

Teaching Tips with Rockwell

Rockwell's strength lay in telling a story in a single image, and often, the longer you look, the more details you can see which tell you something more about the story or the person in it.

That being said, looking at a blank sheet of paper and being told, "Draw like Rockwell!" or "Draw a story!" can be really intimidating. If this happens, here's a couple ideas and questions to break the ice.

Ideas to help bring Rockwell's work to life:

Plan A

Ask someone to pose, and let your kids draw. Make sure this is a comfortable pose, for example, someone sitting in a chair or rocking chair, someone sleeping on a surface, someone looking at a book (or, since it's the 21st century, a tablet or phone.) Let the kids draw this model for a few minutes. Tell them, we're not looking for perfection, in fact, we don't want many details yet. Don't focus too much on the colors or the clothes the model is wearing, just draw the general idea of the person's form (for an idea of what you're looking for, look at the Plan B templates in this packet. Just get the general idea down fairly quickly.

Now, think of a story you could tell.

- What if the rocking chair person was in outer space? What could you draw around them to show that?
- What if they were someone from history or your favorite book?
- What if they had lots of cats and were trying not to rock on their tails?
- What if they were hiding from her children or perhaps something scary,?
- What if they are reading to their children, or their cats, or lots of animals crowded all around them?
- What if they were in the mountains?
- By the seashore?
- Locked away in a tower like Rapunzel?

Show how, with a few questions we can discover a lot of "twists" you could add to this "Rocking chair figure" to tell completely different stories just by dressing the "scene" around them differently.

Brainstorm some ideas together.

NOW they can add details, change the clothes of the model (which was why you didn't want to add them earlier), add a background. Add anything that tells the story-food, toys, a window you can see out of...anything you like. Ask the kids to tell the story behind their "Rockwell."

Plan B:

Sometimes, due to time restraints or anxiety levels, drawing the initial model might be difficult. If so, included here are two pseudo-Rockwell templates which a student can add to relatively quickly, to tell a story.

- 1.) First, hide the original Rockwell paintings, show them only at the end if you want to.
- 2.) Hand out the template, and ask some questions to get their imaginative juices going.

In “The Connoisseur” template, consider questions like:

- Who is this person?
- what might they be holding behind their back?
- What are they looking at? Are they looking in somewhere, or looking out somewhere, or looking at a picture on a wall?
- What do they see?
- Are they rich or poor, and how could you show that?
- Is there anyone around them?
- How are they dressed—could you “redecorate” our model to change their appearance to something unusual?
- Where are they? In the real world, or a favorite book, or in the future?
- What could you add or color on this person to tell a story about who they are and what they are seeing?

After the kids are done, you could, if you wanted, show them the “real” Connoisseur painting by Rockwell and ask them what story did they see Rockwell tell? What story did they get to tell?

For the “Boy Reading an Adventure Story” template, consider asking these questions or ones of your own:

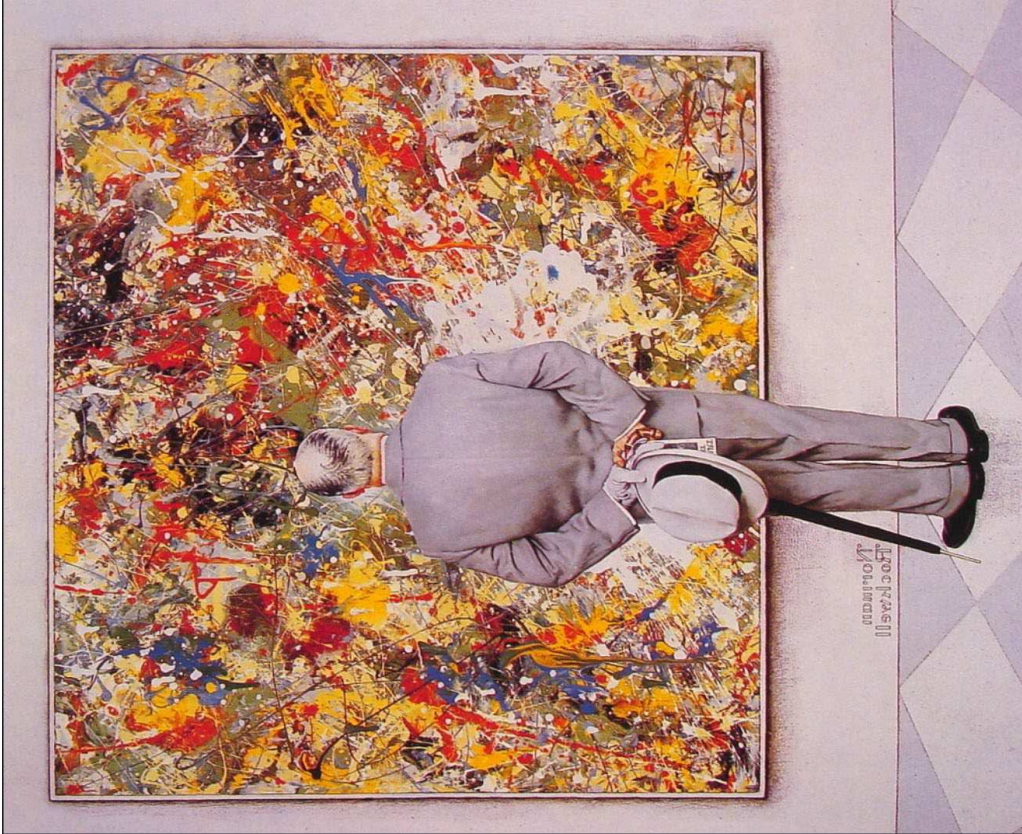
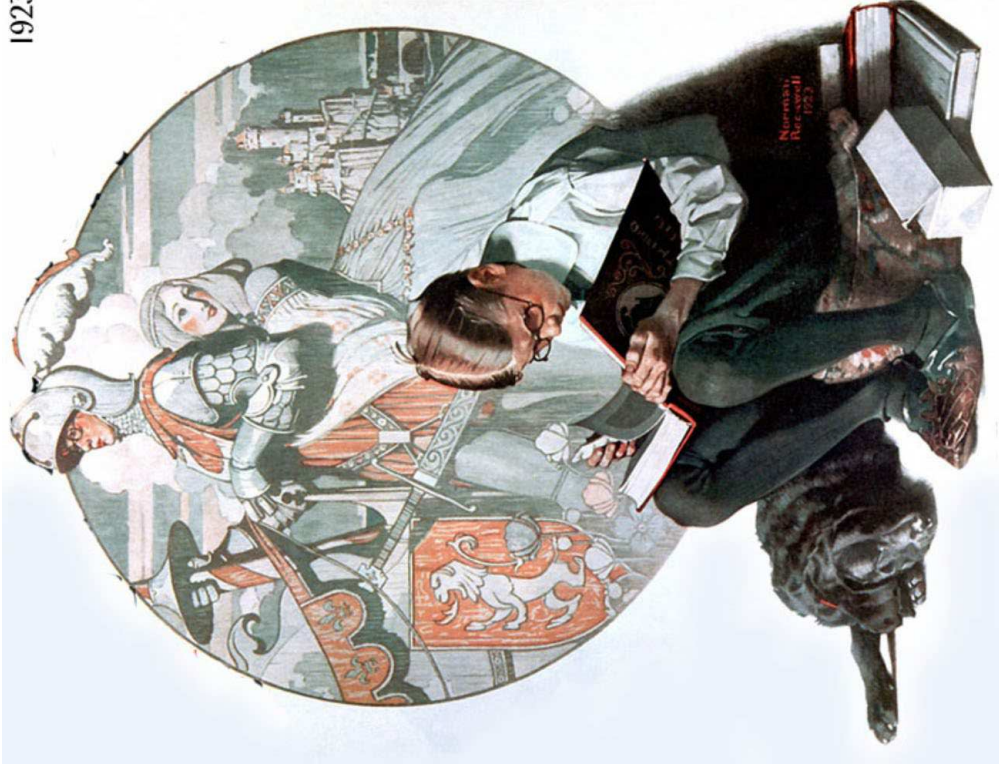
- Who is this?
- What are they looking at? (Answers other than “book” are allowed!)
- Where are they?
- What is this person sitting on? A stool, the ground, what?
- See that big circle behind the person...if you could see that they’re seeing in their imagination right now, what might that be?
- Or, could that circle be a big window somewhere, or a piece of art? What might be seen through there?
- Is anyone, or anything, or any animals with them?
- How are they dressed? What color is their hair?
- Is something about to happen to the person on the page? Is it good, or bad, or something else?

Like “Connoisseur,” let a little bit of conversation start, then give them leave to decorate their template to tell their story.

When they’re done, if you want, show the original “Boy Reading an Adventure Story” and ask them to tell the stories behind their “Rockwells”. Celebrate the creativity of the different stories told even by using a similar starting point.

After all, many stories start with a type of “Once Upon a Time...” but from there, things can grow very different very quickly.

1923



A Boy Reading an Adventure Story, 1923

The Connoisseur, 1962

