

# Lesson Plans for Teachers

## Design-a-Mag

### Museum Connection: *Norman Rockwell's America* exhibition

#### Overview

Using Norman Rockwell's *Saturday Evening Post* covers from a variety of eras as inspiration, students will examine magazine covers to discover the ways in which the magazine cover's headlines and graphics express the main ideas of the articles inside. Students will then select a contemporary article from a newspaper. They will analyze the content and create their own *Saturday Evening Post* cover that summarizes the information contained in the article. Students will also choose a political cartoon from which the text has been erased and provide their own text for the image. This will serve as their "letter from the editor."

#### Students will:

- demonstrate comprehension of a text by identifying important details
- create visual representations (magazine covers) to illustrate or describe information found in the text and add political cartoons and other pages to create a magazine.

#### Alabama Course of Study Learning Standards

(One grade from each area was highlighted – Change as needed for your grade)

#### Elementary

##### Language Arts

- K/8: Use brainstorming, drawing, and discussion as elements of prewriting in the writing process.
- K/10: Use print and nonprint classroom, library, and real-world resources to acquire information.
- 1/12: Collect information from print and nonprint resources to investigate a teacher- or student-selected topic.
- 2/7: Explain how authors use text features to identify key and supporting ideas in informational texts.
- 2/12: Utilize research skills to collect and record information on a specific topic.

##### Visual Arts

- K/2: Describe what is observed in selected works of art
- K/6: Use vocabulary associated with looking at and talking about art
- K/8: Identify features, similarities, and differences in artwork
- K/19: Identify colors
- 1/3: Describe what is observed in selected works of art
- 1/4: Identify subject matter in works of art

#### Middle School

##### Language Arts

- 6/13: Utilize resource materials for supporting evidence in compositions.
- 7/5: Recognize the use of textual elements, including main idea and supporting details, to gain information from various text formats, including graphs.

- 8/4: Apply strategies appropriate to type of reading material, including making inferences to determine bias or theme and using specific context clues, to comprehend eighth-grade informational and functional reading materials.

### Visual Arts

- 6-8/2: Contrast unique features of particular art style
- 6-8/11: Interpret ways artists achieve different effects with the elements of art and principles of design
- 6-8/21: Examine mood and feeling generated by art forms

## High School

### Language Arts

- 9/1: Apply strategies to interpret textual, functional, and recreational written materials
  - Examples: applying prior knowledge, noting organizational pattern, determining sequence of events, determining cause and effect, noting important details, drawing conclusions about main idea
- 9/6: Determine the literary elements in specific works
  - Plot, tone, mood, character, setting, theme
- 9/11: Select and indicate preferences for various forms of communication
  - Examples: magazines, Internet, movies, how-to books and videos, drama, biographies, documentaries
- 9/22: Demonstrate personal style and voice through writing poetry and prose

### Visual Arts

- 9-12/5: Initiate, define, and solve visual arts problems independently using higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation
- 9-12/19: Use understanding gained through art research to solve problems illustrating personal experiences, feelings, and beliefs
- 9-12/21: Analyze and justify artists' intentions and purposes in selected works of art
- 9-12/24: Compare themes, issues, and modes of expression of visual arts with other creative disciplines
- 9-12/26: Compare the creative and analytical processes of the visual arts with selected other arts disciplines, the humanities, and the sciences

## Background

Norman Rockwell illustrated 323 covers of the popular magazine *The Saturday Evening Post* between 1916 and 1963. The magazine, originally known as the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, was founded in 1728 by Benjamin Franklin and became known as *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1821. Initially it was a four-page newspaper with no illustrations that daringly tackled political controversy. By 1855, it had an impressive circulation of 90,000 copies per year. It eventually became the first magazine to sell 1,000,000 copies per year.

Between 1899 and 1936, the cover changed from appearing as page one of the magazine to a distinct cover featuring artwork or illustrations. This innovation fueled the popularity of magazine advertising as well as the success of *The Saturday Evening Post*. The *Post* continued to distinguish itself through its cover artwork, the most famous of which were painted by Norman Rockwell. Americans recognized the art of *The Post* and eagerly awaited the next issue because of it. Other notable cover illustrators include J.C. Leyendecker, N.C. Wyeth, Charles Livingston Bull, and John E. Sheridan, while featured authors include F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis among others.



In the 1920s and 1930s, Norman Rockwell and *The Saturday Evening Post* were synonymous. Rockwell was almost as well-known as aviator Charles Lindberg and actress Mary Pickford. The 1920s were the heyday of the *Post*, with F. Scott Fitzgerald publishing his stories next to Charlie Chan serial stories.

On the covers of the 1920s, Rockwell often used a circular motif to frame the central character or establish a central scene. Generally, he depicted a single person or small groups of people with a few items placed at the bottom of the composition, just above the lines of type announcing the week's features. He often used his neighbors as models and posed them and chose all the props in the scene.

By 1937, he began working from photographs in order to keep up with his younger competition. Told by his editors that he needed to use new angles for his compositions, he created a device for the camera that allowed him to peer down at the model and thereby capture different angles. The photographs did allow him to see highlights and shadows in new ways and changed the direction of his art.

In 1939, after a year in Europe with his family in which he created only 6 *Post* covers, he moved to rural Vermont. His covers changed and became cleaner in composition and lacked the circle that telegraphed deeper meaning. He more deeply observed his subjects and much of the sentimentality of his earlier covers disappeared, though the humor remained.

In 1943, a new art editor at the *Post*, Ken Stuart, took the magazine in a new direction. Influenced by the American scene painters of the 1930s, he wanted *Post* covers to serve as a living repository of Americana – a contemporary Currier and Ives. This directive gave Rockwell a chance to use real backgrounds and new iconography.

By 1946, he was using over 100 photographs for a single cover. He still came up with the idea, found the models and props and posed them for the camera. He used the photographs to work up his layout drawings and projected the final drawing, not photos, onto the canvas. He would not project photographs on the canvas for he considered that a dishonest practice that produced inferior machine-made art.

After WWII, the covers no longer had a single center of interest, perhaps reflecting the complexity of life after the war. The growing popularity of movies and television changed the way he told his stories in his cover images. He created sequences compressed into one image and relied on the viewer to compare one picture to another in order to flesh out the story. Images such as *Going and Coming* and *Gossips* both read like frames of a film.

The magazine ceased publication in 1969, six years after Rockwell ended his relationship with the magazine. In 1971 it was revived and re-introduced with a focus on health and medical breakthroughs by the Benjamin Franklin Literary & Medical Society. Its website contains all of the publications past covers.

*The New York Times* wrote that the *Post* “probably had more influence on the cultural life of America” than any other and became an institution by smoothing over potentially disruptive cultural and social differences to create a mythic magic mirror for its white middle class target audience. The magazine promoted the value of the ordinary man – cozy domesticity, a sense of humor, a belief in decency and common sense, and a faith in free enterprise. The magazine's cover was crucial to its success in promoting these values.



#### Sources:

Garfield, Simon. *Just My Type: A Book About Fonts*. New York: Penguin Group, 2010.

Gonyea, Mark. *A Book about Design: Complicated Doesn't Make it Good*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005.

Marling, Karal Ann. *Norman Rockwell*. New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with The National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1997.

*The Saturday Evening Post*, <http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/about>

#### Vocabulary

Advertising

Font

Graphic design

Masthead

Political Cartoon

#### Materials

- Images of Norman Rockwell's *Saturday Evening Post* covers. See the online archives of Post (<http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/sections/in-the-magazine/norman-rockwell-in-the-magazine>)
- Magazine covers, imagery or the magazines themselves
- Newspapers (chosen because most of the stories are not illustrated); books could be used as well if the reading level of the newspaper is too advanced for the students
- Political cartoons with text removed
- Paper with Saturday Evening Post logo (see attached)
- Optional publishing software (e.g., Microsoft Publisher, Adobe PageMaker, Microsoft Word, PowerPoint) or online FakeAZine ([fakeazine.com](http://fakeazine.com)), Magcover ([magcover.com](http://magcover.com)), Enjoypic ([enjoypic.com](http://enjoypic.com)), MagMyPic ([magmypic.com](http://magmypic.com)) and Yourcover ([yourcover.com](http://yourcover.com)), Magazine Cover Creator (<http://bighugelabs.com/magazine.php>), ReadWriteThink Printing Press (<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/printing%20press>) and CD/DVD Cover Creator (<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/cd-dvd>).

#### Procedure

Examine magazine covers as a group. Review what's on the cover and determine why it's there. Discuss why magazines have images on the cover and what makes a good cover.

Tell the class that when creating covers, publishers must find words and pictures to summarize the content of their magazines. Discuss the ways in which a cover's layout, graphics, fonts, and headlines summarize and reveal clues to the magazine's content. Don't forget about the impact of fonts in design.

Divide the class into groups of four. Give each group a magazine or image of magazine cover. The groups should examine their magazine and consider the ways in which the pictures and headlines on the cover reflect the contents of the magazine.



If using actual magazines, the students should examine the covers and make predictions about the articles they might find inside the magazine. Using the table of contents, the students should try to link the articles in the magazine with the cover photographs and headlines. How does the imagery on the front of a magazine summarize the contents inside it?

If using only a magazine cover, they should consider what narrative is being portrayed in the image. The groups can share their evaluations with the class and explain what they see that helps them draw conclusions about the piece.

Give each student a newspaper article (or magazine article with imagery removed) to use as the basis for their illustration of the cover. Each should also receive a copy of the *Saturday Evening Post* masthead to use as the base image of their cover.

After creating the cover, give the students copies of political cartoons with the captions removed. They will be responsible for creating captions to describe the action. A good source for cartoons is

[www.politicalcartoons.com](http://www.politicalcartoons.com) for more current ones or <http://multimedialearningllc.wordpress.com/category/teacher-resources/political-cartoon-classroom-resources/> for historical ones that can tie into social studies themes.

Extensions:

1. Students can examine the changes in cover designs over time as a reflection of the change in the magazine's audience and thus life in general. For example, students could examine the changes in *Boy's Life* magazine published by the Boy Scouts of America from 1911 to the present. Norman Rockwell designed many covers for that magazine. Online archives located here [http://boyslife.org/wayback/#issue=TVGeB4AU0\\_4C](http://boyslife.org/wayback/#issue=TVGeB4AU0_4C).
2. Students can view Norman Rockwell's advertising images and develop their own for their magazine.

