Tell a Story!

Rockwell was a master of adding props or details to the backgrounds of his paintings to tell a larger story. As you draw the person reading in the rocking chair, think about what you could add to “tell a story.” Try asking yourself (or your class) questions like these:

* Is the person reading inside or outside?
* If outside:
* Where is he or she? On a porch? Under a tree in the lawn? At a cabin? On the beach?
* What is the weather?
* What is happening in the world behind them?
* Are they seeing-or missing-something because they are reading outside?
* If inside:
  + Are they in a library? A Kitchen? A living room? Their bedroom? In front of a window? What sort of things might be happening in the same room they are in?
* Is there anyone else around?
* Is something happening, or about to happen? Is someone, (child, pet, adult) about to knock over, drop, or break something? Eggs? A vase? A toy? Is something (the cup of water perhaps, or a cup of hot tea or coffee!) about to fall over for some reason?
* Is something happening the reader doesn’t know about because they are engrossed in their paper or book? Are they ignoring it deliberately?
* Is dinner -or something else-boiling over or burning because they are lost in their reading? [[1]](#footnote-1)
* Is a child painting on the walls, or doing something naughty they don’t yet see?
* Is the reader reading a scary book while a storm rages outside? Are they reading a funny book instead to counter the storm?
* Can we see what the reader is seeing in his or her head? (This would be similar to Rockwell’s *‘The Daydreaming Bookkeeper’*, where we see the subject’s daydream)

See what different details your class adds to tell different types of stories using the same central idea!

1. That scenario reminds me of the old tale of Alfred the Great and the burning cakes. According to the story, Alfred the Great, his army broken and scattered by the Danes (Vikings), had to flee, each man running for his own life. Ragged, cold, and hungry, Alfred, alone, stumbled upon a poor woodcutter’s cottage and begged for food and a place to sleep for the night. The woodcutter’s wife, unknowing this shivering man was the king, took pity on him, and asked him to watch the cakes (bread) she was baking on the hot hearth while he warmed himself. She then left the cottage to milk the cows to get dinner ready that much faster. Preoccupied with his losses, how he could re-group and take his kingdom back, Alfred soon became lost in his own thoughts. When the wife returned, the cakes were smoking and blackened on the side which faced the fire. Furious that this man had indeed watched her cakes until he was watching them burn, she smacked him across the head and scolded him for destroying everyone’s dinner because he wasn’t paying attention. By all accounts, King Alfred took the scolding as well-deserved, flipped the bread (so it could cook evenly) and carefully watched until the other side was perfect. Within days, rested and nourished by the woodcutter’s family, Alfred gathered his remaining men, and from that point forward, was victorious over the Danes. Today, this tale is considered more myth than fact, but still, proof that sometimes, we can get so lost in something, we can forget about other important-and more immediate!-matters. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)