

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 60-minute class period.

Enduring Understandings/ Essential Questions:

1. Norman Rockwell is a 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, every day 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?
 - What do you think the Four Freedoms communicated to the American people?

GRADE

5-8

THEME

Four Freedoms

LENGTH

This activity is designed for one 60 minute class period.

DISCIPLINE

National Visual Arts Core Standards

VOCABULARY

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

Objectives:

- Students will share any prior knowledge regarding Norman Rockwell that they may have.
- Students will use computer technology to search for information about Rockwell, beginning with [The Norman Rockwell Museum Digital Collection: collections.nrm.org](https://collections.nrm.org).
- Students will observe images and state what they see.
- Using prior knowledge, the information from the articles and internet resources, 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.
- Students will discuss and assess the information presented in a biography article.

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 321 covers over the next 47 years.

The same year, 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:

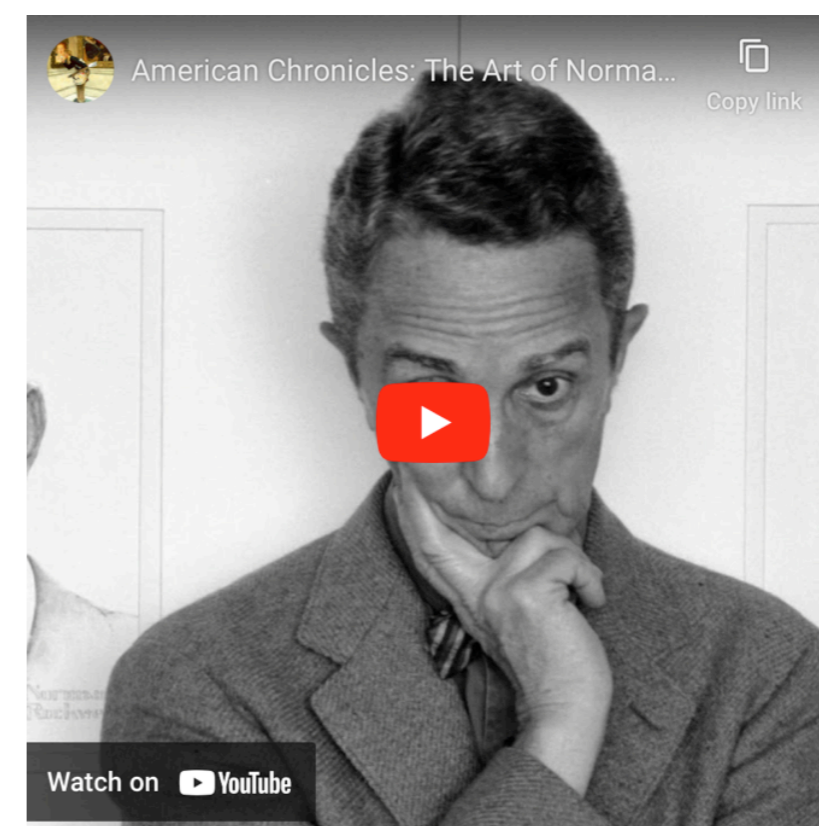
Multimedia Resources:



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](#)

- **Think Sheet:** Who Is Norman Rockwell 5-8
- [Biography article from The Norman Rockwell Museum](#)
- Timeline of Events from the Life of Norman Rockwell
- Computer with web access, if accessible
- Index cards
- Drawing Paper
- Pencils

Various books on Norman Rockwell and his work including but not limited to:

[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:

The tables, seats, and students will be arranged in a format conducive to conversation.

1. Hand out an index card to each student, and a pencil if they don't already have one.
2. Ask the students to listen attentively to one another as they share personal responses throughout the lesson. Ask the students to respond by raising their hand to the following question, "Who has heard of Norman Rockwell?" In all cases, reassure them that the class will be learning about the life and work of Norman Rockwell together. First, the students will be asked to recall (silently) any prior knowledge they may have about Norman Rockwell by jotting down ideas or information they already know on one side of their index card. Comfort the students by telling them that if they don't know anything yet, it is okay to leave their index card blank.
3. Students will be invited to share the information they have written on their index card with the class. Using these thoughts as a catalyst, a group discussion will be prompted. Student participation will be the key aspect to this discussion. 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?"
4. Following the student driven discussion, ask half of the students to remain in their seats and distribute books on the life and work of Norman Rockwell to these students. Direct the other half of the students to the computers and give instructions on how to access the digital collection of The Norman Rockwell Museum website. Give the students the worksheet **Think Sheet: Who Is Norman Rockwell 5-8**. All of the students will read articles and look at images (on-line or in books) to inform themselves better about the life and work of Norman Rockwell.
5. Ask the students to take notes on one image that stands out to them (students should keep track of page number or keep image up on the computer screen.) This research time will be limited to 15 minutes.
6. Ask the students to return to their original table seating arrangement to gather together to analyze and share information they discovered about the life and work of Rockwell. Information may include biographical information, his schooling, his points of inspiration and the instructor will allow for judgments to be made including meaning from historical and cultural metaphors and symbols used in his work. Take this opportunity to join the conversation and point out symbols and visual clues that are connected to American culture and history.
7. Project or show an image of Norman 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.

8. 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 well as his points of inspiration, will be read together as a class. Be sure to pause for any further questions.
9. 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.
10. As time allows, the sketch may become the basis of a larger project (an illustration, a painting, etc.)

Assessment:

Students will be evaluated on their participation in the discussion as well as participation in analyzing the written and visual information (informal checks of understanding through questions).

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.RI.5.1

Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.2

Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.4

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.5

Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.6

Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.7

Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.9

Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.1

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

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.2

Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.5

Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

Applied Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.7

Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.9

Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.2

Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.5

Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.7

Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium's portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.9

Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.1

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.2

Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.5

Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.7

Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.9

Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.

Applied Standards

VA:Cn11.1.5

Identify how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society.

VA:Cn11.1.6

Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.

VA:Cn11.1.7

Analyze how response to art is influenced by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the available resources, and cultural uses.

VA:Cn11.1.8

Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect group identity.

VA:Re8.1.5

Interpret art by analyzing characteristics of form and structure, contextual information, subject matter, visual elements, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

VA:Re8.1.6

Interpret art by distinguishing between relevant and non-relevant contextual information and analyzing subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

VA:Re8.1.7

Interpret art by analyzing art-making approaches, the characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

VA:Re8.1.8

Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, art-making approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.

VA:Re9.1.5

Recognize differences in criteria used to evaluate works of art depending on styles, genres, and media as well as historical and cultural contexts.

VA:Re9.1.6

Develop and apply relevant criteria to evaluate a work of art.

VA:Re9.1.7

Compare and explain the difference between an evaluation of an artwork based on personal criteria and an evaluation of an artwork based on a set of established criteria.

VA:Re9.1.8

Create a convincing and logical argument to support an evaluation of art.



