

Meet Norman Rockwell: American Illustrator

Overview:

This lesson will introduce students to Norman Rockwell, a professional artist and illustrator who had been inspired by the daily events in his everyday life in the USA. Images from books, the Internet, written articles and a group discussion will be used to demonstrate how American culture influenced Norman Rockwell in communicating his ideas as visual narratives.

This lesson is designed for one or two 30-minute class periods.

GRADE

2-4

THEME

Four Freedoms

LENGTH

This lesson is designed for one or two 30-minute class periods.

DISCIPLINE

National Visual Arts Core Standards

VOCABULARY

Art Director; Biography; Canvas; Civil Rights; Community; Culture; Editor; Exhibit; Freelance; Gallery; Illustrate/Illustrator; Model/Pose; Ordinary; Patriotic; Poverty; Series; Self-Portrait; Symbol

Enduring Understandings/ Essential Questions:

1. Norman Rockwell is a well-known, famous American illustrator.
2. Illustrators are storytellers; they are artists and create pictures to tell a story.
3. Rockwell's paintings show what American life was like from the early 1900's to the 1970's. His paintings progress from the portrayal of ordinary, everyday events to social inequalities.
4. We can learn about Norman Rockwell by reading books, talking about and looking at artwork. We can see authentic pieces of artwork created by Rockwell at museums. We can learn more about him by visiting the [digital collection of the Norman Rockwell Museum](#).
5. Norman Rockwell was inspired by his surroundings (nature, politics but also ordinary events of his friends and neighbors.)
 - Who is Norman Rockwell?
 - What is an illustrator?
 - What do you know about Norman Rockwell?
 - How might you learn more about Norman Rockwell?
 - What things influenced Norman Rockwell's work?

Objectives:

- Students will share any prior knowledge regarding Norman Rockwell that they may have.
- Students will discuss the information presented in a biography article and book.
- Students will use computer technology to search for information about Rockwell, beginning with The Norman Rockwell Museum Digital Collection: collections.nrm.org
- Using prior knowledge, the information from the articles and The Norman Rockwell Museum Digital Collection, the students will make judgments on Rockwell's work including meaning from historical and cultural metaphors and symbols.
- Students will listen attentively to one another as they share personal responses about the specific artworks.

Background:

Norman Rockwell was born in New York City in 1894. He was a super-skinny kid and was terrible at sports, but he always knew that he wanted to be an artist. His paintings would tell a story without words. His work was influenced by family, friends, neighbors and vacations. He worked for more than sixty years painting scenes of people in their everyday life.

Rockwell was a teenager when he was hired to work as the art director of *Boys' Life*, the official magazine of the Boy Scouts of America. In this job, Rockwell had to make all of the decisions on how the magazine should look. When he was 22 years old Rockwell painted his first cover for a popular American magazine, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and continued to paint 323 covers over the next 47 years.

In 1916, the same year that his first cover was on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*, Rockwell married Irene O'Connor. Their marriage lasted 14 years, then they divorced. In 1930 he married a teacher, Mary Barstow. Norman and Mary Rockwell had three sons, Jarvis, Thomas, and Peter. Nine years after they were married, the family moved to a small town in Vermont. The community of people in Arlington were supportive of Norman Rockwell and his work. Their neighbors and friends were often eager to be models for his work.

In 1943, President Franklin Roosevelt spoke to the American people in a speech called "The Four Freedoms." Norman Rockwell felt the President's message was important and wanted to illustrate it. The *Four Freedoms* paintings were Norman Rockwell's interpretations of the Freedom of Speech, Freedom to Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear. These four paintings became tremendously popular.

The Rockwell family moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts in 1953. Sadly, six years later his wife, Mary, died unexpectedly. Shortly after, Rockwell met a retired teacher, Molly Punderson, at the library and they became close friends and eventually married. It was at this time that Rockwell began to paint pictures illustrating some of his most worrisome concerns and deepest interests, including civil rights, poverty, and the exploration of space.

In 1977 the President presented Rockwell with the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom! Rockwell became one of America's all-time favorite artists before he died in 1978.

Materials:

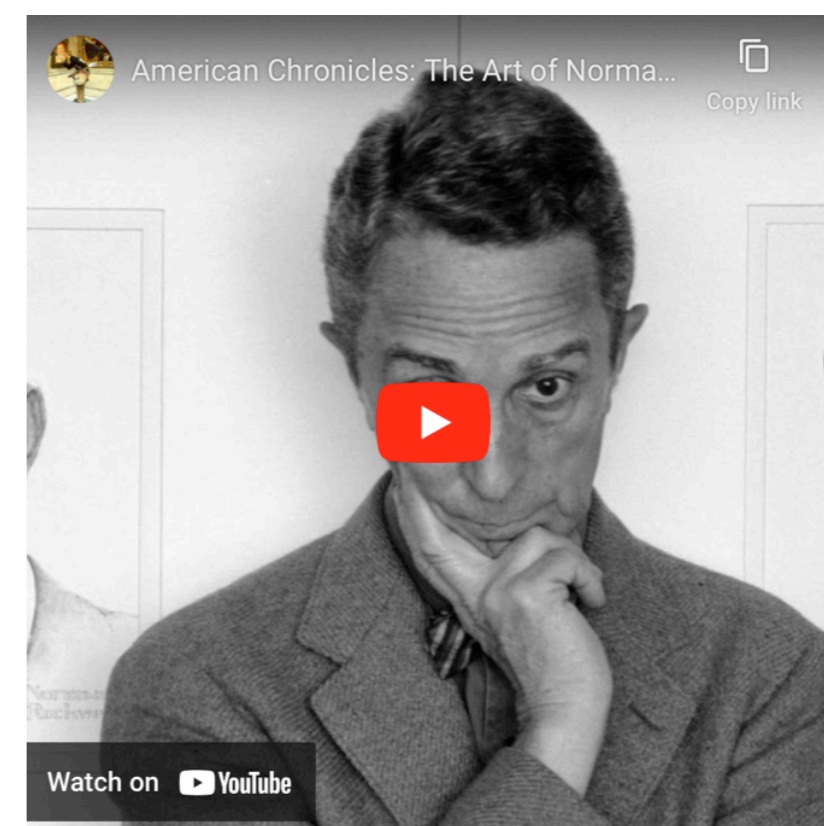
Multimedia Resources:



Norman Rockwell (1894-1978)
Triple Self-Portrait, 1959
Cover illustration for *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 13, 1960
Oil on canvas, 44.5 x 34.75 inches
Norman Rockwell Museum Collection, NRACT.1973.19



Photo by Louie Lamone
Norman Rockwell enters his Stockbridge studio.
Norman Rockwell Museum Digital Collections. ©NRELC: Niles, IL.



American Chronicles: The Art of Norman Rockwell
Norman Rockwell Museum

Classroom Supplies

Link to resources below: [Links](#)

- [Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artist: Norman Rockwell](#) by Mike Venezia
- [Biography article from The Norman Rockwell Museum](#)
- [Timeline of Events from the Life of Norman Rockwell](#)
- Computer with web access and projector
- Easel or board for writing the visual inventory
- Drawing Paper
- Pencils

Additional Teaching Resources:

[American Chronicles: The Art of Norman Rockwell](#) by Linds Szekely Pero

[Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artist: Norman Rockwell](#) by Mike Venezia

[Enduring Ideals: Rockwell, Roosevelt & the Four Freedoms](#), edited by Stephanie Haboush Plunkett and James J. Kimble

[The Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge](#) by The Norman Rockwell Museum

[Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera](#) by Ron Schick

[Norman Rockwell's America](#) by Christopher Finch

[Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms: Images that Inspire a Nation](#) by Stuart Murray, and James McCabe

[Norman Rockwell's Counting Book](#) by Gloria Tabor

[Norman Rockwell: Storyteller with a Brush](#) by Beverly Sherman

[My Adventures as an Illustrator](#) by Norman Rockwell

[A Rockwell Portrait: An Intimate Biography](#) by Donald Walton

Activities:

1. Ask the students to listen attentively to one another as they share personal responses throughout the lesson.
2. Ask the students, "Who has heard of Norman Rockwell?" Student participation will be the key aspect to this discussion. However you may want to encourage the students with prompts such as, "Has anyone been to The Norman Rockwell Museum?" or "Does anyone have a Rockwell print hanging in their own home?"
3. Read *Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artists: Norman Rockwell* by Mike Venezia to the students, pausing to reinforce information and allowing for questions to be asked when something is unclear.
4. Access the digital collection on [The Norman Rockwell Museum website collection at: collections.nrm.org](https://collections.nrm.org) and project the site on a screen for all students to see. Display Rockwell's *Triple Self Portrait* and ask the students to point out what they see in the work (not what they interpret things to be.) The class will collectively take a visual inventory. As each student contributes, restate their observation and bullet the observations on the board or an easel. You might be able to elaborate on what they have said to add more visual detail or you might ask them for clarification. You might encourage them to look more closely and carefully.

After the items have been listed, point out symbols and explain some of the visual clues that are connected to American culture and history. Continue to browse through the online collection for no longer than 10 minutes, according to the direction of the students, taking time to note some of the cultural symbols Rockwell used in his work.

5. Distribute a copy of the biography text and Timeline of Events from the Life of Norman Rockwell to each student. The text, which includes details about Norman Rockwell's childhood and schooling, and his points of inspiration, will be read together as a class. Be sure to pause for any further questions.
6. Ask the students to think about themselves and what objects or symbols they would include in their own self-portrait to help show others who they are as individuals. As a student offers a suggestion, the instructor should ask how that may symbolize that individual so others better understand what a symbol is. After a few suggestions are offered, pass out a piece of drawing paper and ask the students to draw a self-portrait including at least one symbol about themselves.

Assessment:

- Students will be evaluated on their participation in the discussion.
- Students will be evaluated on their participation in analyzing the written and visual information.
- Students will be evaluated through informal checks of understanding.

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](#).

Applied Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.2

Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.4

Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.5

Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.6

Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.2

Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.5

Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.6

Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.2

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.5

Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.6

Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.



