

# NORMAN ROCKWELL

**R**ockwell was born in New York City on February 3, 1894. When he was nine years old, his family moved to the small town of Mamaroneck, New York. He was a skinny boy and not very athletic, so he chose drawing as his hobby. At age eighteen, Rockwell became art editor of *Boys' Life*, the official magazine of the Boy Scouts of America. When Rockwell was twenty-two years old, one of his paintings appeared on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*, which showcased the works of the finest illustrators of the period. Remarkably, in forty-seven years, 321 of his paintings appeared on the cover of the *Post*, making him one of the most famous painters of the twentieth century. Rockwell's paintings were seen across America, as they appeared in books, advertisements, calendars, and on the covers of popular magazines, such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Look*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*. Rockwell died on November 8, 1978 at age 84 in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

## Norman Rockwell's paintings are humorous:

► Look at *No Swimming*, 1921. →

Rockwell often paints the funniest moment in a story. Rather than picture the boys swimming in the forbidden pool, Rockwell paints the moment when the rascals<sup>1</sup> have been discovered and are frantically trying to put their clothes back on as they race from the scene of the crime.



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<sup>1</sup> a rascal : un vaurien

## Norman Rockwell's paintings celebrate ordinary, everyday life:



*The Saturday Evening Post, 1945*

In 1939 the Rockwells moved to Arlington, Vermont where Rockwell began to paint small town life more consistently; scenes from the daily life of ordinary people - stories about swimming holes, gossiping<sup>2</sup>, family vacations, and barbershops<sup>3</sup>...

## Norman Rockwell's paintings are skilfully painted:

Rockwell carefully studied the works of great artists like those pictured in the upper right corner of the easel<sup>4</sup> in *Triple Self-Portrait, 1960*.

He also spent weeks, even months creating his paintings.

► Look closely at the painting *Triple Self-Portrait, 1960*. →

► Can you find these items?

- The “antique<sup>5</sup>” that fooled Rockwell
- The soft drink he often enjoyed as he worked
- A reference to the accidental burning of his studio
- A tribute to the great artists he admired

► Pretend you made a visit to Rockwell's studio and Rockwell told you that, as a gift, he would like you to select any item from this painting. What would you bring home and why?



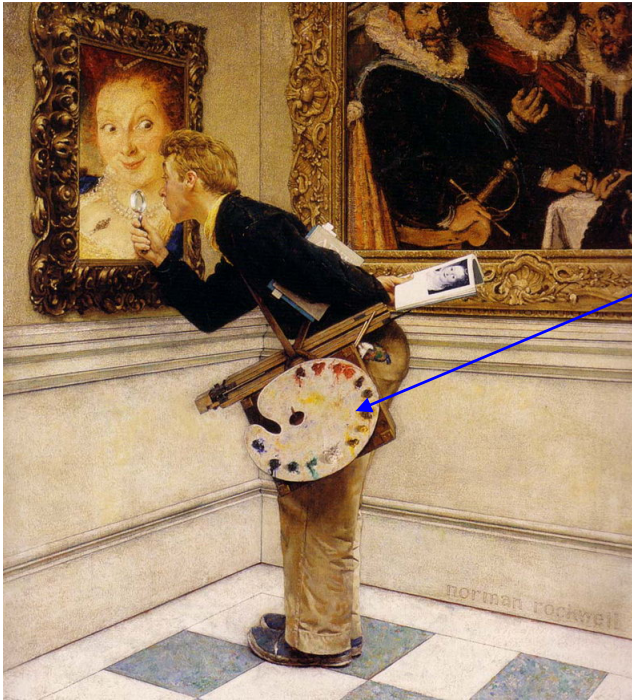
<sup>2</sup> gossip : commérages, bavardages

<sup>3</sup> barbershop (USA) = men's hairdresser

<sup>4</sup> easel : chevalet

<sup>5</sup> antique : objet ancien





Art critic, 1955

## FUN FACT

Did you know Rockwell left actual globs of paint on this canvas? Look closely at the critic's palette. Each color is a dried clump of paint!

### Let's look more closely at some of Rockwell's techniques

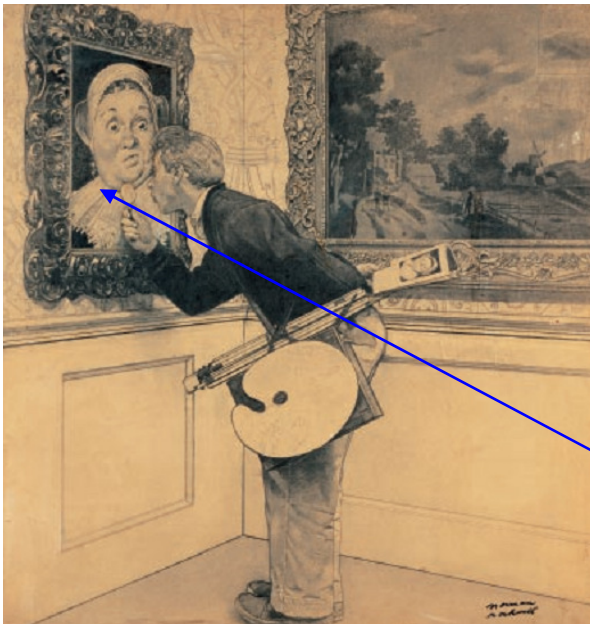
- When he had an idea for a painting, Rockwell often took photographs of models (sometimes his friends and neighbors) in various poses.

A photo he used to create Art Critic →



Photo by Gene Pelham

- He then mixed and matched details from these photos and made numerous pencil sketches, rearranging the composition and adding new details.



- Rockwell sometimes coated the back of his final sketch with charcoal dust and laid it on top of a canvas. By tracing the top image, he left a dust outline on the canvas.

- He then painted on top of this sketchy image with oil paints, which covered up the charcoal lines. Even while he was painting the picture, Rockwell often made changes in the poses, the backgrounds, and facial expressions.

- ▶ Who was the painting of the woman in *Art Critic* based on?



Photo by Bill Scovill





◀ This painting is entitled *Day in the Life of a Little Girl*, 1952. It is called a sequence painting because it is composed of lots of little images that are combined to tell a story, just like a comic strip or a movie.

▶ Find a partner. Choose one of the images on this page but don't tell your partner which you chose. Simply imitate the action and invite your partner to guess. Switch and then guess as your partner imitates one of the images. Remember, if you were a model for Norman Rockwell, you might have to hold that pose for several minutes!

### *Gossips*, 1948

The people who posed for *The Gossips* were Rockwell's neighbors in Arlington, Vermont. His wife, Mary, appears in the painting, too.  
▶ Can you find her?

### **FUN FACT**

The editor at *The Saturday Evening Post* did not believe that anyone could have a mouth as big as the man with 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.

- ▶ Why is the woman at the end shocked?
- ▶ Can you find Norman Rockwell in the picture?







◀ In the painting *Going and Coming*, 1947, Rockwell shows an old-fashioned tradition: family gatherings. This family, however, is wrapped in a modern invention: the American station wagon.

▶ Notice the feelings Rockwell shows in the top part of the painting. How are the two parts the same? How are they different?

▶ Look for the one person who remains unchanged.

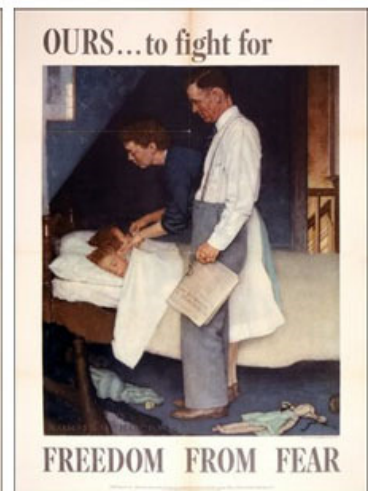
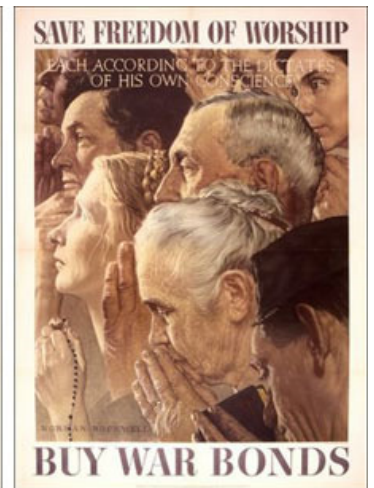
▶ Can you think of any changes that have taken place in our world since your parents were your age?

When the United States entered World War II in December 1941, Rockwell wanted to help in the war effort. Remembering a speech President Franklin D. Roosevelt had made earlier in the year, Rockwell painted pictures to help people better understand **the four basic freedoms** the president thought everyone in the world should have: freedom of speech, freedom to worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

It took Rockwell seven months to complete the four paintings. He painted Freedom of Speech and Freedom to Worship several times before he was satisfied with the results. In the middle of the night when pondering how to best depict freedom of speech, Rockwell was struck with what he called “the best idea I’d ever had.” He remembered a man who stood up at a town meeting and made a comment. Everyone disagreed with him but believed that he had the right to speak his mind. This, Rockwell thought, was what freedom of speech was all about.

## FUN FACT

Rockwell claimed that the turkey featured in *Freedom from Want* was, in fact, the Rockwell family’s Thanksgiving turkey. He later confessed, “This was one of the few times I’ve ever eaten the model.” The woman serving the Thanksgiving turkey in *Freedom from Want* was the Rockwell family cook, and he also included his wife, Mary. ▶ Look closely to find her.





*"Like everyone else, I'm concerned with the world situation, and like everyone else, I'd like to contribute something to help." Norman Rockwell*



When Rockwell painted *New Kids in the Neighborhood*, 1967, America was experiencing the civil rights movement. Families from different cultures and backgrounds were beginning to live in the same neighborhoods, eat at the same restaurants, and sit next to each other on buses.

The two groups of children in *New Kids in the Neighborhood* may look different, but they also have several things in common.

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

### KEYS:

*Triple Self-Portrait*, 1960:

The gold helmet atop the easel: Rockwell thought it was an antique army helmet but later discovered it was just a fireman's hat!  
Norman Rockwell's daily cola drink is precariously perched on his art book.

The smoke rising from the trash can is a reference to the accidental burning of Rockwell's studio in 1943.

The pictures pinned to Rockwell's canvas are self-portraits by Albrecht Dürer, Rembrandt, Pablo Picasso, and Vincent van Gogh.

*Gossips*, 1948:

His wife, Mary, is the second person from the left in the third row.

Rockwell appears in the last row, pointing at the woman. He was the subject of the gossip.

*Freedom from want*, 1943:

Mary Rockwell is sitting on the left of the table, and Rockwell's mother is on the right.

*Freedom of Speech*, 1943:

Only a portion of Rockwell's face can be seen. His eye is visible on the left edge of the painting, looking at the man speaking.