

The Problem We All Live With – Norman Rockwell



INTRODUCTION

Title of the work:

Artist (*name, dates of birth & death, nationality*) :

Artistic style :

Identification (*what is it? where was it published?*):

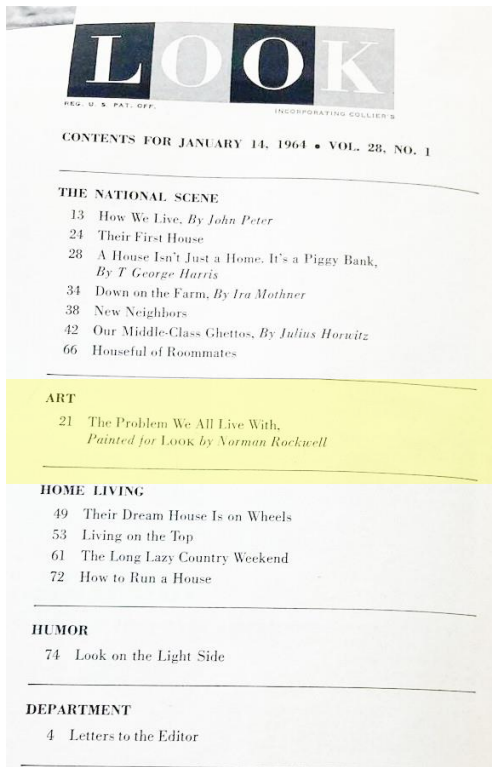
Date of the work :

Dimensions :

Materials (*ex: acrylic paint on wood*) :

Location of the work (*where is the original artwork?*) :

Historical context:



Look Magazine

→ Fill in the blanks :

Look Magazine was a popular _____ (nationality) _____ (frequency) magazine from _____ (year) to _____ (year). It emphasized* _____ more than _____.

In 1964, Norman Rockwell started working for Look Magazine as a commentator on current events*, which gave him more creative freedom than at the _____, another American magazine, where he worked for more than 40 years.

→ Translate into French :

emphasize (vb) =

current events =

The Artist

Norman Rockwell was an American _____. He was born in _____ (city) in _____ (year) and died in _____ (year). He is famous for having illustrated the _____ of the _____ (name of a magazine) from 1916 to 1963. He illustrated the novels of _____ (writer's name), Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. In the 1950s, he was considered the most popular American artist and painted portraits of Eisenhower*, _____ (American President 1960-1963) and Nasser (Egyptian statesman - 1918-1970). In 1960, he painted his _____ (painting's title) - the painter paints himself while looking in a mirror. At the end of the 1960's, he worked for Look Magazine and illustrated themes more related to the political and social situation of the time. His most famous illustration for Look depicts a little _____ American _____ going to school, escorted by federal agents.

→ Visit :

* <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/BQVhetJCW1g5KQ>

The artist's techniques

His precise and meticulous style (*attentive to small details*) announced “**hyperrealism**”.

→ **Give a definition :**

Hyperrealism :

Norman Rockwell made several sketches* to elaborate* the initial idea, then he made a very precise charcoal* drawing* in the same format as the final canvas*. He transferred this drawing to the canvas and began the painting.



From the 1930s, Rockwell used photography, which allowed* him to work with his models without imposing long posing sessions*. Norman Rockwell pays attention* to details. His style has been described as “*storyteller*”*: each detail is important; the work tells a story - this kind of painting is called "narrative".

→ **Translate into French :**

sketches =

elaborate =

charcoal =

drawing =

canvas =

allow (vb) =

posing sessions =

pay attention to (vb) =

storyteller =

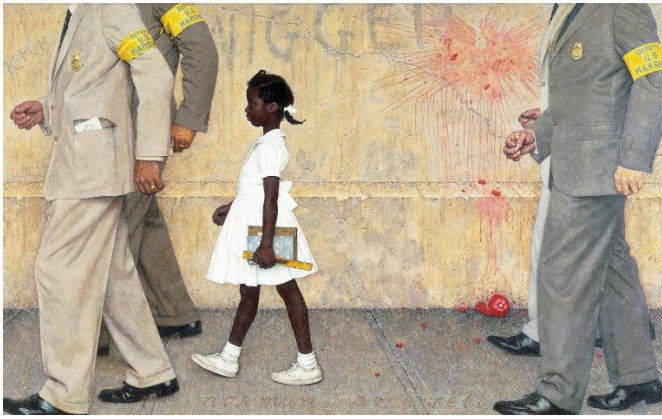
The Problem We All Live With – Norman Rockwell



→ Vocabulary :

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| 1) | 11) |
| 2) | 12) |
| 3) | 13) |
| 4) | 14) |
| 5) | 15) |
| 6) | 16) |
| 7) | 17) |
| 8) | 18) |
| 9) | 19) |
| 10) | |

The Problem We All Live With – Norman Rockwell



Description and Analysis of the work

→ *Fill in the blanks*

The little girl:

She is the first character we see because she is in the _____ and she is represented in _____.

→ she is the _____ character.

She is black and she is dressed in white. She is wearing a white _____, white _____, white _____, a white hair _____.

→ there is a contrast between the white _____ and her skin _____.

→ the first thing we notice is her skin color.

She is holding _____, a yellow _____ and _____.

→ she is going to _____.

She is _____ by 4 men. → She seems protected.

The 4 men:

They have no _____, no head → they are _____.

We can see their _____ → their skin color is different from the girl's skin color; maybe some are white men.

They seem very _____ and strong → there is a _____ with the girl who looks even smaller.

They are wearing yellow _____ labelled "*Deputy US Marshals*", badges → they must be federal _____, they are _____ the girl, they are protecting her.

The background:

In the background, in the upper part, there are 2 racist _____ on the wall: the word " _____ "

in the middle, and the initials " _____ " on the left. There is also a red _____ (on the right) and a

_____, crushed on the sidewalk and against the wall.

→ *Translate into French:*

upper =

sidewalk =

crush (vb) =

The colors:

The officers are wearing grey _____ (dark grey, light grey, beige grey, not white, not black, neutral) → they are there to enforce the law. Their opinion doesn't matter.

The dominant color is grey. It is a monotonous, sad color. → Perhaps this is how Norman Rockwell sees the society he lives in: a sad, racist, segregated society.

The girl is in white → this color evokes _____, _____.

There is a contrast between grey and white → as if to oppose : adult world vs children's world, a racist world vs a pure and innocent world

The red of the tomato evokes _____, violence. → The color probably refers to the hostility of the white population.

_____ : it's the color of armbands, the badges, the _____ → it evokes the emblems of the law and maybe a glimmer of hope for the future.

→ Translate into French:

enforce (vb) =

armband =

the law =

a glimmer of hope =

it doesn't matter =

→ Read and understand

3 elements stand out on the background:

- **The first element**, on the chest of the marshal in front, is "KKK", the acronym of the *Klu Klux Klan*. It is an organization born in the nineteenth century in the United States. Its members want the white race to predominate over other races and they use violent methods. The KKK officially disappeared in 1944, but small groups emerged from 1950 in reaction to the actions of the *Civil Rights Movement* and started a series of violent acts to establish white supremacy.

- **The second element**, visible above the little girl, is the racist inscription "**NIGGER**". This is how southern slaveholders referred to the black people they enslaved.

- **The third element**, blood red, is a splash and trail left by a tomato that was thrown against the wall and then fell to the ground. This tomato can be seen at the foot of the 4th marshal, on the right, close to the wall.

→ Translate into French:

chest =

trail =

slaveholders =

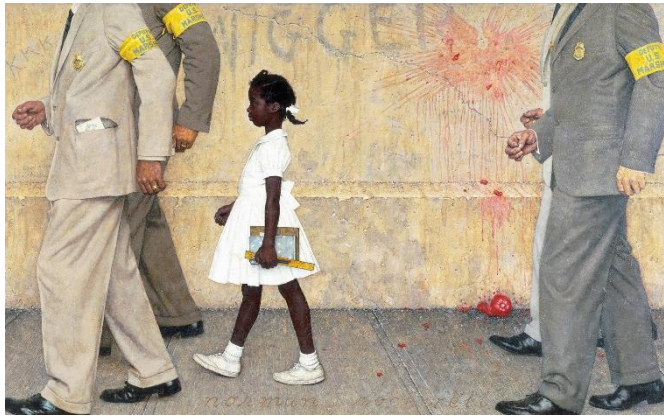
throw, threw, thrown (vb) =

enslave (vb) =

close to =

splash =

Impressions



We could say that **the four men** are a part of the **background**: the color of their clothes belongs to the same chromatic range (*similar colors*). The beige and grey suits of the first row of marshals correspond the gray and beige suits of the second row. The suits near the wall are the darkest and the lightest.

Their faces are not represented: only their hands can give us an indication of their ethnicity, and as for their suits, their color is not uniform.

The four men seem to move at the same pace: they all have the same body attitude (upper body and legs). The little girl's upper body follows the same movement as the men in her escort, but her steps are not synchronized (*right foot forward and left foot backward*) with those of the four men (*left foot forward and right foot backward*).

→ Translate into French:

row =

steps =

pace =

The **focus** (*the most important element*) is **the little girl**. she is the only person represented in full. The colors chosen for Ruby are the lightest (the bow in her hair, her dress, her socks and her shoes), and the darkest (her skin).

In most of Rockwell's paintings, the focus is in the **middle** of the painting. Here, the eye is first drawn to the girl, who is slightly **off-center to the left**. This choice reinforces the impression of **movement** and **dynamism**: the little girl goes to school and she looks determined. She seems to walk faster than the men who surround her. She has a serene and impassive face.

→ Translate into French:

in full =

slightly =

off-center =

surround (*vb*) =

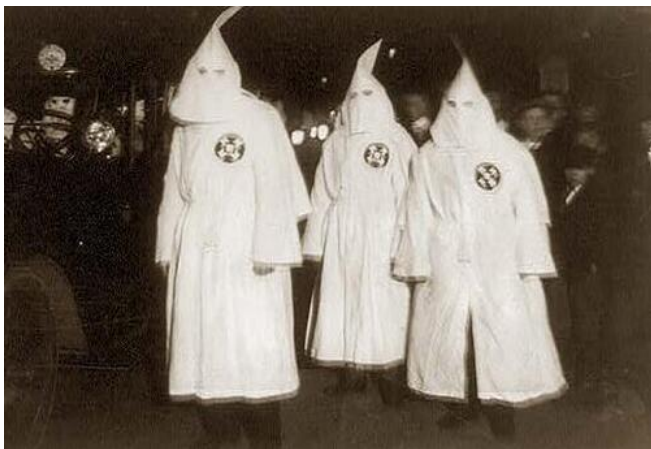
Historical Context

The painting represents a current scene: in 1960, **Ruby Bridges** became the first African American child to enter a white school (*William Frantz Elementary School*) in New Orleans, Louisiana.

→ Do some research and fill in the blanks

Racial segregation

At the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865), the U.S. Congress passed the **13th Amendment** in 1865, abolishing _____. The **14th Amendment** (1868) granted _____ to African Americans and the **15th Amendment** (1870) gave the right to _____ to all males, regardless of their racial origin.



During the **Reconstruction period** (*the period of U.S. history that followed the Civil War - 1865-1877*), this new legislation was imposed in the southern states. In reaction, the **Klu Klux Klan** emerged. The Klan was for the supremacy of the WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants) race.

Members of the Klan - 1900s

1877 marked the **end of "Reconstruction"** and the end of the military occupation of the South, but also the questioning of the rights granted to African Americans, especially after the adoption of the **Jim Crow laws** that established racial segregation.

→ Translate into French:

the questioning =

the rights =

granted (to) =

Jim Crow laws granted municipalities, counties (parishes in Louisiana), or states the right to enact and enforce laws imposing segregation.

→ Translate into French:

grant (vb) =

parish =

county =

enact (laws) (vb) =

→ **Watch and Read:**

Jim Crow Laws documents : <http://englishpager.free.fr/?p=551>

→ **Lisez ces exemples :**

Alabama

Autobus : Toutes les gares de passagers de cet État exploitées par une société de transport doivent disposer de salles ou d'espaces d'attente séparés et de guichets séparés pour les Blancs et les Noirs.

Chemins de fer : Le conducteur de chaque train de passagers est autorisé et tenu d'affecter chaque passager à la voiture ou à la division de la voiture, lorsqu'elle est divisée par une cloison, désignée pour la race à laquelle ce passager appartient.

Restaurants : Il sera illégal d'exploiter un restaurant ou tout autre lieu où l'on sert de la nourriture dans la ville, dans lequel des Blancs et des Noirs sont servis dans la même pièce, à moins que les Blancs et les Noirs ne soient effectivement séparés par une cloison s'étendant du plancher jusqu'à une distance de sept pieds ou plus, et à moins qu'une entrée séparée de la rue ne soit prévue pour chaque compartiment.

Florida

Mariages mixtes : Tous les mariages entre une personne blanche et un nègre, ou entre une personne blanche et une personne de descendance nègre jusqu'à la quatrième génération inclusivement, sont par la présente interdits à jamais.

Éducation : Les écoles pour les enfants blancs et les écoles pour les enfants noirs seront dirigées séparément.

Cohabitation : Tout homme noir et toute femme blanche, ou tout homme blanc et toute femme noire, qui ne sont pas mariés l'un à l'autre, qui vivent habituellement dans la même chambre et l'occupent la nuit, seront punis d'une peine d'emprisonnement n'excédant pas douze (12) mois, ou d'une amende n'excédant pas cinq cents (500,00 \$) dollars.

Mississippi

Prisons : Le directeur veillera à ce que les condamnés blancs aient des logements séparés des condamnés noirs, tant pour manger que pour dormir.

Entrées des hôpitaux : Les autorités dirigeantes de chaque hôpital géré par l'État pour le traitement des patients blancs et de couleur devront maintenir des entrées séparées pour les patients et les visiteurs blancs et de couleur, et ces entrées devront être utilisées par la seule race pour laquelle elles sont préparées.

Promotion de l'égalité : Toute personne... qui se rendra coupable d'imprimer, de publier ou de faire circuler des documents imprimés, dactylographiés ou écrits incitant ou présentant à l'acceptation du public ou à l'information générale, des arguments ou des suggestions en faveur de l'égalité sociale ou du mariage entre Blancs et Nègres, sera coupable d'un délit et sera passible d'une amende n'excédant pas cinq cents (500,00) dollars ou d'un emprisonnement n'excédant pas six (6) mois ou des deux à la fois.

Georgia

Coiffeurs : Aucun coiffeur de couleur ne doit servir de coiffeur à des femmes ou des filles blanches.

Enterrement : L'officier responsable n'enterrera pas, ou ne permettra pas d'enterrer, des personnes de couleur sur un terrain réservé ou utilisé pour l'enterrement de personnes blanches.

Parcs : Il sera illégal pour les personnes de couleur de fréquenter tout parc appartenant à la ville ou entretenu par elle pour le bénéfice, l'utilisation et la jouissance des personnes blanches... et il sera illégal pour toute personne blanche de fréquenter tout parc appartenant à la ville ou entretenu par elle pour l'utilisation et le bénéfice des personnes de couleur.

Louisiana

Personnes aveugles : Le conseil d'administration doit... maintenir un bâtiment séparé... sur un terrain séparé pour l'admission, les soins, l'instruction et le soutien de toutes les personnes aveugles de la race noire ou de couleur.

Billets de cirque : Tous les cirques, spectacles et expositions sous chapiteau auxquels plus d'une race est invitée ou attendue doivent prévoir, pour la commodité de leurs clients, au moins deux guichets avec des vendeurs de billets individuels, et au moins deux entrées pour ledit spectacle, ... et dans le cas de spectacles en plein air ou sous chapiteau, lesdits guichets ne doivent pas être distants de moins de vingt-cinq (25) pieds.

Logement : Toute personne... qui louera une partie quelconque d'un tel bâtiment à un Noir ou à une famille de Noirs lorsque ce bâtiment est déjà occupé en tout ou en partie par un Blanc ou une famille de Blancs, ou vice versa lorsque le bâtiment est occupé par un Noir ou une famille de Noirs, sera coupable d'un délit et, sur condamnation, sera punie d'une amende d'au moins vingt-cinq (\$25.00) et d'un maximum de cent (\$100.00) dollars ou d'une peine d'emprisonnement de 10 jours au minimum ou de 60 jours au maximum, ou des deux, à la discrétion du tribunal.

Source : <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/links/misclink/examples.htm>

Right to Vote

African Americans were officially guaranteed the right to vote by the Fifteenth Amendment, but many states found ways to prevent them from exercising that right. They made it difficult for black people to vote by creating certain conditions to vote: **literacy tests***, **poll taxes***, and the so-called "**grandfather clause***".

→ Translate into French:

right to vote =

prevent (from) (vb) =

**literacy test: examen / test visant à déterminer si une personne remplit les conditions d'alphabétisation requises pour voter, servir dans les forces armées, etc. ; test de la capacité à lire et à écrire.*

**poll taxes: taxes créées dans les années 1890 comme moyen légal d'empêcher les Afro-Américains de voter dans les États du Sud, la poll tax était essentiellement un droit de vote. Les électeurs éligibles devaient payer leur poll tax avant de pouvoir voter. En 1964, le vingt-quatrième amendement a interdit l'utilisation des poll taxes pour les élections fédérales. Cinq États ont imposé le paiement des poll taxes pour les élections d'État jusqu'en 1966, date à laquelle la Cour suprême des États-Unis les a déclarées inconstitutionnelles.*

**grandfather clause : qui ne permettait de voter que si son grand-père avait le droit de vote (ce qui était impossible pour les descendants d'esclaves)*

1909: the creation of the **NAACP**, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which advocated **equal political, educational, economic, and social rights** for all citizens.

→ A lire :

*Cette association rassemble des Afro-Américains et des Blancs qui contestent la légitimité des lois Jim Crow. Elle mène des combats contre la ségrégation sur le terrain juridique, et amène en **1954** la Cour Suprême à déclarer **inconstitutionnelle la ségrégation dans les écoles** élémentaires subventionnées par l'État (Brown v. Board of Education).*

Un an plus tard, sous l'impulsion de Rosa Park, une militante de la NAACP, un boycott des bus de Montgomery est organisé: il durera plus d'un an ! Il se déroule du 5 décembre 1955 au 21 décembre 1956 et aboutit à une décision de la Cour suprême déclarant anticonstitutionnelles les lois de l'Alabama imposant la ségrégation raciale dans les bus.

*D'autres groupes prônant l'égalité des droits pour tous les citoyens américains sont apparus, dirigés par des figures pacifistes comme le pasteur **Martin Luther King**, ou plus extrémistes comme **Malcolm X** du **Black Power** (qui soutenait que les Noirs américains devaient se concentrer sur la construction de leur propre pouvoir économique, social et politique, plutôt que de chercher à s'intégrer dans une société dominée par les Blancs) ou **Huey Newton**, fondateur des **Black Panthers** (un mouvement révolutionnaire pour la libération des Afro-américains).*

The months before the publication of "*The Problem We All Live With*" were marked by a series of events that highlighted the racial tensions that divided the American nation.

1963 was an important year for Norman Rockwell.

- In January, **Rev. Martin Luther King** was thrown in jail following a peaceful demonstration. He wrote a letter, known as the Birmingham **Letter from Birmingham Jail**, an open letter written on April 16, 1963 by Martin Luther King Jr. The letter defends the strategy of nonviolent resistance to racism.
- In June, civil rights activist **Medgar Evers** is murdered in Mississippi.
- In August, the **March on Washington** for Freedom and Labor takes place, during which Rev. King makes his historic "*I Have a Dream*" speech.
- In September, the **bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church** in Birmingham, Alabama kills four black girls.

Seven months after the publication of Rockwell's painting, on July 7, **1964**, the **Civil Rights Acts** were enacted, making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It put a permanent end to Jim Crow laws.

→ Translate into French:

jail =

labor =

demonstration =

bombing =

peaceful =

church =

Theme

Rockwell chose to paint the arrival of 6-year-old Ruby Bridges at her new school. This was no ordinary arrival: the school **only accepted white children** before the end of school segregation.

→ A lire :

En 1960 six ans après la décision de la Cour Suprême de déclarer inconstitutionnelle la ségrégation scolaire dans les établissements financés par l'Etat, les parents de Ruby, des partisans de la NAACP décidèrent de bousculer les mentalités et d'inscrire leur fille à la William Frantz Elementary School, à La Nouvelle Orléans en Louisiane.



*Les forces de police locales ayant refusé d'escorter l'enfant (elles soutenaient majoritairement la ségrégation), ce sont **des agents fédéraux (US marshals)** qui l'accompagnèrent.*

Ses parents décidèrent de ne rien lui dire des enjeux de cette inscription. Ils lui firent les recommandations habituelles : " Tu vas aller dans une nouvelle école, et tu devras te comporter comme il faut."

*Pendant un an, elle passa devant **une foule de blancs hostiles** qui hurlaient des **menaces** et des **insultes**. Ruby Bridges a déclaré elle était trop jeune pour se rendre compte de ce qui se passait.*

Ruby Bridges in 1960

Son institutrice **Barbara Henry**, une dame blanche, l'accueillait et la traitait comme n'importe quelle autre élève. Seule élève de sa classe, Ruby souffrit surtout de la **solitude**, en dépit de l'attention que Ms Henry lui portait, car elle n'avait pas d'amies de son âge dans cette école. Le **premier jour** fut particulièrement **chaotique**, et Ruby et ses parents le passèrent dans le bureau de la direction, tandis que les parents blancs retiraient leurs enfants. Le **deuxième jour**, une mère blanche traversa la foule avec sa fillette pour la laisser à l'école. Les autres élèves blancs suivirent le même mouvement dans les jours suivants.

La mère d'une camarade de classe menaça de l'empoisonner : Ruby fut autorisée à ne pas prendre ses repas à la cantine de l'école. Une autre mère amena un jour aux portes de l'école un petit cercueil dans lequel reposait une petite poupée noire, ce qui terrifia la petite fille de 6 ans. Le psychiatre pour enfants, **Robert Coles**, se porta volontaire pour suivre chaque semaine la petite Ruby pendant cette première année d'école, et tira un livre de cette expérience bouleversante : « L'histoire de Ruby Bridges ».

Le **choix** de cette école eut des **répercussions pour sa famille** : son père fut licencié, ses grands-parents, métayers dans le Mississippi (qui louaient leurs terres), virent leur bail interrompu, l'épicerie où la famille faisait ses emplettes, leur ferma ses portes.

Cependant la famille trouva **des soutiens** dans les communautés noires mais aussi blanches, y compris parmi celles qui envoyaient leurs enfants dans la même école que Ruby. Un voisin embaucha son père. D'autres voisins se portèrent volontaires pour surveiller leur maison, s'occuper des enfants de la famille ou pour accompagner Ruby à l'école, derrière les agents fédéraux. La famille reçut des lettres de soutien, des cadeaux et de l'argent. Au bout de quelques mois, l'agitation initiale s'étant calmée, Ruby put aller à l'école en taxi.

Lorsque Ms Henry, son institutrice, apprit que d'autres enfants de première année étaient revenus à l'école et mis dans une autre classe sous la pression de leurs parents, elle alla voir la direction de l'établissement et rappela que la loi interdisait toute ségrégation scolaire. Elle insista pour qu'ils passent quelques heures par jour avec Ruby, ce qui lui fut accordé. Les choses changèrent radicalement l'année suivante : enfants noirs et enfants blancs fréquentaient les mêmes écoles, devenaient amis, et apprenaient à accepter leurs différences.

When he painted the picture, **Rockwell did not know the identity** of the little African American girl: because of her young age and the risk of violence against her and her family, her name had not been released to the press .

This oil on canvas is part of the **hyperrealism movement**, an American movement born in the 1950s, which tends towards a quasi-photographic realism. When you observe a hyper-realistic work you wonder whether it is a painting or a photograph.

→ **Translate into French:**

against =

her name had not been released to the press =

Several photographs were used in the early stages of his composition:



Norman Rockwell Museum Collections.

Rockwell found his model **Lynda Gunn**, the granddaughter of friends in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

Interpretation

→ **A lire** (*suggestions d'interprétation de l'œuvre*)

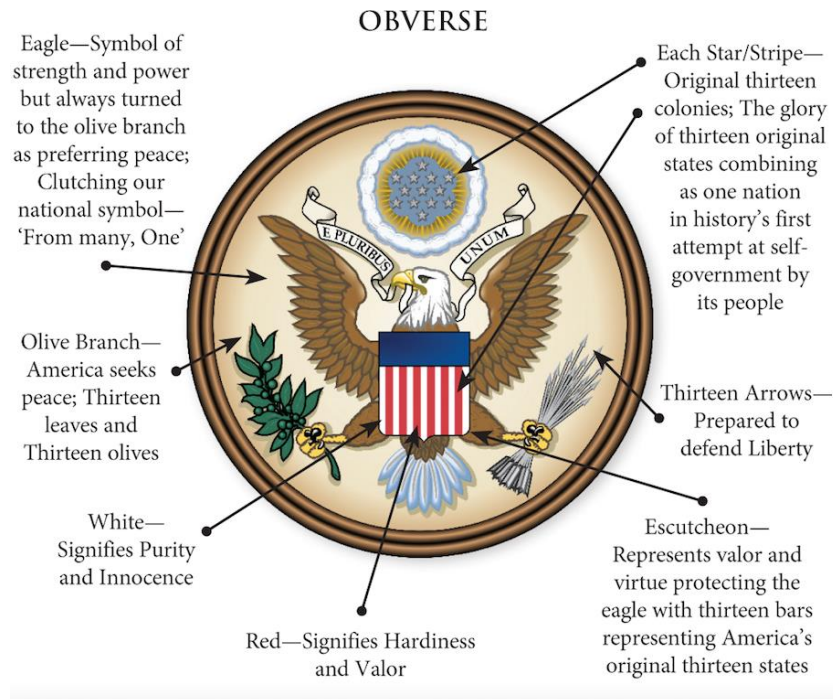
La petite fille est encadrée par **quatre agents fédéraux**, mais **leur présence ne paraît pas menaçante**. Il existe une **correspondance** entre Ruby et son escorte, grâce aux **éléments colorés** du tableau :

- **le blanc** de la robe de Ruby, **symbole de pureté et d'innocence** se retrouve dans la couleur de la chemise du premier marshal, et du document officiel qui dépasse de sa poche (*il semble y avoir un sceau sur le document, peut-être un mandat ou une copie de la loi*).
- **Le jaune** de sa règle que porte Ruby se retrouve à la fois dans les insignes des agents fédéraux et dans le brassard qu'ils portent autour de leur bras. La correspondance est aussi sémantique (*qui concerne le sens, la signification*): le mot "ruler" (*la règle de l'enfant*) renvoie à "the rule", la règle, la loi en anglais, rappelée par l'inscription "Deputy US Marshal" sur les brassards.

Les **couleurs vives** font aussi écho aux **couleurs ternes** des insultes : le **gris** du KKK est pâle, peu visible. De même, le **gris** du mot NIGGER est pâle sur le fond beige du mur. Ces inscriptions sont les vestiges d'un passé récent mais leur pâleur semble atténuer la virulence des propos, comme la promesse d'un avenir meilleur.

Le sigle KKK et l'insulte sont de la même nuance de gris que les taches et les fissures sur le mur. Ils ont donc par association une connotation négative.

L'éclaboussure sur le mur peut faire penser à la silhouette d'un aigle. L'aigle est un symbole des Etats-Unis et il est souvent associé à la devise : **e pluribus unus**. *. On peut y voir la représentation de l'aigle symbolisant l'unité de l'Amérique comme arrêté en plein vol.



* *E pluribus unum* est la devise en latin qui apparaît sur le Grand Sceau des États-Unis. Ce sceau est utilisé comme emblème des États-Unis, apparaissant notamment sur les documents officiels comme les passeports. Il apparaît également sur les sceaux du président, du vice-président, du Congrès et de la Cour suprême. « Un seul à partir de plusieurs » ou, dans une traduction plus directe, « De plusieurs, un », proche de « L'union fait la force » ; « Un pour tous, tous pour un ».



Les US marshals sans visage, par leur costume et leur attitude, représentent les concepts de loi et de justice, aveugle car elle s'exerce sans s'arrêter aux apparences.

Meanings

The "problem" in this painting is **racism**. Norman Rockwell is denouncing the **prejudices** in his country in the 1960s, even though the US Supreme Court had officially put an end to segregation.

When we look at this painting, our position is quite uncomfortable because we seem to be standing among the protesters. We are shocked by what this little girl is enduring. Nevertheless, the **main movement** is to the left; the 5 characters are marching towards the west, which for the Americans symbolizes the future. Ruby is going to cross a line on the sidewalk, a symbolic passage to a new era. Norman Rockwell was probably an optimist and wanted to believe, as Martin Luther King had dreamed, that black and white children could one day hold hands. Barack Obama, by becoming the 1st African American president, confirmed that for some people the dream could become reality.

→ Translate into French:

prejudices =

protesters =

put an end (vb) =

a new era =

towards =

hold hands (vb) =

even though =

→ **A lire :**

Perception de l'œuvre par ses contemporains

La réponse du public fut mitigée. Rockwell et le Magazine Look reçurent un courrier abondant dans les mois qui suivirent, allant des critiques les plus acerbes aux louanges les plus dithyrambiques (*flatteuses, élogieuses*). Les admirateurs de Rockwell, habitués à la légèreté et la drôlerie de ses peintures du temps où il travaillait pour le *Saturday Evening Post*, furent un peu déboussolés par la gravité de ce tableau. Mais cela renforça aussi son impact.

Après le choc initial, la plupart des abonnés de *Look Magazine* s'intéressèrent différemment au problème de la ségrégation raciale. Le regard porté sur Rockwell changea lui-aussi. Les critiques de son époque, qui ne voyaient en lui qu'un illustrateur farceur et léger, soulignèrent son courage et son engagement.

Conclusion

With this painting, Norman Rockwell breaks with the artistic codes of the time: blacks were only presented in positions of submission. Here, the little African American girl is at the center of the painting.

Rockwell breaks with his reputation as an illustrator who depicted a timeless, white, happy-go-lucky America for nearly fifty years. The comical nature of the illustrations that appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* is replaced by the seriousness of this representation of a current event that appears in *Look Magazine*.

"Rockwell breaks with the role of 'storyteller': he invites his contemporaries to write history".

For many, the vision of this courageous little African girl walking confidently forward remains the symbol of resistance to racism. 48 years after this first step towards integration, the first black president of the United States was elected.

Today, the reproduction of this painting is the most frequently purchased at the Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

Ruby Bridges said, "*Racism is a grown-up disease and we must stop using our children to spread it.*"

President Barack Obama had *The Problem We All Live With* temporarily installed in the White House in 2011. As he contemplated the painting with Ruby Bridges, the duo couldn't help but marvel at the situation. "*I think it's fair to say that if you hadn't been here, I might not be here and we wouldn't be watching this together*", said Obama, the country's first African American president.

→ **Translate into French:**

depict (vb) =

remain (vb) =

timeless (adj) =

purchased =

happy-go-lucky (adj) =

grown-up =

seriousness =

disease =

storyteller =

spread (vb) =

confidently =

couldn't help but marvel =

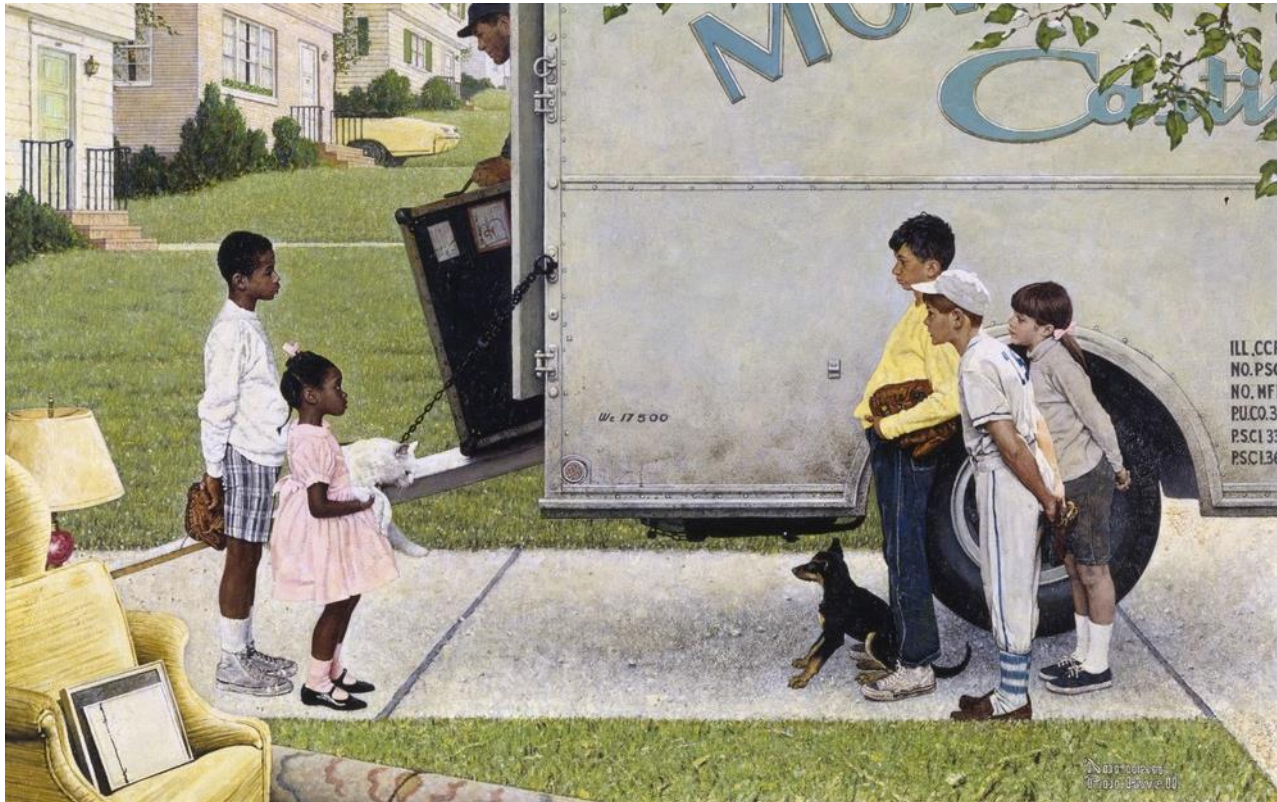
forward =

Norman Rockwell's works on the same theme

New Kids in the Neighborhood

Three years after the publication of *The Problem We All Live With*, Rockwell revisited the same theme. *New Kids in the Neighborhood*, another illustration for *Look magazine*, features two groups of children: one black and one white. Set in what appears to be a suburban neighborhood, the scene features a moving truck. As the black children are placed near the truck's cargo (furniture), we can deduce that they are the "New Kids in the Neighborhood" and, judging by their curious expressions, the white children are not sure what to make of it.

As with *The Problem We All Live With*, and unlike his previous depictions of children, *New Kids in the Neighborhood* illustrates Rockwell's interest in exploring the effects of racism on children.



New Kids in the Neighborhood – 1967 (Moving In)



Context

As part of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, the state of **Illinois** offered black families the opportunity to move into previously white-only residential neighborhoods.

Description / Analysis

In the foreground, we see two groups of children: on the left, two **black** children dressed in **white** and on the right, three white children with more **colorful** clothes.

In the center, an empty space symbolizes the lack of contact between the two communities and their different appearances.

They are looking at each other, the white children seem very **curious** (two are leaning forward), the black children seem more **reserved**.

Behind them, we can see a moving truck. The black family must be moving into this new white neighborhood.

In the background, we see houses that look the same, they are all lined up.

In the window of one of them, we see a figure behind the window who seems to be observing the scene. Is it hostile towards these newcomers?

Between the children we perceive mainly curiosity.

Despite their difference in color, we perceive a certain number of points that bring them together. The black children have a white cat and the white children have a black dog (*color doesn't matter with animals*), the little boys all like **baseball** and they have the same style of **dress**.

What will happen? Will they talk to each other? Will they play together? By showing all these commonalities between the children, the artist shows a rather optimistic vision of the future of black-white relations.

It is a scene of everyday life as Norman Rockwell liked to illustrate them. Although here, what should be a simple move-in takes on a picturesque, even cartoonish quality. A black family moves into the neighborhood... and obviously, in this neighborhood, it's the first time!

Rockwell has chosen to illustrate these "events" of everyday American life during **desegregation** through the eyes of children. What could be seen as a confrontation is staged more as a chance encounter, curious, surprising, destabilizing, extraordinary ...

The children show their **curiosity**, but not their animosity. It is this **naivety** that shines through in the scene and makes it almost comical, touching.

Southern Justice (Murder in Mississippi)



Southern Justice (Murder in Mississippi) – 1965

The painting depicts the murders of **civil rights activists** James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in 1964. It was intended to illustrate an article written about these murders by civil rights lawyer Charles Morgan Jr.

The composition of the work is very sober, Norman Rockwell focuses the viewer's attention on the moment just after the lynching of the first two victims. Against a dark background, the three protagonists stand out. In the foreground, on an earthy ground, a few rocks and sticks are lying around, situating the action in an almost desert-like place. There is also a character lying on the ground. He is lying on his stomach, his head towards the viewer, forming a diagonal that directs the gaze towards the background where there are two other characters.

In the background, a man is standing facing the viewer, holding or trying to raise another man whose knees are on the ground and whose back is turned to us. This figure of pain recalls Michelangelo's *Pietà*, which shows a mother crying for her child. Their heads as well as the gaze of

the standing figure are directed to the right creating intrigue, the viewer not knowing what he is seeing.

In a classical construction of the work the three characters are inscribed in a pyramidal composition creating a balance and harmony to the whole. On the right side of the ground, from the foreground to the background, a series of shadows extends, giving a clue as to what is happening outside the frame.

The background forming the upper part of the painting is painted in broad horizontal brush strokes giving an energetic, raw, unfinished and abstract character accentuating the tormented aspect of the scene. The characters are dressed in simple, everyday clothes, anchoring the scene in the everyday life of normal people. They are dressed in jeans, shirts, t-shirts and simple white shoes. There is very little color. A dominant of dark and light browns, beige for the floor and white for the light. The lightest colors are in the foreground as we progress towards the background of the canvas they become darker. Only a few red spots in the center of the work, clearly visible on the white sleeve and on the arm of a character, inform us about the violence of the act that has just taken place.

The light is very bright because it is artificial, it comes from the right, its source is outside the frame: it is the headlights of a car that illuminate the central characters. The light creates a very strong contrast between the whites and the darker colors accentuating the dramatic side of the scene and especially it strikes on the white shirt to highlight the character. The white of the shirt and T-shirts evokes the innocence of the characters. There is a dramatization of the scene highlighting the posture of the hero who acts for good and against evil by helping the victims of an atrocious racist lynching. Here N. Rockwell is inspired by Goya's *Tres de Mayo*. The realistic style has a testimonial value, the artist does not want to distort reality, he does not exaggerate the expressions because he illustrates a current event.

Norman Rockwell condemns this racist act and sanctifies the central character who courageously faces the intimidating shadows which are none other than those of the executioners with their weapons who have just lynched the two civil rights defenders lying on the ground. He freezes for eternity the cruelty of racist acts but above all he gives an optimistic character to his work by highlighting the heroic side of the victims who fight for a just and noble cause.

It was the sketch of the painting that was used to illustrate Charles Morgan's article "*Southern Justice*" in Look Magazine on June 29, 1969. The full-page article faces the illustration. The editor of the magazine chose the preparatory drawing because he thought it was much more energetic, more powerful than the painting. This strongly displeased Norman Rockwell at first, who refused to allow a simple sketch to be shown to the public. This sketch is indeed more expressive, the style does not have the photographic rendering sought by the artist and therefore has a less realistic character.

Works on the same theme

David C. Driskell, *Behold thy Son*, 1956



Artist **David C. Driskell** moved to the South in the late 1950s, shortly after the **lynching** of 14-year-old **Emmett Till**. Emmet Till's mother had insisted that his coffin be opened during his funeral, so that the world could see the victim's mutilated and battered body. This triggered a sense of anger and rage within the black American community. For many, it was the spark that drove them to fight, launching the civil rights era.

Driskell felt some responsibility and used his artwork to speak to the horrific murder that had just occurred. He painted *Behold Thy Son* in 1956. The painting uses religious iconography and evokes the crucifixion of Christ. However, the central figure is no longer Christ but the young Emmet Till. It is a powerful work, which evokes the unjustified sacrifice of innocent people.

Charles Henry Alston, *Walking*, 1958



From 1955 to 1956, black Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, **boycotted the buses**. This was a protest against the racial segregation of the city's public transportation system. Artist **Charles Henry Alston** was influenced by this moment in history, which he recalls in *Walking* in 1958. Instead of depicting key figures of the civil rights era, such as Martin Luther King Jr. or Rosa Parks, Alston depicts ordinary people, marching to protest segregation. While the leaders of the day were essential to the broad coverage of the movement, it was the adults and children who formed the backbone of the civil rights era. Alston's painting celebrates and recalls their considerable efforts at a crucial time.

Norman Lewis, *Evening Rendezvous*, 1962



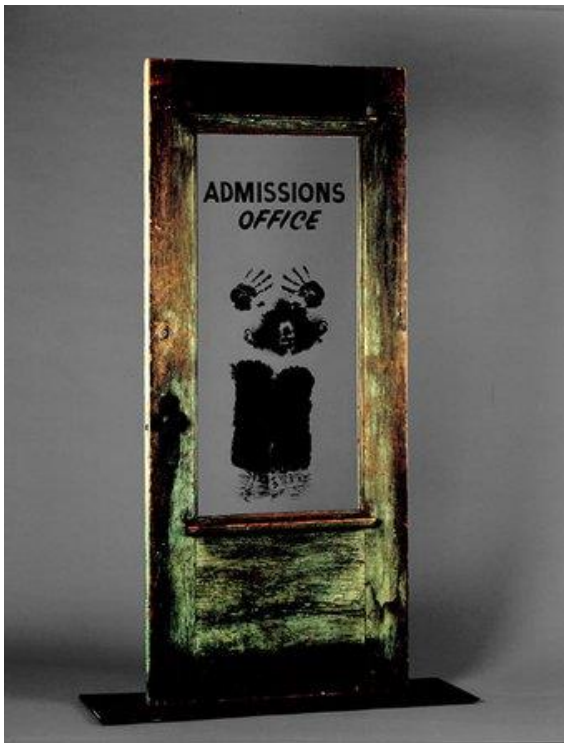
Jim Crow legislation has been a fixture in the United States for decades. But it was not the only threat to the black community. The community also feared the rise of attacks orchestrated by white supremacist groups. In his semi-abstract painting, **Norman Lewis** depicts swirls of red and blue surrounded by small white figures. The presence of white is an allusion to the white hoods, an ominous symbol of **the Ku Klux Klan**. The painting *Evening Rendezvous* is a reference to the nightly meetings of the Ku Klux Klan. The colors also evoke the American flag.

Jacob Lawrence, *Soldiers and Students*, 1962



Artist **Jacob Lawrence** depicts everyday scenes experienced by black Americans. In his painting *Soldiers and Students*, Lawrence captures the fear and outrage felt by many when segregation was lifted from schools in the United States. He paints three armed guards escorting a group of black American students as a group of white protesters attempt to block the school entrance. Many believe that Lawrence was inspired by **the Little Rock 9**, a group of black American students at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. Five years later, a mob of angry protesters attacked U.S. police officers sent to the University of Mississippi by the Kennedy administration. U.S. Marshals had been deployed to protect **James Meredith**, a black American student who was attending what was previously an all-white university.

David Hammons, *The Door (Admissions Office)*, 1969



David Hammons's *The Door (Admissions Office)* commemorates the trauma and struggles associated with **school desegregation** during the civil rights era. Hammons presents a wooden door frame with "Admissions Office" written on it. Underneath the door label, we can make out in ink the profile of a body that has been violently pressed. Hammon's work evokes the violence experienced by early black American students in white schools in the United States. While the end of segregated schools was central to the process of civil rights recognition, it led to a violent response from a white, racist America. In some cases, white students and adults prevented black students from entering by blocking the door frames. It is this very incident that Hammons captures in her powerful work. It allows us to remember the trauma and struggles that black students experienced during the civil rights era.

Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Jim Crow*, 1986



Basquiat has repeatedly depicted racism and the history of slavery: *Jim Crow* (1986) evokes the segregationist laws of the same name, which were not abolished until the 1960s. Mississippi is the state where these laws were applied with great severity.

Jacob Lawrence, *Bar and Grill*, 1941



Jacob Lawrence painted this scene after a visit to New Orleans in 1941. It was the first time he was confronted with the realities of the South's exacerbated racism and Jim Crow laws.

Andy Warhol, Untitled (Birmingham, Alabama), 1964



In the 1960s, **Andy Warhol** began creating a variety of prints based on images from popular media that he would then alter and display as art. This image is based on a photograph taken by Charles Moore of a man being attacked by dogs under the command of the police, who were trying to disperse a series of anti-segregation protests in Birmingham, Alabama. The police efforts quickly turned violent, and the captured images became iconic.