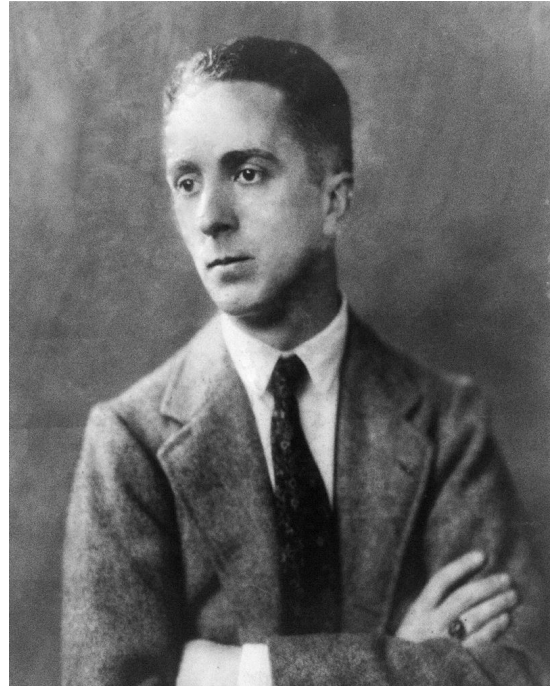


Norman Perceval Rockwell

American Illustrator
Modern Period of Arts

Born: 3 February 1894, New York City, New York
Died: 8 November 1978, Stockbridge, Massachusetts
Active: 1912 – 1970s

Norman Rockwell was the younger of two brothers. His older brother, Jarvis Jr. was an “A” student and athlete. Norman, skinny, gangly, and awkward, struggled to get passing grades. The one thing he did love was drawing, and knew, from the time he was a child, he wanted to be an artist, specifically, create covers for the Saturday Evening Post Magazine. One of the Post’s top illustrators, J.C. Leyendecker, lived in Rockwell’s hometown of New Rochelle, and Rockwell used to study everything about Leyendecker’s work: composition, color...even stalked him around town and mimicked his walk and manners!



Norman Rockwell

At 16, Rockwell made the decision to leave high school and enroll in an art academy. The focus on art paid off: by 19, Rockwell was busy with commissions for the Boy Scouts and commercials and in 1916, when he was 22, he painted his first cover for the Saturday Evening Post. (He would go on to paint 321 covers, one less than Leyendecker’s 322).

Rockwell painted the world, not as it was, “but as I would like it to be.” He also thought of himself, not as a “fine arts painter,” but rather, a storyteller. His paintings included a number of details which help flesh out the “story” that he told. In fact, Rockwell said of his Saturday Evening Post Covers: “*Some have been good, some have been bad, and some just indifferent...often the ones I have liked best have been liked least by the readers...one I like least has found favor. This is because the artists is often interested in the problems of composition, tone, and color, while the public is primarily interested in the story told. Which is as it should be.*”

Rockwell was a stickler for details: when he was commissioned to illustrate “Tom Sawyer” and “Huckleberry Finn” by Mark Twain, he traveled to Hannibal, Missouri (the setting of those books) to research the locations Twain mentioned. When commissioned to illustrate “Little Women,” he went to Louisa May Alcott’s home. The illustrations that appeared were set in these locations.

Personally, Rockwell’s workaholic tendencies (he sometimes worked more than 12 hours a day and rarely took a day off) were rough on his family. Sometimes, the best way for his sons to talk to their father was to offer to model for him in the studio. Like many of the fathers in his paintings, Rockwell was not openly affectionate, but he supported his sons in their chosen paths...and each one ended up becoming a creative in different fields: his oldest, Jarvis, became an artist and toy collector; the middle, Thomas, an author (most famous work: “How to Eat Fried Worms”); the youngest, Peter, became an acclaimed sculptor working in Italy. Even Rockwell’s nephew Richard became a comic book artist after some training from “Uncle Norman.”

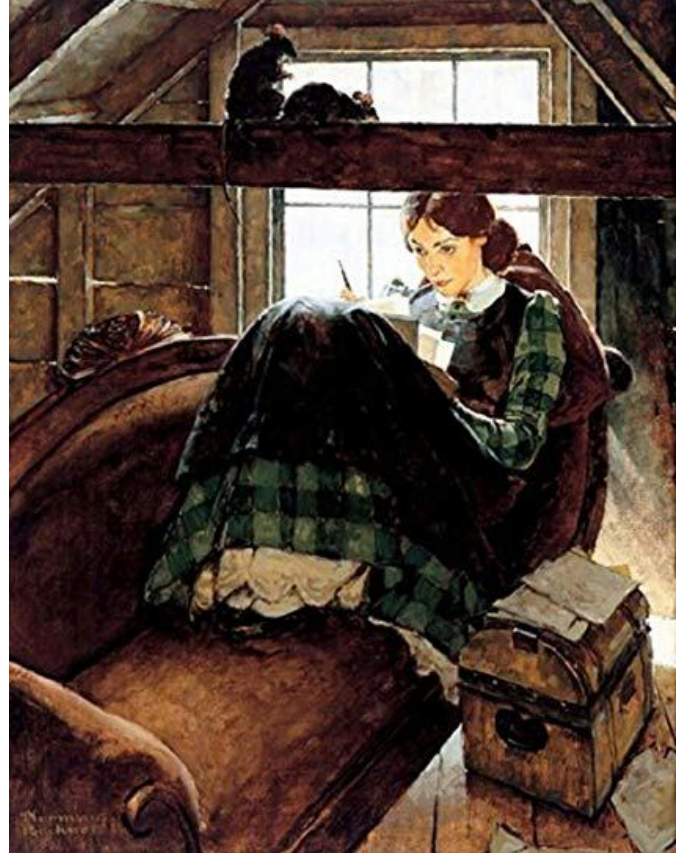
Illustration:

(n.) A picture, painting, or other image, often specifically created to pair with a publication, text, or presentation. Illustrations are used to make difficult concepts clear, enhance the enjoyment of a story, or otherwise provide an example to support a claim.

In art, an illustration is sometimes treated differently from “fine art”. “Fine art” is often defined as an artistic object created primarily to be enjoyed for its imaginative or aesthetic qualities, (AKA: it’s creative and pretty) and is judged based on its technical skill (how hard it was to create) and how it makes the viewer feel (beauty is still in the eye of the beholder)

Illustration must do something more: it is created to support another work, to make an idea more clear, vibrant, or interesting than either text or image could have done alone. That being said, many illustrations can stand as beautiful images on their own.

In addition to authors and children’s books, archaeologists, architects, doctors and medical teachers, scientists, fashion designers, theater and movie designers, all use illustration in their work, presentations, and studies. Some of these fields form specialized illustration disciplines, like “archaeological illustrators”, “botanical illustrators”, “medical illustrators”, “scientific illustrators” and “technical illustrators”.



Rockwell's illustration of “Jo Seated on the Old Sofa” from “Little Women” by Louisa May Alcott...what clues do you see in this painting what can tell you something about Jo or where she is?

Illustrator:

(n) A person who creates art specifically to pair with another (often written) work.

Illustration Etymology

Illustration: (n) From the Latin word: “*illustrare*”, meaning “to light up, make light, illuminate”. The word appears in English around the 1520s. By the 1610s, it meant, “to provide examples [to make a concept clear]”.

Illustrator: (n) From the Latin, “*illustrator*” meaning, “an enlightener” or “One Who Enlightens”. The meaning “one who draws” comes from the 1680s.

Quotes from Norman Rockwell:

The Art Critic; 1955

“Some people have been kind enough to call me a artist. I’ve always called myself an illustrator. I’m not sure what the difference is. All I know is that whatever type of work I do, I try to give it my very best. Art has been my life.”



“It is we who become tired when we cease to be curious and appreciative. We find it is not a new scene which is needed, but a new viewpoint.”

“Stuck Inside” (1922)



“If a Picture wasn’t going very well, I’d put a puppy in it” -Norman Rockwell

What clues did Rockwell put in this painting to indicate where the boy is? What clues do we have about where (or what) he’d rather be doing? What story was Rockwell trying to tell?

Christmas Homecoming; (1948)



This is an example of a painting where Rockwell used a number of his friends and family (and himself!) as models. His wife is hugging his oldest son in the center, his middle child, Thomas, is in the plaid shirt to their left, and Grandma Moses is to the left of him. The youngest son, wearing glasses, is to the left of Grandma Moses.

Grandma Moses and Rockwell ended up being friends, even though they did not meet until after her art career started to build. When they met, she was 78, he was 56, but he already had almost 40 years' experience as a professional artist. He liked her respect for the profession. Whenever she brought people to meet Rockwell, she insisted they stay only a couple of minutes, for Rockwell was a busy man.

Freedom from Fear (1943)



One of Rockwell's most famous works was "The Four Freedoms." Created in 1943 as illustrations of President Franklin Roosevelt's January 1941 "Four Freedoms" speech. The Four Freedoms were the Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear, which Roosevelt believed were universal human rights which should be protected. These four paintings toured in 1943, raising over \$132 million dollars for the war effort from 1.2 million people who came to see them.

Triple Self-Portrait (1960)



This Triple-portrait was commissioned to front the first of eight excerpts of Rockwell's upcoming autobiography (ghost-written by his author son Thomas). Some of the parts of his "studio" have been exaggerated-Rockwell worked in a backed chair and had a glass table for a palette, and was tidy for an artist (no scattered brushes and paint tubes). But other parts of this portrait ring true-the helmet perched on top of his easel was part of the studio décor. The charcoal sketches Rockwell made for the "self-portrait" are tacked to the left side of the canvas, while inspiration ideas are tacked to the right: self-portraits of Albrecht Durer (1471 - 1528), Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606 - 1669) Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890). The smoke spiraling out of the brass bucket references reality: if cigarette or pipe ash fell into paint rags, the bucket would occasionally catch on fire.

Rosie the Riveter (1943)



During WWII, 19 million women entered the workforce in farms and factories to take “men’s jobs” on behalf of the war effort (the men were away at the warfront). In 1942, songwriters John Jacob Loeb and Redd Evans wrote “Rosie the Riveter” about a woman on an assembly line in the war effort, and the name stuck. Multiple musicians covered the tune and several artists created a visual “Rosie.” This one was Rockwell’s.

You see her at lunch, her hands holding her sandwiches and lunch pail while she cradles her rivet gun on her lap. In a final twist, her booted foot sits on a battered copy of Hitler’s “Mein Kampf.” The buttons she wears across her coveralls tell part of her story too: from left to right they are a Red Cross Volunteer button (she is volunteering free time towards the war effort), a Blue Star Pin (she has a brother or fiancé away at war), a V for

Victory Badge (a slogan British Prime Minister Winston Churchill inspired, and which was embraced across the Allies during WWII), and two bronze medals, likely celebrating Rosie’s blood and money donations to the war effort. Below them are the Army-Navy Production E Award, given to only 5% of the 85,000 companies making war materials—Rosie and her co-workers are making the best of the best for the war! The largest button is her work ID.

Rockwell based Rosie’s posture on the Michelangelo’s Prophet Isaiah from the Sistine Chapel Ceiling (see picture to the right). His model, beyond Isaiah, was 19-year-old telephone operator Mary Doyle, who posed for photos...after the cover was published, Rockwell called to personally apologize for “beefing” up Mary’s physique for this work, as Miss Doyle was quite petite!



How Rockwell Worked

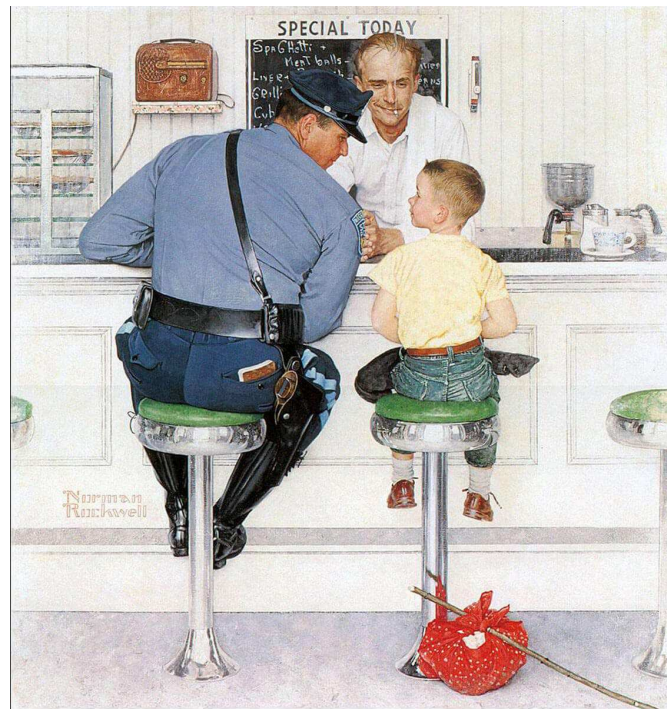
Despite the common idea that most artists draw out of their head, the truth is, many instead draw from life, models, and now, photography (and Google Image Search!).

During the Renaissance, artists would hire models who had to remain still for long periods of time. This continued for many years, but with the advent of photography, artists could, instead, photograph scenes for reference photos later.

When Rockwell was commissioned to create a new painting, he would often hire his neighbors, family, and friends to pose for photos which he would use for references later. The photos allowed him to try different compositions, types of lighting, even different models or combinations of people. Most of the time, he would direct over 100 photos per painting composition. This also allowed the photographer to capture those split-second facial expressions Rockwell became famous for—expressions impossible to hold for a traditional painting session.

Look at these paintings and some of the reference photos which inspired them. What did Rockwell keep, and what did he change? What details tell a fuller story than the central image alone?

The Runaway (1958)



In this painting, Massachusetts State Trooper, Staff Sgt. Richard J. Clemens Jr, posed with local 8-year-old boy Ed Locke. Locke posed for Rockwell again that year, for a painting called “Before the Shot”, where a little boy, preparing to get a shot at his doctor’s office, peers closely at his doctor’s diploma, as though dubious of the doctor’s degree. After receiving permission from his boss, Staff Sgt. Clemens posed in both his summer and winter uniforms, so Rockwell could decide which season he preferred to set the stage in. This painting was an immediate hit, and Sgt. Clemens became the most recognizable faces in the Massachusetts police force thereafter.

“New Kids in the Neighborhood” (1967)



As America became more celebrity-focused in the 1960s, the Saturday Evening Post asked Rockwell to do more celebrity portraits and fewer American scenes, which Rockwell detested. Eventually, he parted ways with the Post after 321 covers. Another Magazine, “The Look,” approached Rockwell and allowed him to do pictures that interested Rockwell-including, by the 1960s, focusing on the Civil Rights Movement. This painting was based on several cobbled-together photographs, which show Rockwell tried different combinations of children, acoutraments, and even furniture and moving men and dog. Some photos show three boys, another two boys. Even the moving man got a photoshoot, holding different pices of furniture in different ways, so Rockwell could select the “right one.” In the dog’s case, that’s Rockwell himself holding the dog while the trainer gets the puppy’s attention.

The Soda Jerk (The Soda Shop) 1953



This spread shows how Rockwell would sometimes take photos of separate people and “stitch” the photos together later, before making his painting. In this case, we can see how most of the painting will look, even though none of the models are actually together. In this case, only the jealous boy sipping a milkshake is at a “diner”...the soda jerk and the girl are actually on a card table.



Sometimes, Rockwell would even “cheat” during the photoshoots. Girls in pigtails who needed the breeze blowing back their braids would be photographed with someone holding their braid out behind them, caught in a “breeze.” If a person needed to be seen “walking” in a painting, Rockwell would ask them to balance on slats of wood to adjust the angle of their feet correctly. (see model on the right, posing for *The Problem We All Live With*; 1963)

If a crowd scene was called for, people would be photographed individually and Rockwell would piece them back together on canvas. Look at the photo on the left-recognize what painting in this packet this is from?



Ideas to go Deeper at Home:

Norman Rockwell created everyday scenes which people might miss during their day-to-day lives. He tried to show the beauty in these “ordinary” scenes. Stop during your day and think about an ordinary scene and what makes it extraordinary. (you can draw it if you like, that’s up to you!) Simple scenes like:

- A child or adult reading or reading together, or surrounded by books. (the wonder of reading, the miracle of knowledge in our homes. After all, for thousands of years, so few had such knowledge at their finger tips...)
- A pet sleeping in the sunshine or in front of a roaring fire. (the beauty of simple pleasures, like the warm sunshine-especially if you are in a cold-weather area at the moment!)
- Children playing together, indoors or out
- Eating dinner as a family
- Gathering to worship together openly.

These are just a few ideas. You will likely have more-especially if you keep it up. Rockwell’s world wasn’t so cheery as his paintings showed: he lived through two world wars and a depression. He and his first wife divorced, his second wife died, his career took twists and turns. But through it all, Rockwell *chose* to see the beauty in the ordinary.

Compare and Contrast

Look at Rockwell’s work on wikiart.org. Then look at J.C. Leyendecker’s work. Do you think there are similarities? Leyendecker was America’s most popular illustrator prior to Rockwell’s rise. There’s a great article on both men: “*Norman Rockwell and his Mentor, J.C. Leyendecker*” on the americanillustrators.com website. (under “*Traveling Exhibitions*”).

Books & Online Galleries:

- “*Meet the World’s Great Artists: Norman Rockwell*” by Mike Venezia
- “*Norman Rockwell: Storyteller with a Brush*” by Beverly Gheman (a longer book with more of his life story. Better for older Foundations kids or kids who want a lot more information or want to see more of Rockwell’s work.)
- <http://totallyhistory.com/norman-rockwell-paintings/> & <https://www.wikiart.org/en/norman-rockwell>

Field Trip:

The following museums and institutions have some of Rockwell’s art:

- Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge, Stockbridge, Massachusetts (the largest single collection of Rockwell’s work, plus a number of articles and Rockwell works.)
<https://www.nrm.org/>
- National Scouting Museum, Irving, Texas, (Near Dallas)
- Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas
- Delaware Museum of Art, Wilmington, Delaware
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York