

## **Norman Rockwell**

### **Introduction:**

Norman Rockwell is the most well-known and perhaps most popular American painter of all time. His paintings reached so many people, for such a long period of time, that his career and works help to tell a story about American history and culture over more than 60 years!

### **Norman Perceval Rockwell was born on February 3, 1894 in NYC**

1. oldest of 2 sons
2. sang in church choir
3. spent early Summers in the country which had a large impact on what Rockwell painted later on.
4. Wanted to be an artist from an early age, took lots of classes
5. Quit high school in 10<sup>th</sup> grade to go to art school full time.
6. Moved with family to Mamaroneck, NY and later to New Rochelle, where he had a studio for several years.

**Board 1:** *Here are some photos of the artist, Norman Rockwell as a young man and older man. He had a very expressive face, and he used himself from time to time in his paintings. Here's one self-portrait called "Triple Self Portrait" Can you guess why it's called that?*

**Board 2: Titles** *are very important in Norman Rockwell's paintings. They help tell a story, as you can see from some of Rockwell's paintings. Some are very simple stories that we all understand—like in the first picture, "No Swimming." What do you think might have happened in this picture?*

*Norman was so good at using pictures to tell stories, that authors often wanted him to paint the illustrations for their books, such as these paintings for "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer."*

*On the bottom is one of Rockwell's more famous pictures, "Girl at a Mirror." What do you think she's doing in the picture?*

### **Board 3:**

*Here is the first surviving picture that we have by Norman Rockwell. What*

*does it look like? A rustic cabin, etc....Norman was still in school when he painted it.*

**Story of first “commissioned” art assignment:** When he lived in Mamaroneck, Rockwell had a paper route on Orienta point. A woman who lived there knew of Rockwell’s interest in becoming an artist. Every year she sent Christmas cards to family and friends. She asked **Norman whether he could design some Christmas cards** for her. He did, she paid him quite well, and he was on his way....

While still in school, **Rockwell got a job illustrating a children’s book.**

His teachers thought he was very good, and helped him get an assignment from **Boys’ Life Magazine**, official publication of Boy Scouts of America.

1. Eventually made him art director of the magazine.
2. Did an illustration for the Boy Scout calendar for over 50 years!

*Top, Center: Here is Norman’s first “Boy Scout-Good Turn” painting, showing scouts helping Santa out of the snow where he’s fallen.*

*Top, Right: One of Rockwell’s early Boy’s Life covers. This was one of his favorite models, Bill Paine, from New Rochelle. He didn’t have a pool or lake to use, so he had Bill stand on his head and just painted his legs, cut off at the waist and drew in a splash!*

*Bottom, Left: This is from the Boy Scout Handbook 1929. Do you recognize anyone in the background? Norman would paint many important American figures over the years.*

**At age 22**, in 1916, met with George Horace Lorimer, editor of the **Saturday**

**Evening Post** to show him some paintings for the cover. It was a dream of his to work on the SEP.

- SEP is a magazine/newspaper with articles, stories, pictures on a wide variety of current topics, which started with Benjamin

Franklin in the 1700's (it's still around today!).

- Got a job painting covers for the SEP, and several other magazines started hiring him to do paintings and drawings for them.
- Rockwell is most well-known for his SEP covers. He showed people in situations that everybody could relate to.

**Board 4:** *Here are some Saturday Evening Post covers from the 1940s and 1950s. Try looking at the picture and guessing what's going on. Does it help to read the title? Can you see how each one tells a story?*

*What do you think is happening in the Top, Middle painting?*

*How about some of the others?*

*Do you believe the story that Rockwell is telling? One reason people loved his paintings so much is because they believed his stories. They looked very real. Rockwell did a LOT of work to make them look that way. He had models of many different body types, he had lots of costumes and props; he paid a lot of attention to small details. Finally, he took pictures of the scenes and painted a few studies before doing the final painting.*

*The picture on the Top, Right is of a son coming home from school—all of Norman's own family is in the painting.*

*The Bottom, Center painting, "Saying Grace" is Rockwell's most popular cover ever. Why? See the coffee cup in the foreground? Does it make you feel like part of the scene?*

Rockwell would have many jobs over the years: continuing the Boy Scout work, the SEP covers, advertisement illustrations, many, many magazines. Along the way he got married 3 times, had three children, and moved from the NY suburbs to the City, to Vermont and Massachusetts. **He did over 4000 original works. What a busy man!!**

In 1917 during World War I, Rockwell joined the US navy (had to gorge himself to make weight big enough to be accepted!) where he worked for the camp newspaper.

After the war, Rockwell started doing advertising illustration.

His advertisements have sold cough medicine, bicycle tires, fountain pens (see pic, Board ) light bulbs, toothpaste (see pic), encyclopedias, soda, Jell-o, and insurance.

### **Board 5:**

During World War II, the president, Franklin D. Roosevelt made a speech to Congress describing the “four essential human freedoms.”

Rockwell was inspired to paint them, and they became very popular, symbols of American values; they were published in the Post in 1943.

Freedom of Speech

Freedom from Fear

Freedom from Want

Freedom to Worship

*Look at each of the paintings. What does each make you think of/feel? These are very important paintings to Americans. Why do you think that is?*

*Notice the close up of the elderly lady's hands from Freedom to Worship. Do you think it took a long time to capture all of those wrinkles?*

**Board 6:**

*Here are some of the advertisement illustrations that Rockwell did in the 1940s and 50s. Christmas cards, Parker pens, Crest Toothpaste (he used the same little girl as a model for this Post cover, Bottom, Center.)*

In 1953, commission from Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company to do ads in black and white reflecting "family values."

People liked the drawings because they could relate to the situations in their own lives—*(give some examples shown here)*.

He had this assignment for 10 years and did 81 drawings!

**Board 7:**

Norman Rockwell covered all of the presidential elections from the 1950's until his death in 1978. He painted both the winning and losing candidates. *Here are some of the winners. Do you recognize any of them?*

*The painting on the Bottom, Left is Rockwell's last SEP cover, painted after President Kennedy died.*

*The Bottom, Center painting is of the Peace Corps, which was started by President Kennedy. He did this painting in 1966, 3 years after Pres. K. was shot.*

## **Board 8:**

1960's: Rockwell paints current events and social issues confronting Americans:

*Talk about his goal of World Peace;*

*See if you can tell the story of this event. Who do you think were the “new neighbors?” What do you think the kids will learn about each other? (note the baseball mitts, the cat and dog—the kids may conclude that the kids are finding out that they have a lot in common.) Rather than broaching the subject of integration with the kids, you may want to let them comment and see what type of conversation the painting generates.*

*Bottom: Apollo 11 crew—the first flight to the moon. Do you know the names of any of the astronauts?*

In 1969 Rockwell had a one-man show in New York City. Critics were usually unkind toward Rockwell's work or ignored it completely, but the public loved his paintings, and many were purchased for prices averaging around \$20,000. In 1975, at the age of eighty-one, Rockwell completed his fifty-sixth Boy Scout calendar. In 1976 the city of Stockbridge, MA, where Rockwell had lived for years, celebrated a Norman Rockwell Day. On November 8, 1978, Rockwell died in his home.

In 1993 a new Rockwell museum was opened near Stockbridge. Museum director Laurie Norton Moffatt listed all of Rockwell's works in a two-volume book; according to Landrum Bolling of the *Saturday Evening Post*, the total exceeded four thousand original works. In November 1999 an exhibit of Rockwell's work entitled "Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People" opened at the

High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia.

***For More Information***

Buechner, Thomas S. *Norman Rockwell, Artist and Illustrator*. New York: H. N. Abrams, 1970.

Claridge, Laura P. *Norman Rockwell: A Life*. New York: Random House, 2001.

Moline, Mary. *Norman Rockwell Encyclopedia: A Chronological Catalog of the Artist's Work 1910–1978*. Indianapolis: Curtis, 1979.

Rockwell, Norman. *Norman Rockwell, My Adventures as an Illustrator: An Autobiography*. Indianapolis: Curtis, 1979. Reprint, New York: Abrams, 1988.

Walton, Donald. *A Rockwell Portrait*. Kansas City, KS: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, Inc., 1978.

**Letter to parents:**

Please see the website for the letter to parents. You may make copies of the letter to send home with the kids, or better yet, email it to them.

## **Project:**

The students will create their own “cover” for the Saturday Evening Post using colored pencils, crayons, and fine-tipped markers. Each student will get two 11”x18” sheets of drawing paper, one with the SEP masthead on it and one without. The masthead sheet will be used for the background and the other sheet of drawing paper will be used to create a “life-like” scene or character(s). There are magazines for the kids to use as “models” to help them draw faces and bodies. You may also want to ask the teacher ahead of time if you/he/she can send an email to the parents asking the kids to bring in a magazine or photos to help them with their drawings.

They will then cut out their scene or character. In order to make the scene “pop” and feel more real, there are 3-D Os, or small donut-shaped self-stickers which can be applied to the back of their cut-out drawing. They can stick the scene onto the masthead paper for a 3-dimensional appearance, giving the viewer a more lifelike experience of their drawing. (see examples) Each child should limit themselves to 3-4 of the 3-D O’s. That should be sufficient to stick the drawing to the background.

The following items should travel with you to the classroom:

- Presentation Portfolio
- 11”x18” Masthead paper
- 11”x18” plain drawing paper
- Large box Colored pencils
- Pencil sharpeners
- Large box Crayons
- sheets of 3-D Os
- Erasers
- Fine tipped black markers
- magazines with photos to help guide their drawings
- (kids will use their own scissors)

Try to allow at least 75 min for the whole presentation/project, with ideally 45 min or so for the project.

