

# Norman Rockwell

Norman Rockwell's paintings are narrative, they tell wonderful stories. Let the children discover what the story is as you look at the work. Many of the dialogue suggestions/questions are a springboard for further discussion. You may need to move things along if you feel time is running short. If you feel the conversation is drifting away from the topic, a suggestion might be to ask the children to hold their thoughts until the end and if there is time you can go back and elaborate. Or course, if there is a worthwhile and interesting conversation on *art* about one of the works, by all means, let the children continue the dialogue.

There are several picture books on Rockwell's work in that Art in the Classroom collection for you to look through. The website [www.nrm.org](http://www.nrm.org) (the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts) is a great source. It has a very comprehensive educational guide with wonderful background on the artist and his work. With their permission, I have printed it out and included it in the Norman Rockwell folder. If you take the materials home, please remember to take them only overnight and to sign them out.

Ask the children if they can tell you one or two important things about the last Art in the Classroom presentation.

When we look at the artwork that I am going to show you today, let's keep in mind the tools that an artist uses.

### Elements of Art page (color, line, light, texture, shape and space)

#### *Slide 1*

Can anyone tell me what a portrait is? A painting of a person or a group of people.

What is a self portrait? A painting of an artist painted *by* the artist.

I am going to show you a self portrait and I would like you to look at it and tell us what you can figure out about the artist.

#### Triple Self Portrait



#### *Slide 2*

What clues are you using? When did this person live? (recent times or hundreds of years ago) How can you tell? (clothes, objects, stool, framed mirror tell us the period). What is going on?

This is called "Triple Self Portrait". Can you tell me why the artist used that title?

Compare the Norman Rockwell in the mirror with the one in the drawing. Do they look exactly alike? Why do you think he would paint different versions of himself?

Do you see the images that are tacked up around the canvas? Those are self portraits of other famous artists. Why do you think that he included them in his self portrait? Maybe he was inspired by these works/artists.

This picture has a white background. He used the paintbrushes and tubes of paint to create the illusion of a floor. Without them, everything else in the picture would appear to be floating in space.

Rockwell's self portrait gives us a glimpse into how he saw himself. How would you want to be remembered if you painted your self portrait? (serious, funny, brave...?)

Norman Rockwell was an American artist that was known for painting scenes of the everyday lives of Americans. He is most famous for his work that graced the covers of popular magazines at the time – “The Saturday Evening Post” and “Look” magazine - which makes him different from some of the artists we have looked at before. Norman Rockwell first was an illustrator. He was able to tell a story with his paintings. As we look at his work, let's pay attention to the poses and expressions of the subjects and how they help to tell the story...how about the props... or the setting.



*Slide 3*

Take a good look at these photos. Rockwell often used himself as a model in some of his paintings. Maybe you will be able to find him!

## "Going and Coming"



### Slide 4

Let the children look at the image for a minute. Ask them to tell you what is happening. When this was painted – 1947 – the automobile was a relatively modern invention! It was a very popular pastime for families to go out for a drive on the weekends.

Let them tell you the story and then ask them to tell you the clues that helped them “read” this work.

The bow in the girl's hair is crisp, by the end of the day, it has wilted. The posture of the father, the driver, has changed. The mother is sleeping. Even the dog has lost some energy.

How does Rockwell use the light to tell us that the bottom panel is later in the day? Does anyone see the street light?

Who is the one person that has not changed? The grandmother.

This painting shows the beginning and the end of a story. Rockwell invites us to imagine what happened in between. Where did this family go? What happened while they were there? Clues – there is a row boat and a beach umbrella in the top of the car. Can anyone tell me the name of the boat? (Skippy)

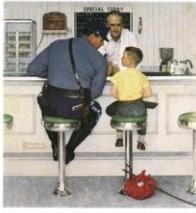
This was painted for the cover of a popular magazine called the “Saturday Evening Post”. Rockwell painted over 300 covers for that magazine in his lifetime.



### Slide 5

Here is what this looked like published on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post.

## The Runaway



### Slide 6

What is happening here?

Do you think that the police officer and the counterperson are angry with the little boy for running away? What emotions do you see on the faces of the police officer and the counterperson? What words would you use to describe them? If you could walk in and listen to them talking, what do you think they would be saying to one another?

Rockwell tells of a time when he was young and he ran away. After a few hours, it began to get dark. He got scared and went right back home. Are you scared for the little boy in this painting? Rockwell gives us a feeling that this boy is protected and will be taken care of.

Have you ever had the chance to sit on a stool like the one you see here? How did it feel?

These people look as if Norman Rockwell walked into a diner and found them sitting the way we see them. Actually, they were carefully posed. The placement of the figures and the objects was done to add interest and drama. The counterperson and policeman are framed by the blackboard. It draws our attention to them. Rockwell visited many diners in neighboring towns until he found one that suited him for the purpose of this painting.

Rockwell did a lot of preparation for his paintings. He chose his props and setting very carefully, so the audience would quickly grasp the story. He photographed his models in many different poses, so he could get just the right expression. He would often ask the same neighbors and family members to pose for him. If you look carefully, you will see the same faces in many of his paintings.

## The Gossips



Slide 7

Give the children a chance to look at the work and then tell you what they think is happening.

Has anyone ever played the game of telephone? That is similar to what is going on in this painting. What do you think the gossip is about? What are they saying to one another? Look at the surprised expression on the face of the last person. Do you think that the story she is hearing is the same story she told at the beginning?

The painting "reads" from left to right, like a comic strip. This is called a sequence painting. There is a rhythm of repeated shapes in the way he placed these portraits in rows. Did you notice that the person on the end of each row faces the middle?

Can you see the man in the grey hat pointing to himself? What do you think Rockwell is telling us with that gesture? (the gossip is about him).

Does anyone look familiar to you?



Slide 8

The man in the grey hat at the bottom right of the picture is Norman Rockwell. The whole town seems to be talking about him. What if everyone was talking about you? How would you feel? Would you confront the person that started the gossip? Why do you suppose Rockwell made himself the person being gossiped about?

Interesting fact: The editor at the Saturday Evening Post did not believe that anyone could have a mouth as big as the man in the black hat. He said that no one in America would believe it. Rockwell sent him a photo of this man with his mouth open, and the editor had to agree – that man had one enormous mouth! So the painting was published exactly how Rockwell painted it.

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In 1941, the President of the United States, President Franklin Roosevelt, gave a speech that told the nation how important the American idea of liberty was. He knew that our country might have to go to war to defend these ideas (World War II). He talked about Four Freedoms:

Freedom of speech

Freedom for every person to worship God in his own way (freedom of religion)

Freedom from want

Freedom from Fear

Norman Rockwell made four paintings to illustrate these four freedoms. They were published one by one in the Saturday Evening Post. They were a great success and helped raise money for the war effort. Nearly everyone in the country had heard of Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms.

We are going to look at the "Four Freedoms". I want you to tell me which freedom you think that Rockwell is illustrating and what clues gave you that idea.

### Freedom from Fear



Slide 9

What is going on in this painting? Parents tucking in their children at night in a quiet home while the newspaper reports of bombings elsewhere. The parents can be confident of an untroubled night. (Can any of the children read the headline? You may have to tell them what it is about as the image may not be clear enough)

How did Rockwell use color to frame the figures? The father and mother are against a dark background.

Does anyone see the line that the Father makes and the line of the bed? Do they meet? They cross in the middle of the picture. This adds importance.

Do you see anything that gives the picture diagonal lines? The mother's stance, the edge of the newspaper, the fold of the bed sheet, the father's arm, the slope of the ceiling. These diagonal lines create interest.

Knowing that this picture was done when the world was at war gives us clues to the kinds of discussions that family might have. What kind of questions do you think that the children would have for their parents? What emotions do you think that the parents were feeling?

Interesting facts:

The father in this picture appears in all four freedom paintings. Let's see if we can find him in all four.

To get the details just right, Rockwell asked the local newspaper to make up an edition with the bombing headline to use as a prop for this painting.

## Freedom of Speech



Slide 10

What is the scene? Where are we? A town meeting  
What freedom do you think that Rockwell is illustrating?  
How do we know what is important in this painting? Rockwell has placed the main figure in such a way that attention is drawn to him. He is the only standing figure, while everyone else is seated. The other figures are looking at him and if we follow the lines of sight, it leads us right to the main figure. He has his mouth open, he is talking.

How did Rockwell use color to emphasize this man? He is placed against a dark background which provides contrast for him and frames him. Have we seen this technique before? Freedom from Fear and the Runaway

Rockwell remembered a town meeting in which a man got up to speak against a plan that everybody else was for, they let him speak and they listened to what he had to say. Do you think that he tried to recreate that scene here?

Why do you think he chose the clothing that he did? The seated men are wearing suits and ties. They are listening to a man in work clothes. Maybe he was trying to say that everyone has the same right to speak.

Good work! We have already identified 2 of the Four Freedoms: Freedom of Speech and Freedom from Fear. The two that are left are Freedom of Worship or Religion and Freedom from Want. Let's look closely at the next picture and guess which one Rockwell is illustrating.

## Freedom from Want



### Slide 11

What Freedom do you think that Rockwell is illustrating here? What holiday could they be celebrating? What is the center of attention? The turkey, placed in the center of the picture.

Why do you think that Rockwell chose a Thanksgiving dinner as the subject for this painting? Plentiful, abundant food and being with family.

How did Rockwell use light to provide contrast? The light coming in from the window against the darker figures.

Can anyone find any repeated oval shapes? The tops of the drinking glasses and in the shapes of the plates. These ovals are like stepping stones that lead you right to the turkey.

What is the mood among the guests? It appears to be lively. Rockwell uses expressions and postures as clues to the dinner conversation. How might the conversations sound?

Can you picture the rest of the room? Use your imagination and walk around the rest of the house. Is it big or small, tidy or messy? As we create a larger scene in our mind, Rockwell's picture means more to us.

The bottom of the picture is cropped in such a way that we can imagine our own seat at the end of the table.

Interesting fact: The woman holding the turkey was actually the Rockwell family cook. Rockwell claimed that the turkey featured here was, in fact, the Rockwell family's Thanksgiving turkey. He later said, "It was one of the few times I've ever eaten a model."



Slide 12

### Freedom to Worship (Freedom of Religion)

What is Rockwell trying to say here? He is trying to show how we are all the same (unity) but in some ways different (diversity). Is that easy to do?

Let's look for the elements that unify the picture (that show sameness):

What colors did Rockwell choose to use in this work? Did he use similar tones throughout or many contrasting colors? The limited colors show that we are all belonging to one color family.

How are the figures placed? They are all facing in the same general direction.

They are all in the act of praying or worshipping.

Let's look for things that are different in the picture:

The figures are looking up or down or straight ahead.

There are people of different ages

There are men and women

There are differences in light and dark

Notice the textures of the hair and skin

These paintings were a huge undertaking for Rockwell. They took seven months and left him very tired and drained. They did help to raise \$133 million for the war effort!

Did you find the man that is in all 4 Freedom paintings?



Slide 13

## Shuffleton's barber shop



Slide 14

Can you tell me what is happening in this scene?

Can the children tell that it is a barber shop? The letters are barely visible on the front window. Barber shops were often a place where men would get together and catch up on the local news and visit with friends.

Where are you standing when you look at this scene?

What is your view point?

What kind of clues can you find about the barber shop? The wood burning stove, the single chair used to cut customer's hair, the sink in front of the chair, the white towel draped over the arm of the chair, the poster with the American flag on the back wall, the broom leaning against the door frame, the magazine stand just inside the front door, the bench seat in the back of the front room that might be used for those visiting or waiting for a hair cut.

Who are the people inside? How long might they have known each other? Can you think of a tune that they might be playing? Might there be some others that are hidden from our view? Rockwell gives us lots of clues to understand the story he is trying to tell. Sometimes he leaves things hidden so we can imagine stories of our own.

What shapes did Rockwell use to build this painting? Rectangles

How many rectangles can you see? Where?

How would your impression of this scene change if Rockwell had painted it as if the viewer was standing in the brightly lit back room? Would you still have the same feeling about this scene?



Slide 15

What is happening here?

What are some of the clues that Rockwell gives us to figure out what is happening in this scene? Moving truck; furniture and wrapped rug on the lawn; the lack of familiarity between the children.

Look at the 2 groups of children. Do you think that they know each other? Why do you think that they are meeting for the first time? Their postures, no one is talking, they are separated into 2 distinct groups.

Can anyone tell me what Martin Luther King is famous for? He wanted everyone in America to be treated equally. In the 1960's not everybody got along. Rockwell painted this in 1967. What do you think he might have been trying to say?

They may look different, but they have some things in common. Can you find them? Baseball gloves, pets (one has a cat the other group has a dog) both girls have pink ribbons in their hair, they are close to the same ages... they are now neighbors.

When the kids start to talk and play together, what do you think they will find?

Does anyone here remember moving to a new neighborhood? How did you feel? How do you think these children feel? Tentative, nervous, curious.

Do you see any lines in the picture? The lines in the sidewalk, the lines that make up the large rectangle of the truck, more straight lines and rectangles in the homes in the background.

Why do you think that Rockwell placed a line in the driveway between the 2 groups of children?

Unfortunately, we do not have time to look at the hundreds of works that Rockwell painted. Did you enjoy seeing the ones that we looked at today? Can anyone tell me a few important points that we learned today about Norman Rockwell and his art? Take a minute to summarize their ideas. Thank them for being good observers and helping to uncover the stories that Rockwell tried to tell.