

Lesson Plans for Teachers

Strategies for Using Norman Rockwell in the Classroom

Museum Connection: *Norman Rockwell's America* exhibition

Practice Close Observation Skills to Support the Visual Arts and Science Habits of Mind

Norman Rockwell's imagery is rich in details and narrative possibilities and thus perfect to use for practicing close observation skills and descriptive vocabulary. Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a great tool to use to practice this important 21st century skill. See <http://www.vtshome.org/what-is-vts> for more information.

Language Arts Connections

Fiction: Norman Rockwell wrote and illustrated one children's book, *Willie Was Different: A Children's Story*. First published in *McCall's* magazine in 1967, it was later republished by Funk & Wagnalls as a book, but this edition is based on Rockwell's original concept, complete with the color and monotone paintings he created for the story. Willie is a wood thrush—but a very different kind of wood thrush. Driven by thoughts that he possesses a special genius, Willie leaves his avian fellows to take up singing with the exquisitely down-to-earth Miss Polly, flautist extraordinaire. Together they find fame, and they eventually travel to the nation's capitol so Willie's beautiful singing can be appreciated all the more. Yet all the attention and bustle of city life distress Willie and make him stop singing, so Miss Polly brings Willie back to his native woods, where he resumes his tranquil life and music-making with her. But the world remembers and reveres Willie and the genius of his song.

Poetry: Read poems from *Nostalgia's Thread: Ten Poems on Norman Rockwell Paintings* (2009) by Randall R. Freisinger and allow the students to listen and imagine the Rockwell image that inspired it. Some poems may not be appropriate for younger students, especially *The Discovery* (1956). Other images that inspired poems in this book are *Girl at Mirror* (1954), *Girl with Black Eye* (1953), *Freedom of Speech* (1943), *The Runaway* (1958), *The Problem We All Live With* (1964), *Christmas Homecoming* (1948), *After the Prom* (1957), *Rosie the Riveter* (1943) and *Artist Facing Blank Canvas II* (1978). Afterwards, show the students other works by Rockwell to inspire their own poetry and writing.

Social Studies Connections

World War II

Norman Rockwell's work spans the majority of the 20th century and, his images can be incorporated into many units of American history. His *Four Freedoms* images created to help sell war bonds during World War II could be used to show how much the American people were asked to sacrifice during the war. They can also connect to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" speech given in his State of the Union Address in 1941.

Civil Rights

The Problem We All Live With (1964) is an excellent image to include in the study of Civil Rights history. In this iconic work, Rockwell depicts Ruby Bridges, the 6 year old girl who integrated the New Orleans Public school system in 1960, on her way to school. She became the first African American child to attend an all-white elementary school in the South. Ruby Bridges wrote about her experience for Scholastic Press in *Through My Eyes* (1999). She also founded The Ruby Bridges Foundation (<http://www.rubybridges.com/>) that contains more information about her experience.

Boy Scouts of America

From his first interview with the editor of *Boys' Life* magazine in 1912 to his last painted scouting illustration published in 1976, Norman Rockwell enjoyed a long relationship with the Boy Scouts of America. The *Boys' Life* website contains a complete archive of cover images from its inception in 1911. See the WayBack Time Machine here: http://boyslife.org/wayback/#issue=TVGeB4AU0_4C

Visual Arts Connections

The work of Norman Rockwell connects to several aspects of the art curriculum. Students can examine graphic design, perspective, composition, narrative art, and illustration. Several museums have created extensive lesson plans related to Rockwell's work including:

The Norman Rockwell Museum

(http://www.nrm.org/pdfs/teacher_resource.pdf and <http://www.nrm.org/pdfs/viewpoint.pdf>)

The Brooklyn Museum

(http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/norman_rockwell/uploads/Rockwell_Teachers_Packet.pdf)

The Smithsonian Institution

(http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/rockwell_tg_book.pdf)

The John and Mable Ringling Museum

(<http://www.ringling.org/uploadedFiles/Resources/Education/Details/InSearchofNormanRockwellDocentpacketfinal.pdf>)

The Detroit Institute of Arts

(<http://www.dia.org/exhibitions/rockwell/educators.asp>).

In addition, see the National Endowment for the Humanities Picturing America information here:

<http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/norman-rockwell-freedom-speechmdashknow-it-when-you-see-it>).



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