.

Step 3: Make your own

Strike a pose!

- Divide students into pairs. Have each pair generate a character or choose from a list of characters they will portray in their photograph. Take 5-10 minutes for each pair to brainstorm a simple background and storyline for their character.
- Within each pair assign the roles of “director” and “subject.” If available, students can choose from different costumes, accessories, or props to incorporate into their image and tell their story visually.
- Have the director invite the subject to act out the character they have developed. Using a digital camera, take photographs using as many different expressions, poses, and actions as possible. Capture the photographs from different viewpoints and with different compositions.
- Have students look at the photographs they took and discuss as a group. How does changing these elements change the way the subject appears? Does it communicate the storyline?

Photography as a tool

- Have students think of a story or idea to create an artwork about. Ask them to brainstorm a list of different objects, characters, and settings that they could use to communicate this story or idea.
- Using a camera, have students photograph different objects and characters to incorporate into their finished piece. Items should be photographed from multiple sides and

perspectives to give a variety of options to choose from. If some items are not available, images from the internet can be used to supplement.

- Ask students to look at the images they have collected and choose the ones that best seem to represent their story or idea. Using collage or digital tools such as Photoshop, combine the chosen elements into a final composition.
- Discuss as a class. How do the composite images tell a story? How did using this process affect the way they thought about creating an image?

Tableau Vivant

(a French term meaning “living picture”)

- Divide students into small groups, and have each group choose one painting from the virtual exhibition to bring to life. Invite each group to create a “tableau vivant,” or “living picture.”
- One student should take on the role of “director” and guide the other students in the group to arrange themselves and take on the poses and facial expressions of the characters in the painting. Encourage them to incorporate costumes or props if available.
- Once the scene has been completed, students can create a second tableau to show what might happen next. Groups can photograph their two tableaux or perform them for the class.
- Discuss as a class. Which parts of the original painting influenced their choices? How do the tableaux compare to the original painting? Did creating a tableau provide any new insights about painting?

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

VISUAL ARTS

NA-VA.K-12.1 UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING MEDIA, TECHNIQUES, AND PROCESSES

NA-VA.K-12.2 USING KNOWLEDGE OF STRUCTURES AND FUNCTIONS

NA-VA.K-12.3 CHOOSING AND EVALUATING A RANGE OF SUBJECT MATTER, SYMBOLS, AND IDEAS

NA-VA.K-12.4 UNDERSTANDING THE VISUAL ARTS IN RELATION TO HISTORY AND CULTURES

NA-VA.K-12.5 REFLECTING UPON AND ASSESSING THE CHARACTERISTICS AND MERITS OF THEIR WORK AND THE WORK OF OTHERS

Teaching resources for Norman Rockwell Museum’s *Imagining Freedom* virtual exhibition are supported by:

K.A.H.R. Foundation

Feigenbaum Foundation

Dena Hardymon

Green Foundation

covers, top to bottom, Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) Color study for *The Problem We All Live With*, 1963. Oil on Board Norman Rockwell Museum Collection, Norman Rockwell Museum Art Collection Trust. © 1963 Norman Rockwell Family Agency. All rights reserved. | Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) Charcoal study for *The Problem We All Live With*, 1963. Charcoal and Gouache on paper. Norman Rockwell Museum Collection, Norman Rockwell Museum Art Collection Trust. © 1963 Norman Rockwell Family Agency. All rights reserved. | Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) *The Problem We All Live With*, 1963. Illustration for *Look*, January 14, 1964, Oil on canvas. Norman Rockwell Museum Collection. **page 4**, Louis Lamone (1918-2007) Reference photograph for *The Problem We All Live With*, 1963 Norman Rockwell Museum Collection, Norman Rockwell Museum Art Collection Trust. © 1963 Norman Rockwell Family Agency. All rights reserved. | *White Cotton Dress* Norman Rockwell Museum Collection. From Lynda Gunn, model for *The Problem We All Live With*. NRM.2016.03.2 *Freedom of Speech Study* | Picture of Linda with her father, Louis Lamone (1918-2007). Reference photograph for *The Problem We All Live With*, 1963. Norman Rockwell Museum Collection, Norman Rockwell Museum Art Collection Trust. © 1963 Norman Rockwell Family Agency. All rights reserved. **page 5**, Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) Color study for *Freedom of Speech*, 1943. Oil on canvas. Lent by Metropolitan Museum of Art, George A. Hearn Fund, 1952 (52.164). © 1943 Norman Rockwell Family Agency. All rights reserved. | Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) *Freedom of Speech*, 1943. Illustration for *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 20, 1943. Oil on canvas. Norman Rockwell Museum Collection, NRACT.1973.021. © 1943 SEPS. Licensed by Curtis Licensing, Indianapolis, IN. All rights reserved.