

“Grandma Moses” (1860-1961)

Anna Mary (Robertson) Moses

Born: 7 September 1860; Greenwich, New York, USA

Active: 1938 - 1961

Died: 13 December 1961, Hoosick Falls, New York

Genre: Folk Art

Interesting Facts about Grandma Moses:

She was born only seven months before the Civil War began.

She only painted the last 23 years of her life, yet painted over 1,500 compositions!

She was always creative, and used fruit juices and laundry rinses as paints when she was a little girl.

She started painting only when her arthritis made quilting and embroidering difficult for her. Her sister suggested a paintbrush might be easier to hold!

Grandma Moses’s works debuted the same decade that Laura Ingalls Wilder’s “Little House” series was published? Two years before Grandma Moses’s first solo show, the Newberry-Award Winning book *Caddie Woodlawn*, by Carol Ryrie Brink, depicting the Wisconsin post-Civil War childhood of “Caddie” was published. These authors and artists had seen their way of life radically change from their childhood to adulthood, and wanted to record what the world had been like when they were young.

You never see cars, electric lines, or telephone poles in Grandma Moses’s paintings. She wanted to share what she remembered of life during her youth. And in the wake of World War I and the Great Depression, people wanted to remember a “simpler time”. It was a composition of a memory.

Grandma Moses is a “Folk Artist”, meaning she was never trained by another artist or school. Some people believe this doesn’t make her a “real” artist. What do you think?



Figure 1: Grandma Moses in 1953. Photographed for the New York World-Telegram and the Sun staff photographer: Roger Higgins. Now in the Library of Congress. Public Domain.

Folk Art:

Artistic or decorative works created by people who are not trained in “fine art”. This umbrella term includes decorative works by indigenous or native peoples who do not have a separate or specific art school or art training tradition, items created by artisans or laborers (such as carved or inlaid tables created by carpenters) or works created by a person who is not trained to be an artist by trade, such as Grandma Moses.

Folk art can include paintings, sculpture, or items not traditionally considered “art”, such as quilting, leatherwork, metalwork, weaving, or decoration of useful objects such as tools, weapons, and household goods. Many folk art objects are normal, utilitarian items which have been decorated or beautified.

Etymology¹ of “Folk Art”

Folk: (n) From the Old English Word “*folc*” meaning “common people, laity, nation, tribe”.

Art: (n) from the French Word “*art*” meaning “skill resulting from learning or practice”. The French “*art*” itself comes from the Latin word “*Artem*” meaning “a work of art, practical skill, business or craft”

Definitions drawn from the Online Etymology Dictionary etymonline.com

Folk Artist:

An artist who has not been formally trained in artistic techniques by another artist, art apprenticeship, or art school.

Quotes from Grandma Moses

“Life is what we make of it. Always has been, always will be.”

-Grandma Moses

“Painting is not the important thing. The important thing is keeping busy...if I hadn’t started painting, I’d have raised chickens.”-Grandma Moses

¹ Etymology: The study of words, where they come from, and how their meanings have changed over time.



“Sugaring Off”

1955;

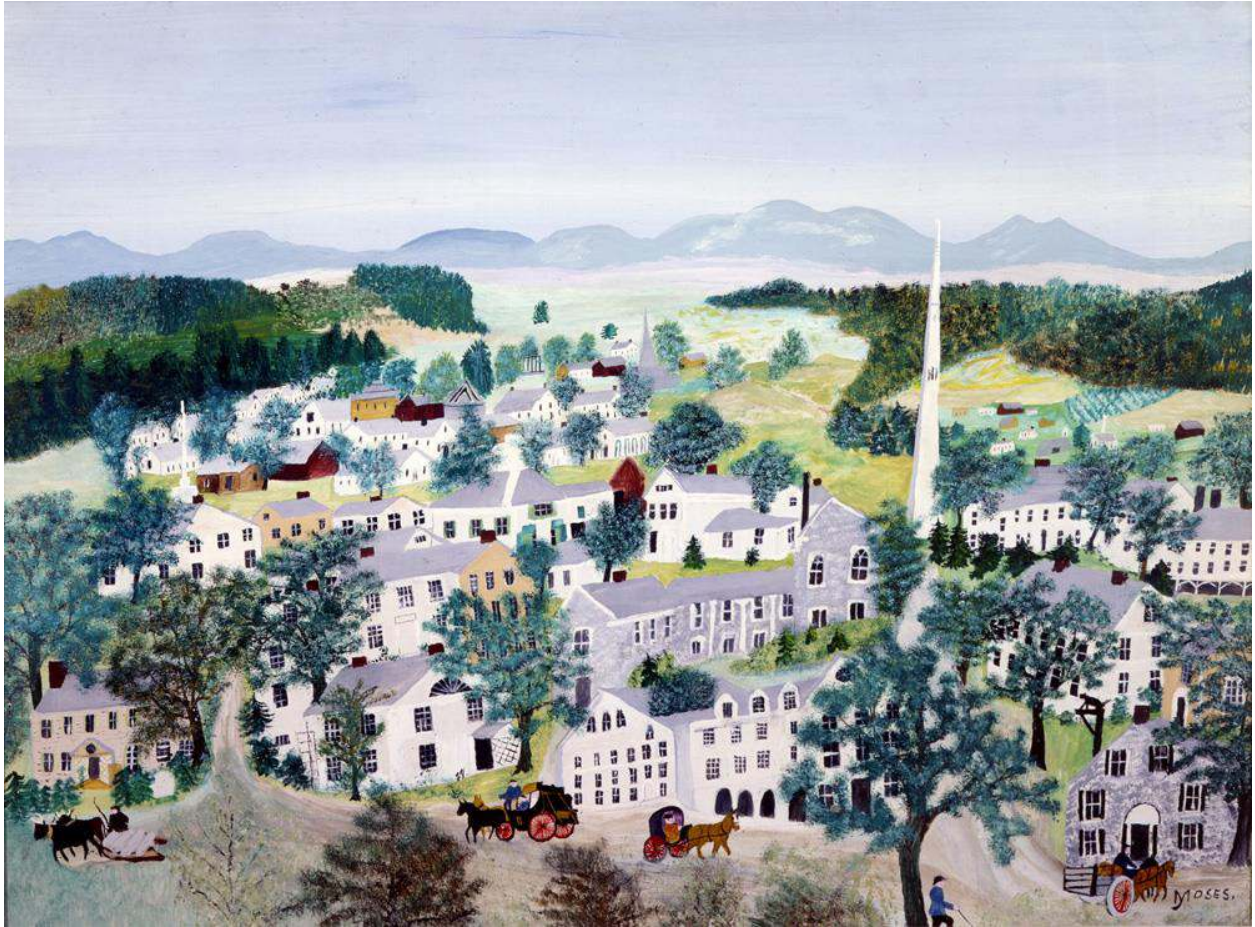
Oil on Wood

What sorts of little stories do you see in this composition?



"Grandma Moses, Christmas, 1958, oil and tempera on pressed wood, 16-1/8 x 20-1/8 in. (41 x 51.1 cm)

(Smithsonian American Art Museum, © Grandma Moses Properties, Gift of Charles Nelson Brower in memory of Charles H. and Elizabeth N. Brower, 2015.49



[Bennington, 1953](#)

Anna Mary Robertson "Grandma" Moses (1880-1961)

Oil on pressed board

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Bennington MuseumJay

Ideas to Go Deeper at Home :

Interview: Grandma Moses’s works appealed to many because they showed a way of life which had vanished due to the inventions of trains, cars, telephones, and other inventions. Try to make a “Grandma Moses” yourself. Interview a parent, grandparent or other older person (with your parent’s permission) and ask them about how their childhood was different from today. Perhaps ask:

- “What did you do with your friends during the summer? How did you play outside in winter?”
- “How did you celebrate Christmas as a kid? How did you celebrate your birthday?”
- “What did your room look like when you were a kid?”
- “Did you take a special vacation or trip? What do you remember?”
- “Do you remember getting your first television or radio? Or first computer? What was life like before then? Or, what were your favorite things to watch/do with that new device?”

Compare and Contrast:

Even though he was a trained artist, Peter Bruegel the Elder’s (ca. 1525 – 1569; Netherlands) work reminds some people of Grandma Moses’s work. Look at some of Peter Bruegel’s work, like:

- Census at Bethlehem (1566)
- Hunters in the Snow (1565)
- The Harvesters (1565)

What do you think? Are there similarities?

Books:

- Meet the World’s Great Artists: Grandma Moses by Mike Venezia
- Grandma Moses Written and Illustrated by Alexandra Wallner

Field Trip:

If you live near one of these institutions, see if you can see a Grandma Moses painting:

- Bennington Museum in [Bennington, Vermont](#), holds the largest public collection of Moses's paintings^{[26][27]}
- [Brooklyn Museum](#), New York City^[28]
- [Figge Art Museum](#), Davenport, Iowa^[29]
- [Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden](#), Washington D.C.^[30]
- [Lauren Rogers Museum of Art](#), Laurel, Mississippi^[31]
- [Maier Museum of Art at Randolph-Macon Woman's College](#), Virginia^[32]
- [Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester](#), New York^[33]
- [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#), New York City^[34]
- [National Museum of Women in the Arts](#), Washington D.C.^[35]
- [The Phillips Collection](#), Washington D.C.^[36]
- [Phoenix Art Museum](#), Arizona^[citation needed]
- [Smithsonian American Art Museum](#)^[37]
- [University of Iowa Museum of Art](#), Iowa City^[38]



Census at Bethlehem (1566)

Peter Brueghel the Elder (1525 – 1569)

Oil on Board

Royal Museums of Fine Art, Brussels, Belgium



Hunters in the Snow 1565

Peter Brueghel the Elder (1525-1569)

Oil On Wood

Kunsthistorisches Museums



The Harvesters 1565

Peter Brueghel the Elder (1525-1569)

Oil on Panel

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY, USA