

# Close Reading of The Problem We All Live With

**GRADE**

9-12

**THEME**

Four Freedoms, Civil Rights

**LENGTH**

This activity will take one class period

## Overview:

Students will examine the illustration, *The Problem We All Live With*, noticing the details within the context of the painting. They will look closely at the details within the painting, sharing these details. They will make supported inferences from these details, including Norman Rockwell's purpose and message.

*This activity will take one class period.*

## Enduring Understandings/ Essential Questions:

1. People were not always treated equally.
  2. People, young and old, help to bring about change in our country.
  3. We can learn about the history of our country not only from people who study the events that took place in the past, but also from people who participated in these events.
- Why are some people treated differently than others?
  - In what ways can people help to bring about change?
  - How do we learn about events that happened in the past?
  - Are all accounts of a historical event the same?

## Objectives:

- Students will view the reproduction of *The Problems We All Live With* by Norman Rockwell
- Students will view and analyze the composition, and design elements and principles of *The Problems We All Live With*, by Norman Rockwell
- Students will consider the historical and cultural events of the time that the illustration was created.
- Students will brainstorm problems they are currently faced with, complete a Think Sheet, and create a work of visual art that demonstrates an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes they use.

## Background:

In the 1960s, particularly following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and the intensification of American military activity in Vietnam, long-held beliefs and cultural norms shifted dramatically in America. Attitudes about race, sexuality, and gender roles were challenged as diverse social groups united to fight for civil rights and protest the Vietnam War.

After resigning his forty-seven year tenure with *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1963, Norman Rockwell embraced the challenge of creating imagery that addressed the nation's pressing concerns in a pared down, reportorial style. *The Problem We All Live With* for *Look* magazine is based upon an actual event, when six-year-old Ruby Bridges was escorted by U.S. Marshals to her first day at an all-white school. While the neutral title of the image invites interpretation, Rockwell's depiction of the vulnerable but dignified girl clearly condemns the actions of those who protest her presence and the issue of desegregation. Letters to the editor were a mix of praise and criticism, but that did not stop Rockwell from pursuing his course.

In September 1960, years after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling stating that separate was not equal in America's public schools, four African American students were selected to begin the integration process in the public elementary schools of New Orleans, Louisiana. One six year old, Ruby Bridges, was assigned to a first grade class at the William Franz Elementary School. The integration of the schools was not welcome by many white Americans in the south, and parents refused to have Ruby in their child's class. As a result, she was the only student in the first grade class taught by Boston native, Barbara Henry. For many months, angry parents protested her attendance at the school.

Norman Rockwell's painting, *The Problem We All Live With*, shows a young African American girl symbolizing Ruby Bridges being escorted to school by U.S. Marshals despite the barrage of racial slurs and threats. The young girl who posed is Lynda Gunn, Rockwell's neighbor in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he lived for his last twenty-five years.

## Materials:

## Multimedia Resources:



Norman Rockwell (1894-1978)  
*The Problem We All Live With*, 1963  
Illustration for *Look*, January 14, 1964, pp. 22-23  
Oil on canvas  
Norman Rockwell Museum Collection,  
NRM.1975.01



**A Conversation with Ruby Bridges Hall**  
Norman Rockwell Museum

## Classroom Supplies

- Chart paper with T-Chart labeled "What I See"/"What I think" (can infer)
- Marker
- Jim Crow Laws (These laws were enforced until 1965.)



## Activities:

- Display the illustration of *The Problem We All Live With*.
- Ask students to look carefully at the illustration. Give them a few minutes to do this.
- Turn and Talk: When you feel enough time has passed, have students turn to a person sitting beside them. Ask them to share with each other some of the things they notice in the illustration. As they are sharing, listen in to their conversations.
- Have partners share some of the things they noticed in the picture. Record their responses on chart paper. (Elicit what was heard during partner talk that are not shared or share them for the students)
- Turn and Talk: When everyone has an opportunity to share, have students turn to face their partners again. Tell them to talk to their partner about what they are thinking based on the details they noticed.
- Have partners share their thoughts. Record responses on the T-chart. Elicit details from the picture to support their thinking.
- New observations may be contributed as they look closer and are thinking about the details. Add them to the appropriate column on T-Chart.
- If you have not already done so, share the origin of the painting and its name. Have students reflect on the purpose of the message that Mr. Rockwell would want them to understand, and what the message means to them.
- Optional Activity: Read *Through Her Eyes* by Ruby Bridges to the class.

## Assessment:

- Did everyone participate?
- Are students basing their thinking on the details?
- Do student responses to the illustration reflect the relevance of personal interest and perspectives as well as civic virtues/principles which were in conflict during this movement?
- Do students' responses reflect relevant thinking about the significance of the illustration in today's world?

# Standards:

This curriculum meets the standards listed below. Look for more details on these standards please visit: [ELA](#) and [Math Standards](#), [Social Studies Standards](#), [Visual Arts Standards](#).

## Reading: Literature

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9

Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.9

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

## Speaking & Listening

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.6

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grades 11-12 Language standards 1 and 3 [[link to="CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12" here](#)] for specific expectations.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.6

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grades 9-10 Language standards 1 and 3 [[link to="CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10" here](#)] for specific expectations.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7

Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

D1.1.9-12.

Explain how a question reflects an enduring issue in the field.

D1.2.9-12.

Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question.

D1.3.9-12.

Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a supporting question.

D1.4.9-12.

Explain how supporting questions contribute to an inquiry and how, through engaging source work, new compelling and supporting questions emerge.

D1.5.9-12.

Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources.

D2.Civ.10.9-12.

Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

D2.Civ.9.9-12.

Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings.

D2.His.1.9-12.

Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

D2.His.2.9-12.

Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.

D2.His.3.9-12.

Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

D2.His.4.9-12.

Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.5.9-12.

Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

D2.His.6.9-12.

Analyze the ways in which the perspectives of those writing history shaped the history that they produced.

D3.1.9-12.

Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

D3.2.9-12.

Evaluate the credibility of a source by examining how experts value the source.

D3.3.9-12.

Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.

D3.4.9-12.

Develop claims and counterclaims attending to precision, significance, and knowledge conveyed through the claim while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both.

D4.2.9-12.

Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear and non-linear), examples and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanation given its purpose (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, procedural, technical).

D4.5.9-12.

Critique the use of the reasoning, sequencing, and supporting details of explanations..