

A New Viewpoint

Rockwell Lesson Plans for Secondary Students

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A New Viewpoint

“Commonplaces are never tiresome. It is we who become tired when we cease to be curious or appreciative...[We] find that it is not a new scene which is needed, but a new viewpoint.”

-Norman Rockwell

GRADE LEVEL

This project is designed for students in grades 7-12.

TOPIC

To consider Norman Rockwell’s imagery as a means of helping students reconsider their familiar cultural and community contexts.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will develop visual literacy skills by carefully observing and analyzing Norman Rockwell’s representation of the “commonplace.”
- Students will reevaluate their own communities by giving attention to details they have overlooked.
- Students will create photo collages or multi media presentations that focus on details of their communities.

MATERIALS

- Postcard or print versions of Norman Rockwell images.
- Disposable cameras (one for each student, if possible).
- Large poster board for mounting images or computer access with scanning capabilities.

TIME

Two 45-minute class periods are needed for presentation of project. Students will need additional time to complete their work.

PLAN

- I. ***Observing Rockwell*** One of the essential features in Norman Rockwell’s painting is his use of commonplace details as a means of creating a distinct sense of a place. His representations of small town America are characterized by a careful attention to artifacts that imbue his imagery with a sense of authenticity and location. Rockwell once said, “I showed the America I knew and observed to others who might not have noticed.”

Begin this lesson by breaking the class into small groups and distributing a Rockwell image to each. Have the students identify the “location” of the image and generate a list of all the details they observe in the painting. For each of the important elements, ask them to interpret the possible meaning of the detail, to suggest *what information it gives about the place*. Challenge them to move beyond the most obvious elements to examine less apparent issues of composition:

1. How are the details arranged? What is emphasized? Where does your attention fall?
2. What perspective does Rockwell take on the subjects? Where are you placed as a viewer? Why would he construct the image in this way?

3. What are the dominant colors and tones? What sort of light does the image capture?
4. How does Rockwell want you to feel about this place? How is this accomplished?

Have each group share a selection of their findings, emphasizing their responses to Question #4. Make a list of the common techniques that Rockwell used to impart a sense of place. Discuss why Rockwell might have chosen these details as symbols of small town America: *How did his decision to use familiar details make his representations of ordinary places seem special, important, or unique?* Rockwell's work poses important questions: *How does representing an ordinary place or idea cause people to think of it differently? Why is it valuable to observe a place closely, with a careful attention to detail? What do we understand about a place when we do this?*

To better understand this idea, have students silently observe the classroom for three minutes. Then ask them to individually select five details within the space that could be easily overlooked. For each of these details, have students speculate as to how they would look to an outsider. *What would an outsider learn about this place from each detail you have listed?* Encourage them to identify unlikely or obscure details. Discuss their findings, emphasizing again the idea that commonplace details are a powerful means of evoking or representing a place.

Return briefly to the Rockwell images and pose the questions: *Have you ever been someplace like this before? How did it compare to the Rockwell images? How are these hometown images different from the place you live? If you were going to represent your most familiar place, what would you show?*

- II. **Observing Environment** As homework, asks students to decide on a familiar place they want to represent and celebrate. Challenge them to choose a place of personal significance. Have them go to this place and spend 10 minutes observing important and easily overlooked details. Then ask them to select 10 of the details they feel best represent or evoke a sense of the place. Make sure they give this a good deal of thought, as they will have to defend or explain their choices.

The next day, have each student name their place and one detail before giving them the camera. Encourage them to frame their photos carefully, composing their representations as deliberately as Rockwell did. If possible, have each student take a full roll to ensure the quality of her/his selection options.

Once the photos are developed, have students select their five best images. For each image, ask students to write a brief anecdotal explanation of the significance of the detail: *Why is this detail important for evoking a sense of this place?* Encourage them to explore varied forms of writing: memoir, poem, etc. Place the images together with their text on posterboard, or format them as a multimedia presentation with student voices as narration.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Many contemporary American poets address the concept of *place* and the experiences, emotions, events, etc. that invest that place with meaning. Through language and metaphor, writers like Robert Pinsky, Elizabeth Bishop, Rita Dove, Robert Hass, Richard Wilbur, Li Young-Lee, and Stanley Kunitz (there are countless others) lend often overlooked places a special significance. As a related activity to the photography described in the above plan, have your students write poems that celebrate their “common-place” through language. Help them to create images that evoke this place through a variety of senses, through memory, and through historical references or emotion. Working from discussions of contemporary poetry, challenge students to write work that addresses these questions: *Why and how are your familiar places invested with meaning? What details could you use to evoke a sense of that place? How will you represent these details to communicate their importance?*

The Getty Foundation in Los Angeles has organized a project called “Landmarks,” which directly engages students in a reconsideration of their most familiar contexts. An international project

designed for students aged 9-18, “Landmarks” gives children the opportunity to represent their communities through writing and photography. The elements that make a *place* worthy of the title *landmark* are explored and become a means of celebrating the people, cultural values, and locations that inform each child’s sense of identity. To learn more about this extraordinary project, visit the Getty website:

<http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Landmarks/index.html>

and the “Landmarks” site at: <http://www.landmarkscentral.org/>

What Makes Good History?

GRADE LEVEL

This lesson is designed for students in grades 9 - 12.

TOPIC

The value or significance of Norman Rockwell's representations of the Civil Rights movement as sources of historical information.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will gain an understanding of the events represented in *The Problem We All Live With*.
- Students will develop critical thinking skills by analyzing different sources of visual information.
- Students will reflect on the subjective nature of historical information.

MATERIALS

- Postcard of *The Problem We All Live With*
- Access to the Internet.
- Books concerning the Civil Rights movement, specifically school desegregation in New Orleans and the "Freedom Summer" of 1964. (See also Robert Coles's *The Story of Ruby Bridges*)

TIME

Approximately two to three 45-minute class sessions are needed for discussion of concepts and explanation of the assignment.

PLAN

- I. **Research** Begin this lesson by assembling information about the events portrayed in the paintings: the desegregation of public schools in New Orleans in 1960. The presentation of this information can take many forms, but independent inquiry will yield the sort of divergent accounts of the event that make the lesson interesting. In small groups, have the students research the events, compiling the information into brief written explanations of the historical "facts." This quick research should provide sufficient contextual information for analyzing the images.

Websites with information on desegregation in New Orleans:

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/race_relations/jan-june97/bridges_2-18.html

<http://www.uno.edu/~drif/1997/feb6/ruby.html>

<http://www.conncoll.edu/Spiff/wia/ruby/ruby1.html>

<http://www.worldafricannet.com/html/rubybridge.html>

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1982/3/82.03.06.x.html#b>

<http://www.tulane.edu/~so-inst/dividedindex.html>

Have each group share their account of the historical event, highlighting and discussing discrepancies or differences in the information the students found.

- II. **Image Critic** Having established the historical context, turn attention to the Norman Rockwell images *The Problem We All Live With*. Working again in small groups, have students critique the images as representations of these historical events. Possible guiding questions include:

1. Does this painting match what you know about the event?
2. Do you think this painting is trying to accurately represent the event, or simply alluding to it? What sort of "true" information is included? What is left out?
3. What, if anything, makes the painting realistic? What, if anything, appears to be manipulated?
4. What are important details in Rockwell's particular representation of the event? Why do these things stand out? What is Rockwell trying to emphasize?

5. Is Rockwell representing or interpreting the event? What is the difference?
6. Do you think this image is a valuable source of information about the event? Why or why not?

Share and debate the results of these discussions. As much as possible, draw attention to the paradox of “representing” an historical event. Try to help the class identify Rockwell’s *interpretation* of the event as implicit in his representation. Ask the class what makes one source of visual information more accurate than another. For example: *How would looking at a photograph of this event be different? Why do we consider a photograph more historically accurate than a painting?*

III. **Contrast** As a point of contrast, show the sequences from the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary series that provide information of the same events that Rockwell represents. (Although *Fighting Back* footage emphasizes desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, the parallels to New Orleans will be easy to establish. Have students focus attention on the historical film footage included in each sequence. Then discuss how these differ from Rockwell’s representations of the same events. Possible guiding questions include:

1. Do you think these video clips accurately represent the historical event?
2. What details do they show? What details are left out?
3. Is there any bias in the presentation of the event? Why might the creators of the film represent the event in this manner?
4. Does this film present **fact** or interpretation of the event? Defend your response.
5. How does the video clip differ from the Rockwell image? Is it in any way similar?
6. How might you interpret the Rockwell image differently now that you have seen this video?
7. Is any one visual medium more reliable than another as a source of historical information? How are these different forms incomplete?

IV. **Analysis** To assess understanding, have the students select one of the Rockwell images and critique it as a source of information in essay form. As part of the assignment, students should analyze the focus and composition of Rockwell’s image, identify its strengths and weaknesses as a representation of the event, and suggest how his creative decision making influences the viewer’s understanding.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Analysis of Rockwell’s images could serve as a powerful starting point for a research project on the Civil Rights movement that emphasizes visual information. For instance, another Rockwell image that deals with the Civil Rights movement is *Murder in Mississippi*. This image focuses on the murders of Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman, three civil rights workers who campaigned for equitable voter education in Mississippi. Suggested supplementary materials for a lesson plan based on this image include from the *Eyes on the Prize* (1986) videotapes series, Vol. 2 (*Fighting Back*) and Vol. 5 (*Mississippi: Is This America?*) and two websites: <http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/mississippi.html> and <http://unitycoalition.org/historic.html>. Have students prepare a documentary presentation, giving attention to diversity of sources and media, accuracy of information, and analysis of the persuasiveness of materials. How will this event be “re”presented?

Consider a screening of *Mississippi Burning*, directed by Alan Parker (1988), which represents the same event portrayed in Rockwell’s painting. Although Parker’s film is suited only for older students (as it is rated R), seeing this film would allow your class to extend their inquiry of historical representation into another medium.

Students could research, investigate, and discuss other artists who represent events in the Civil Rights Movement, relating their comments to Rockwell’s technique. Examples of artists who have dealt with the Civil Rights Movement include Carrie Mae Weems, Roy De Caravara, Spike Lee, and Alfredo Jaar (whose work can be found in the High Museum of Art’s permanent

collection). How do these representations inform or influence our understanding of the event? How do they contrast with Rockwell's vision of the time period?

Framing a Scene

GRADE LEVEL

This project is designed for students in grades 8-12.

TOPIC

To highlight the importance of perspective and framing in certain Norman Rockwell imagery.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will analyze the construction of depth and distance in selected Norman Rockwell paintings.
- Students will create a series of drawings that experiment with point of view and perspective.

MATERIALS

- Mini-posters of *Freedom from Want* and *Saying Grace*, and (from the Family Guide), *Shuffleton's Barbershop*.
- Poster board or mat board for "viewfinders."
- Sample photographs for discussion (selections from magazines or photography collections-- see *The Photo Book* by Ian Jeffery, Phaidon Press, 1997.)
- Charcoal and paper.
- Still life materials. (Exaggerated lighting of the objects, if possible, will be helpful.)

TIME

One 45-minute period is needed for the presentation of the project and planning. Students will need additional time to complete their work.

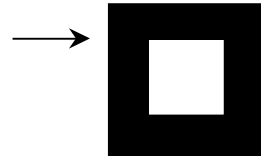
PLAN

I. **Framing Rockwell** Begin by breaking class into small groups. Give each group a reproduction of *Shuffleton's Barbershop*, *Freedom from Want*, or *Saying Grace*. Ask the students to identify and record the ways in which the image is **framed**, how the composition of the image draws attention to a central focus point. Possible discussion questions include:

1. What do you think is the most important element in this painting? List evidence to support your claim.
2. Are there any important lines in the image? Where do they point?
3. Is light used to highlight anything? Is contrast important?
4. Where are the subjects *looking*? How does this draw *your* gaze to a particular part of the image?
5. How are depth and perspective important in the painting? What appears around the edge of the image, closest in terms of proximity? What is at the center, as you move "into" the piece?
6. What point of view are you as the viewer given? What is your "place" in the picture? How does your "placement" affect your relation to the piece? How are you drawn in?

Discuss the students' findings, constantly emphasizing the importance of framing within Rockwell's paintings. Explain Rockwell's painting process, highlighting how photography played an important role in the construction of his imagery. Using sample photographs, discuss ways in which photography (through placement of the camera) frames a scene to give a very specific point of view, to draw the viewer into the image. Make the connections to Rockwell's paintings clear: *the framing of the pieces and composition of objects within them places the viewer in a very specific relation to the subjects of the painting and emphasizes certain features within the work.*

II. **Framing Still Life** To help students see the potential of this technique, have them each construct a viewfinder. (It is important that this be a freestanding frame; help students to construct some legs for it to rest on.) Using these "frames," have them select a particular viewpoint on the still



life. Have students sketch the objects, paying close attention to the relative size of objects (according to distance) and the relationships between the forms.

Encourage them to work quickly, so that they might experiment with different points of view. Once they have completed one sketch, have them try another, this time setting up the viewfinder at a different distance from the objects. Encourage the students to experiment with exaggerated framing: close-up, long-distance, and off-center placement of the frame will yield interesting images. It is important that they understand how placement of the frame affects the viewer's understanding of the objects. Once the sketches are done, have them develop their three best sketches into finished pieces.

To assess this project, ask each student to arrange her/his three completed works in a sequence. Critique the sequence as a group, focusing especially on the framing of each image. Ask students to explain where they placed their viewfinder, why they selected that particular frame, and any challenges posed by this placement. Remind them of how Rockwell's use of depth and perspective helps draw the viewer into his images. Identify which sketch in each sequence does this most effectively.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Normal Rockwell's framing of *Shuffleton's Barbershop*, *Freedom from Want*, and *Saying Grace* is evocative of new film techniques that emerged in the 1940s. To demonstrate the connection between his works and film, show the students selected sequences from Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), Howard Hawks's *To Have or Have Not* (1944), John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) and *Notorious* (1946), or Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944). Discuss ways in which camera angle, lighting, and perspective work together to create mood or tension, and how placement of the frame helps to draw the viewer into each scene. Relate the conclusions of this discussion back to the analysis of Rockwell's composition techniques.

Suggested resources for more information on appropriate films:

- *Film: An Introduction* by William Phillips, (Bedford Books, 1999)
- *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, edited Leo Braudy, (Oxford University Press, 1998)
- *Reading the Movies: Twelve Great Films on Video and How to Teach Them* by William Costanzo, (National Council of Teacher of English, 1992)
- *Concepts in Film Theory* by James Dudley Andrew, (Oxford University Press, 1984)
- *Major Film Theories* by James Dudley Andrew, (Oxford University Press, 1976)
- A website from ordering and purchasing films: <http://www.bestvideo.com> .

Rockwell's Momentary Narratives

GRADE LEVEL

This project is designed for students in grades 8-12.

TOPIC

To analyze the construction and significance of narrative in selected Norman Rockwell images. (This lesson serves as a good follow-up to “**Framing the Scene.**”)

OBJECTIVES

- Students will examine and analyze the construction and sequencing of narrative in selected Norman Rockwell paintings.
- Students will learn to analyze narrative structure by isolating important moments of change, tension, and climax.
- Students will isolate an “essential” narrative sequence, using stills from their own short films.

MATERIALS

- Postcard of *Gossips* and image of *Day in the Life of a Little Girl* from the Family Guide.
- Sample narratives: a short story (for quick, engaging examples, see the book *Flash Fiction* by James Thomas, (W.W. Norton & Co., 1992), a taped version of a popular television show or a short film (good examples are the films *Wallace & Gromit - Close Shave* (1995) and *Wallace & Gromit - The Wrong Trousers* (1993), both are directed by Nick Park).
- Video camera and tapes, VCR and television for viewing. (optional)
- Camera, tripod, film. (optional)
- Writing materials.

TIME

Four 45-minute periods are needed for the presentation of the project and planning. Students will need additional time to complete their work and may require individual teacher assistance during these times to coordinate their project. (After-school or recess sessions would be ideal.)

PLAN

- I. **Narrative Elements** Begin lesson by breaking the class into groups and reviewing the elements of a narrative: character, plot, setting, mood, tension, climax, theme, etc. Distribute a copy of *Day in the Life of a Little Girl* and *Gossips* to each group. Start by discussing how the *momentary* structure of these paintings mimics a narrative. Possible discussion questions might include:
 1. How is looking at this painting like reading?
 2. How is looking at this painting like watching a film?
 3. How does Norman Rockwell develop character? Create tension? Set mood? Highlight a turning point? Establish a climax? (Relate these questions specifically to the elements of a written narrative.)
 4. Select one “frame” of the image. How is it connected with those that come before and those that come after? How does it tie into the whole? What makes the sequence hold together?
 5. What is left out? What is included? Why do you think these moments are the most important?
6. Is enough information provided to “fill in the blanks?” Is there much room for interpretation of how those blanks could be filled? Why or why not?
7. Would you say the sequence is complete or incomplete? Why?

Having established the ways in which these Rockwell images mimic narrative structure and cinematic sequence, challenge the students to isolate the essential moments in sample narratives. Working from a short story, a short film, or a television program, have the groups determine what they think are the ten single most important moments of narrative. Remind them that the scenes

they choose must provide enough information about the narrative to seem complete. Just as Rockwell's moments tell a whole story, so too must their selections. Have them be prepared to defend their choices. Comparison and debate of their varying selections should make for an interesting discussion!

- II. **Film Scripts** As an extension of this idea, tell the groups to script a short film narrating "A Day in the Life of a Student." Review the important components of a cohesive narrative; let these become the criteria for assessing the scripts. The group should write a full script together, then film the story as they wish. (Limit the length of these films to five minutes!) Once the films are complete, have the groups exchange their tapes. Their assignment is then to distill the narratives of their peers (as they did with the film or short story in *Part One*) into the most essential moments. They should identify ten specific moments in each film that capture the most important ideas, elements, and themes of the whole. Once they have determined these moments, have the group take photographic film stills of the tape (photograph the television screen while the film is playing). Once developed, have the group arrange the stills in sequence (as Rockwell did). For each still, students must identify what is happening at that moment, and why it is important to an overall understanding of the narrative.

CURRICULUM LINKS

This project lends itself particularly well to theater integration. The parallels between Rockwell's "narrative" paintings and scenes in a play provide an opportunity for students to explore the momentary nature of a theater production. As an activity, have students take two "moments" from either *Day in the Life of a Little Girl* or *Gossips* and improvise the "unseen" interval in between. These could be developed into an actual play, with Rockwell's images integrated to provide a narrative framework.

As another interesting example of a still image narrative, (and a possible culmination of this project) show your students *La Jetée*, the 1962 short film by French writer/director Chris Marker. The film is actually a series of narrated photographic stills, telling the futuristic story of a man who can travel to the past to "reach food, medicine, sources of energy" because of his vivid memory of life before World War III. It is a fascinating story that addresses the complexities of memory and time through a series of beautiful black and white photographs. *La Jetée* is an example of a *complete* narrative told through a series *still* images in *film* form. If you are unable to find a video copy of the film, a book is available which contains all of the images and translations of the narration. (*La Jetée: Cine-roman* by Chris Marker, (Zone Books, 1996).

“Creating America”

GRADE LEVEL

This project is designed for students in grades 7-10.

TOPIC

The influence of Norman Rockwell’s imagery as a reflection of America values in the first half of the twentieth century.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will develop critical thinking skills by analyzing Norman Rockwell’s *Saturday Evening Post* imagery as it relates to American values in his time period.
- Students will critique imagery from contemporary periodicals.
- Students will reflect on the impact and significance of mass media as a vehicle for promoting cultural values through written essays or multimedia presentations.

MATERIALS

- Postcard versions of *Saturday Evening Post* covers.
- Multiple copies (from successive months) of magazines popular among students: *Seventeen*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Source*, *Spin*, *Cosmopolitan*, etc.
- “The Saturday Evening Post” essay by Anne Knutson from *Norman Rockwell: Pictures of the American People* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999) (attached)
- Access to computers with multimedia software. (optional)

TIME

Two 45-minute class periods.

PLAN

- I. **Opinions** Begin by reading Anne Knutson’s essay “The Saturday Evening Post” to assemble information about the readership of *The Saturday Evening Post*, the extent of its popularity and circulation, and the motives of publisher George Horace Lorimer. Assemble important information to share with the class. (If the text is not too difficult for your students, have them read it themselves and discuss as a group).

Begin discussion by asking: *How do you think public opinions are formed? Who has influence over the formation of these opinions?* Discuss the significance of media as a source of opinion and creator of cultural values. Share the information concerning Lorimer’s desire to “‘create America’ in the pages of the Post, delivering it to audiences week after week as ‘a model against which they could shape their lives.’” Discuss the potential advantages and risks inherent in this attitude.

- II. **Analysis** Break students into small groups and assign each a *Saturday Evening Post* cover to analyze. The object of these discussions is to determine what sort of “America” Rockwell helped to create as the *Post*’s illustrator. Possible discussion questions include:

1. What are some important objects that you notice in the painting? What kind of values or emotions do they appeal to?
2. Is there anything significant about the way the subjects of the paintings are portrayed? Are there any exaggerations or stereotypes at work? Do the subjects appear to fit a specific kind of social or gender role?
3. What sorts of social structures or power relationships are represented? How are they portrayed?
4. What segment of society is represented in the piece? Why do you think this specific group(s) was highlighted?

5. Is the painting trying to instruct or persuade the audience in any way? How is this accomplished? Where is emphasis placed in the composition? What is the audience *supposed* to notice?
6. If *The Saturday Evening Post* was trying to appeal to a common set of “American” values, what were they? What do these covers reflect about the time period in which they were published?
7. How do these values differ from our attitudes concerning the same subjects today? How have our opinions about the society and lifestyle represented in Rockwell’s imagery changed?
8. Would you want to live in an “America” like one presented on these covers? Why or why not? (This could serve as an interesting journal reflection assignment.)

III. **Magazine Critiques** Once the students have compiled their responses to the *Post* covers, give each group a series of contemporary magazines (one publication, successive copies per group). Pose the challenge question: *If magazine covers reflect the values and attitudes of the public they appeal to, what are the values for young people in America today?* Working in small groups, have them use the questions above to critique the imagery of popular magazines. Once they have finished their analysis, have them complete the following assignment in essay form or in a multimedia presentation format:

Compare three common elements, themes, or ideas represented on the *Saturday Evening Post* and (your magazine) covers. Your response must in some way address two of the following questions:

- *How do differences in the representation of these elements show shifts in attitudes from Rockwell’s time to the present?*
- *What values does each image promote?*
- *Do you view these changes as a positive or negative evolution? Why?*
- *Which “America” do you think is better? Why?*

CURRICULUM LINKS

A similar activity could focus on the influential power of film. Using Frank Capra’s work, such as *You Can’t Take it with You* (1938), *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946), *Why We Fight*, etc., identify ways that film from this period reflected values similar to those found in Norman Rockwell’s *Saturday Evening Post* covers. *How was Capra shaping a similar vision of America?* A contemporary comparison could again be drawn with films that represent American families today. It would be especially interesting to focus on ways in which power relationships and traditional roles within the American family have (or have not) changed in the interval. *Citizen Kane* (1941), directed by Orson Welles, would also serve as an interesting reference point for considering the influence of media.

The activity described here could serve as a gateway to investigations of historical periods when a common image of “America” became a tool of intolerance. At certain times, the image of what was “American” has been used to identify, alienate, and (in extreme cases) oppress those who did not fit the commonplace standard of “normalcy.” “Know Nothing” Party xenophobia and Ku Klux Klan racism, as well as McCarthyism and Japanese internment, are a few possible entry points into historical studies of the risks inherent with such a *common*, unifying vision. Similarly, a study of “unifying” imagery as a means of propaganda could be an interesting extension, be it Nazi film footage or Allied recruitment posters. Again, Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* and Rockwell’s *Four Freedoms* are essential.

Rockwell's American Utopia

"I paint life as I would like it to be." -Norman Rockwell

GRADE LEVEL

This project is designed for students in grades 8-12.

TOPIC

The significance of Rockwell's vision of an "ideal" America.
The idea of utopia within American thought.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will develop critical thinking skills by analyzing the ideals presented in Norman Rockwell's *Saturday Evening Post* imagery.
- Students will study and reflect on the notion of an ideal society through investigation of utopian writings.
- Students will articulate their own ideas of "ideal" society through written text and collage.

MATERIALS

- Postcard versions of *Saturday Evening Post* covers,
- Internet access.
- Excerpts from texts that describe ideal societies: Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, descriptions of Eden from *The Book of Genesis*, etc.
- Text versions of the preamble of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.
- Magazines for collage images.
- Disposable cameras.

TIME

Approximately three 45-minute classes for analysis of images, examination of utopian texts, and definition of the assignment. Allow additional class time for project work and peer evaluation as desired.

PLAN

I. **Investigating** Begin the lesson by breaking the class up into small groups, giving each one a postcard of a *Saturday Evening Post* cover. Ask them to analyze the image and answer the question: *How does Norman Rockwell create an ideal image of America?* Guiding questions might include:

1. What or who is the subject of the painting? What is the theme? How are these ideas presented? What details give you clues?
2. What kinds of values does Rockwell appeal to? How does he accomplish this artistically?
3. How is this image similar to others you have seen by Norman Rockwell?
4. What aspect of American life does he present in the image? What impression does this give? What emotions is he trying to inspire?
5. Do you think this was a realistic representation of America at that time period? Why or why not?

Have the each group select a presenter who explains the findings to the whole class. Create a class list of the ideals presented in each image to demonstrate the pervasiveness of these themes in Rockwell's work.

II. **Defining Utopia** Present the concept of **utopia** to the class, the time periods when utopian thought was important and its relation to American idealism. Examine the selected utopian texts as a class, listing in each case the specifics of the ideals presented: *What does each author*

consider important to the construction of an ideal society? To suggest the presence of utopian idealism in American thought, read and discuss the ideals presented in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Discuss ways in which these and other American ideals appear in our culture.

Then ask the class: *Does Norman Rockwell present a utopian vision of America?* Discuss whether or not this sort of America ever actually existed in such a nostalgic, innocent form. Have them return attention to the original cover and contrast the article titles with the theme of Rockwell's painting. (If you wish, have students find information on historical events during Rockwell's lifetime.) Guiding questions might include:

1. What was America really like at this time period? What stories were people interested in?
2. How does Rockwell's imagery compare with the realities of his time period? What does the text on the *Post* covers suggest about America at the time that he painted?
3. Do you think he was an idealist? Why or why not?
4. What do you think influenced his vision? What outside factors would he have to take into consideration? How would the place or town he worked in influence his presentation of the ideal?
5. What is your opinion of Rockwell's utopian vision of America? Does this appeal to you? Why or why not? Do you think his vision of America is positive or limited? Why?

III. **Constructing Utopia** Having examined and critiqued Rockwell's utopian vision, have students construct their own ideal America. As individuals or in small groups, have students identify their criteria for structuring the ideal society. Review the earlier readings to establish the elements of a society that must be included within their plans. (Let these elements become the criteria for their peer evaluations.) Suggest different forms the written description might take: travelogue (as in Francis Bacon), story, essay, dialogue (as in Plato), government charter, myth, etc. To get them started, offer these and other guiding questions:

1. What kind of society would you like to live in? What structures would it include?
2. What would your utopia look like?
3. What rules or laws would it have?
4. How would you handle social change?
5. How would you provide for dissent, political opposition, free speech?
6. How would you handle differences between cultures?
7. How would it differ from the society/culture/ context you live in now?

Having written their descriptions of the ideal American society, ask students to create a visual representation of this utopia, using photographs they take and collage elements from magazines. Their work should be a symbolic or literal representation of the ideals they have laid out. As assessment, compare their visions with those of Rockwell, discuss the ways in which their "ideal" reflects the values of their present culture, and critique the utopia according to the criteria established earlier as a group.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Many contemporary songs deal with utopian visions. Especially in the hip-hop genre, musicians are writing songs that describe a perfect world. Ask students to find examples of utopian sentiment in the music they listen to. Assemble lyric sheets and analyze these contemporary versions of the ideal in the same terms used to critique Rockwell's imagery: *What values are being appealed to? Are there any problems inherent in the ideal presented in the music? etc.*

Travel magazines often portray exotic destinations as utopian. Using a selection of images from such publications, explore ways in which other places and (especially) other cultures are sentimentalized or stereotyped in an effort to appeal to the buying public. Give careful considerations to representations of people from these different cultures and the motives of advertisers, discussing ways in which advertising a utopia can actually misinform the viewer's

perceptions of people different from ourselves. (A similar activity could be structured to address film representations of foreign cultures as utopian).

The Saturday Evening Post

Anne Knutson

When *The Saturday Evening Post* arrived, I would sit on the stair landing, and with the north light coming through the door there was enough illumination to study every detail of Norman Rockwell's covers. Sitting with the *Post* in my hands provided one of my most favorite childhood memories.¹

—Ellen Baise, Norman Rockwell Museum guide

For virtually three-quarters of the century, Norman Rockwell captured the attention of millions of Americans with his 322 *Saturday Evening Post* covers and countless other illustrations and advertisements. While he is one of the most recognized American artists of the twentieth century, scholars have yet to examine his achievement. Consider that for over seventy years, every week at approximately the same time, millions of households across the country received *The Saturday Evening Post*. The magazine would be read in living rooms, kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms, and was touched, ripped, dog-eared, stained, carefully collected, or heedlessly thrown away by a great many Americans. The magazine's casual and shifting viewing context within the home and beyond it—to doctors' offices, barbershops, and dentists' waiting rooms—profoundly influences our understanding of Rockwell's *Post* covers. Their familiarity contributes to the problem that the Norman Rockwell Museum guides have with visitors touching paintings in the galleries. The way most people were introduced to Rockwell images—close up, handheld—makes them think that the conventional rules for looking at fine art do not apply.

Indeed, Rockwell's paintings were not meant to be experienced within the formal and controlled environment of a museum. On a frequent and regular basis, millions of Americans brought Rockwell's art into their homes—viewing his *Post* covers while seated in their favorite chairs, surrounded by personal belongings in the company of their families. This particular reception of Rockwell's art affected the way the images were interpreted by encouraging audiences to impose their own narratives on the pieces. The images themselves also encourage this. Because they are frequently vague about time and place, the pictures easily adapt themselves to the attitudes, beliefs, and situations of individual viewers. Subscribers could look at a *Post* cover and feel that they were looking at themselves or their neighbors—the naughty child, the doctor, the babysitter, the dentist, the grandfather, the mom and dad. It wasn't until later in Rockwell's career—the 1950s and 1960s—that he began to paint magazine covers of the famous, of “them.” For the bulk of his career, Rockwell's magazine covers were about “us.”

The intimate contexts in which people saw Rockwell's covers, together with the commercial circumstances that guided his creative process, contributed enormously to the popular appeal of the artist's *Post* covers. Thus it is important to explore how the institutional imperatives of *The Saturday Evening Post* both shaped and were shaped by Rockwell's aesthetic. The *Post*'s innovation was in reaching a mass audience previously ignored by established highbrow magazines such as *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly*. It was one of the first magazines to create a national market of readers unified by their similar patterns of consumption. Indeed, the Curtis Publishing Company, which owned the *Post*, was one of the first advertisement-driven media corporations. Because the advertising space, not the subscription price of the magazine, paid expenses and determined profits, one of the preeminent goals of the *Post* was to find and cultivate a broad audience possessing disposable income. The *Post* editors repeatedly used formulas that cut across class and gender lines, such as the ever-popular Horatio Alger story, in which both men and women, regardless of class, achieved financial success through hard work and determination. In doing so, the *Post* helped to define a huge new market—the emerging middle class—and identified that market's needs for its advertisers, who then tailored their advertisements to fit both the magazine's goals and its readers' needs.²

These formulas for fiction, articles, editorials, advertisements, and illustrations were established by the first permanent editor of the *Post*, George Horace Lorimer. The most powerful and deeply involved of all the *Post* editors, Lorimer took charge of the magazine in 1898 and played a central role in establishing its mass-market dominance through 1936. And because of Lorimer's early efforts, the *Post* continued to influence American cultural life until the magazine ceased publication in 1969. Under Lorimer's tenure,

the *Post* enjoyed a public influence unrivaled by movies, radio, or other magazines. In 1908, *The Saturday Evening Post* had a weekly circulation of one million and a readership of some ten million; by 1929, those numbers had doubled. The unparalleled dominance of the *Post* gave it an unusually powerful opportunity to shape the beliefs and attitudes of Americans.³ Indeed, it was one of the first periodicals to create a truly mass market in the United States. Not even the mass-media giants of our own time enjoy a comparable dominance.⁴

Jan Cohn, who has meticulously chronicled the early history of the *Post*, wrote that Lorimer saw the United States as an “unformed, unassimilated nation that lacked a unifying consciousness of Americanism.” Accordingly, he set out to “create America” in the pages of the *Post*, delivering it to audiences week after week as “a model against which they could shape their lives.” Lorimer realized his goal of using the *Post* to unify readers when they simultaneously received and “came to know, to share in, and to talk to one another about the stories, the articles, the illustrations. . . . To read the *Post* was to become American, to participate in the American experience.”⁵ And in 1916, when Rockwell began selling paintings to the *Post*, his covers became the visual expression of Lorimer’s ideas.

For over a quarter of a century, *The Saturday Evening Post* was unequalled in crafting and mediating a set of attitudes and beliefs that “explained and defined Americanism.”⁶ The magazine was a major source of political, social, and economic information about the United States and the world. The articles, fiction, illustrations, and advertisements functioned as how-to guides for living in twentieth-century America: they taught readers how to make sense of the vast and rapid changes in their new century; they explained how modern consumers should live and work in a society reshaped by technological advances and mass communication.⁷

Throughout the changes of the twentieth century, the magazine kept its readers current. It gave them the latest information on fashion and recommended which washing machine or television set to buy. It educated housewives on the best ways to care for their homes and families, and it provided business advice to men, promoting in particular the ideal of the self-made man. In soothing, clarifying prose, *Post* writers explained complicated new inventions. For example, in “Look Ma! There Goes Our House,” the reader finds an accessible account of the new technology that allowed engineers to move houses.⁸ *Post* writers also educated their readers about international and domestic politics, impassioned them through vivid coverage of sports events, and indulged their fantasies through serialized stories about romance, adventure, and history. The 1954 story “The Cradle Robber,” for instance, takes the reader to rustic Maine in the summertime, where a handsome widower falls in love with the beautiful nanny he hired to take care of his two children.⁹ Like Rockwell’s cover images, this type of fiction spirited readers away from the hectic exigencies of twentieth-century life into the carefree days of another realm.

The *Post* celebrated traditional, old-fashioned values such as hard work, thrift, and common sense; it argued that these virtues were crucial to success in a twentieth-century consumer society—all the while deflecting the contradictions between thrift and consumption, and between hard work and the new, labor-saving devices they advertised. All in all, the *Post* removed the jarring and frightening new aspects of the events, products, and rituals of the twentieth century and presented them in comforting and familiar ways. This is one of the many strategies the *Post* adopted to create its own American ideology, and the paradigm strongly shaped and influenced Rockwell’s imagery.

Lorimer, who approved every article, short story, editorial, and illustration before it went to press, had a great deal of control over Rockwell’s *Post* images. Rockwell’s own description of his meetings with Lorimer reveals how the editor’s ambitions and goals for the *Post* determined which images would become covers:

He never fidgeted over a decision or told me to leave the cover so that he could decide later whether or not to accept it. The first glance, its first impact was his criterion. “If it doesn’t strike me immediately,” he used to say, “I don’t want it. And neither does the public. They won’t spend an hour figuring it out. It’s got to *hit* them.” He rarely asked me to make minor changes—a red cap instead of a green, more smile on a kid. The cover was either good or bad.¹⁰

In his autobiography, Rockwell described how he caught on to Lorimer’s decision-making process and figured out how to “rig” these meetings so that *he* could control which sketches Lorimer would pick.¹¹

His *Post* covers, then, resulted from a continual process of negotiation between artist and editor. Moreover, it can be argued that Lorimer's vision of a unifying Americanism shaped not only Rockwell's choice of subject matter, but also his style. In the 1920s, propelled by a need for change, Rockwell went to Europe, where he experimented with modernist styles of painting. When he returned to the United States, he took one of these paintings to Lorimer, who rejected it, deflating Rockwell and dampening his enthusiasm for further modernist experiments.¹² While Rockwell's cover images were chosen by Lorimer, the success of Rockwell's work—his covers sold more magazines than those of other artists—may very well have reinforced Lorimer's determination to continue his ideological course.¹³ Rockwell's cover images not only epitomized the magazine's ideology, but also sometimes took good-humored jabs at the very forms of modern mass communication celebrated in the magazine.

The twentieth century saw the invention of brand-new technologies that produced such things as automobiles, televisions, and space travel. The century also saw dramatic changes in the way wars were fought and presidential elections staged. Furthermore, there were tremendous upheavals in the arts and in race relations. Rockwell took these subjects and the impact they had on ordinary Americans as the focus of much of his art. Like the stories in the *Post*, Rockwell's pictures wed the familiar and traditional to the unfamiliar and contemporary, creating reassuring visual narratives about change. Many of these images were meant to suggest that cherished values are not necessarily destined to disappear with the onslaught of new influences. Rather, those values can help guide us through the newness and keep us grounded in the familiar.

For example, *The Law Student* (*Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People*, page 146), the February 19, 1927, *Post* cover celebrating Abraham Lincoln's birthday, features a young man in a grocer's storeroom hunched over a cracker barrel, the surface of which is scratched and scraped with use; he is reading law books by the light of a kerosene lamp, much as Lincoln might have done. Posted above the figure are familiar photos of Lincoln by Mathew Brady.¹⁴ The edges of the photos and other bills and cards tacked on the wall are torn, bent, and yellowing with age. The whole scene, with its fading brown and beige color scheme, has an old-fashioned look with no obvious markers of twentieth-century life. The *Post* was reminding its 1927 audience that the qualities Lincoln represented—industry, thrift, determination, honesty—are timeless; indeed they were the important attributes that would help American youth succeed in the twentieth century. Reinforcing this visual homily, many of the themes of the short stories and articles in that issue explored the idea of hard work bringing success to anyone of any class or gender.¹⁵

Lincoln, the Horatio Alger model of rags-to-riches achievement, was the archetype of the small-town man who, without the benefit of formal education and through sheer determination and industriousness, created his own fame.¹⁶ The picture's indeterminate time and setting reinforce the implicit message of the Horatio Alger myth—that anyone can prosper if they are industrious, honest, and thrifty. Moreover, the cards and pictures pinned above the student's head recall the late-nineteenth-century American artist John F. Peto's office-board and card-rack still-lives, which frequently included pictures of Lincoln.¹⁷ Rockwell's allusion to Peto strengthens the picture's celebration of the past and tradition.¹⁸ The *Post* used many anniversaries of famous Americans—Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin—as focal points to bring its audience together in a national community. The frequency with which the *Post* relied on these figures from the past suggests a mass-media strategy to forge a widely popular version of American history that could stand as a buffer against the widespread immigration, devastating wars, and vast economic and political shifts of the times. Like the articles, fiction, and editorials of the *Post*, Rockwell's images used the past to represent hope, reassurance, and belief at a time of dizzying change and an uncertain future.

Rockwell's *New Television Antenna* (*Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People*, page 148), “painted in the peak year of the television bonanza—in 1949, when 100,000 sets were sold in a single hectic week,” exemplifies how the *Post* introduced and humored its readers into modern technological society.¹⁹ A workman perches on the roof of a weathered Victorian house installing a TV antenna. The owner of the house leans out of the window shouting approval as he points to a shadowy figure that has just materialized on the television screen inside. At a time when old urban neighborhoods like this one were being razed and replaced by modern commercial buildings—derivations of the modernist concrete and glass box—it is telling that Rockwell chose this timeworn architectural setting for a new television

set.²⁰ Moreover, the broken millwork on the gable, the holes in the decorative siding, the bricks missing from the chimney, and the wartime Red Cross flag in the window strongly suggest the passing of an era.²¹ Other than the television and antenna, there are no markers of modernity in the image. The house, not the television, is the focus of *New Television Antenna*. The architecture wraps the television into something worn, weary, and familiar, blunting the newness of the technology. Rockwell deliberately used the familiar pyramidal composition of traditional religious paintings to construct his house, with the antenna taking the place of the cross at the top. He used the stability of this triangular form to invest the television with a sense of tradition. These reassuring signifiers of tradition and the past take the edge off Rockwell's witty observation that mass communication was usurping the power of religion in twentieth-century American culture—the antenna towers over the church spire in the right background of the picture.

Although the setting for the cover illustration is identified in a caption as the Adams Street neighborhood of Los Angeles, there are no signs in the image itself marking the place as California. The house could stand in virtually any town or city across the United States, since all were being transformed by television technology. A letter from one *Post* reader in Deerfield, Illinois, responding to *New Television Antenna*, suggests how people across the country identified with Rockwell's images:

Your November 5th Rockwell cover gave a vivid portrayal of the new overtaking the old. It brought to my mind an interesting revelation to our small town.

To passers-by on our main street the old frame house was forlorn. Shrubbery had overgrown the yard; the weather-beaten clapboard lacked shape as well as paint. . . . The front steps had long ago rotted away. . . . What was the great surprise of at least 75% of the town's population to awake one morning to see the unmistakable "cross" of life (television dingus) fastened to the battered gable.

It seems that one of the town's leading tradesmen has always occupied the rear of the structure—unobviously until this "sign of the times" appeared on the roof top.²²

An inspection of this November issue of the *Post* reveals a plethora of advertisements that wed the old with the new as a sales device. An Alcoa aluminum ad compares the twelve-dollar-an-ounce price of aluminum in the mid-nineteenth century to the current price of seventeen-cents-a-pound, underscoring how new technology has made this compound cheaper, and marveling at all the farm roofs in America made of this "precious metal." Kaywoodie Pipe Maker features a color reproduction of the March 1897 boxing match in which Bob Fitzsimmons knocked out "Gentleman Jim" Corbett, accompanied by the text "Our Pipes were favorites then as they are today."

The most interesting of these is a full-page advertisement for Du Mont Televisions. It features a large television encased in a sleek modern box set against a gilded eighteenth-century neoclassical paneled wall. Two women in evening gowns sit on eighteenth-century French salon chairs accompanied by two men in tuxedos—all watching a diva on television. A delicate neoclassical-style urn perches uncomfortably atop the modern box, heightening the contrast (and adding to the oddness of the image). Advertisers attempted to lend legitimacy and familiarity to their products through references to the past, but the wedding of the old and the new often yielded unexpected and strange results. As an advertising illustrator, Rockwell was familiar with this strategy and its pitfalls. Indeed, his cover images also functioned as advertisements in themselves, advertisements that sold the *Post* and routinely relied on contrasts between the old and the new. Unlike the hurried and frequently unskilled creations of advertising agencies, Rockwell's images made brilliant use of the tensions inherent in opposites by dissolving them into humor.

The past offers not only a snug place of calm in a world shaken by change, but also a reassuring sense of stability through basic values that survive the constant pressures of twentieth-century life. In *Girl at Mirror* (Norman Rockwell: *Pictures for the American People*, page 153), Rockwell explored how makeup assumed a central role in teen culture of the 1950s and became the most visible sign of a girl's passage into womanhood.²³ In the image, a young girl in a modest cotton slip slightly yellowed with age compares her features to those of movie star Jane Russell.²⁴ The inevitable passing of time is Rockwell's focus in this image. We know that his heroine is soon going to be changed forever when she leaves her doll and childish demeanor behind and fully embraces the cosmetics industry and Hollywood standards of beauty.

Yet Rockwell imbued this picture with many more signs of the past. The girl sits in a room that is cast in shadow and devoid of any markers of twentieth-century life other than the magazine, the lipstick, and the box of powdered rouge on the floor. The floor's scratched surface revealing layers of old paint, the mirror's worn gilt frame, the spindled legs of the ladderback chair—an early-American style piece—and even the discarded doll from her mother's or grandmother's childhood give the image an air of quaintness.²⁵ The little girl's hair is plaited and pinned up in an attempt to mimic Jane Russell's glamorous bob, but the braids only make the girl look more old-fashioned.²⁶ The slip, with its modest cut and ruffles of eyelet lace (echoed in the antique doll's petticoat), is especially striking in its out-modedness when one considers that Jane Russell would have been wearing something sleek and sexy—the latest in fashion. Even the composition alludes to the centuries-old pictorial tradition of a semi-nude female contemplating her youthful yet evanescent beauty in the mirror.²⁷ The reassuring signs of the past and tradition outweigh those of the modern era—implying that old-fashioned values will bring the girl safely from the old world (childhood) into the new world (womanhood), just as those values will carry us safely into a new age.

Many women would have looked at this image and smiled to remember their first clumsy, self-conscious experiments with makeup. The visual signifiers of a past era and the vagueness of the details convey this act of remembering. Moreover, Rockwell deliberately erased signs that this scene takes place in a specific region or time, and he also eliminated clothing and furniture that might suggest a particular social class.²⁸ In combination with the affordability of magazines and cosmetics at the time, this generality suggests that females from a wide variety of class and regional backgrounds could identify with the girl and the makeovers, great and small, that she faces.

It is no coincidence that Rockwell decided to depict this girl considering the effects of cosmetics—products of a newly emerging mass-culture industry. The image is a fitting metaphor for readers of the *Post* considering whether to buy the mass-advertised goods in the pages of the magazine. The *Post* was a deliberate participant in shaping patterns of consumption as it and its advertisers attempted to reach more and more people. Yet the somber colors of the picture and the uncertainty of the child reveal not only her questioning of her own beauty but also possibly the artist's own wistfulness—about the loss of innocence, about how the new mass products of the twentieth century propel us into change at an ever-more-rapid rate.

In order to fully understand the popularity of Rockwell and his covers for *The Saturday Evening Post*, it is crucial to consider how this new and powerful type of magazine shaped Rockwell's art (and was, in turn, shaped by it). Lorimer and the *Post*, and Rockwell in his covers, tried to forge a national community based not on geography or class, but on an artificial ideal of what it meant to be American. This was not an America of the oppressed or the elite. Instead, the *Post* sought out, defined, and spoke to what we now call middle America. The *Post*'s and Rockwell's America was one that was rooted so firmly in the ethics of the past that it could accommodate and internalize the changes of the twentieth century without being overwhelmed by them.

Rockwell's images—with their deliberately nonspecific, vaguely old-fashioned settings and lack of obvious economic signifiers—could speak to this broad new base of Americans. His images mediated between an imagined traditional past and the great technological advances and social shifts of the new century. While Rockwell's representations were obviously influenced by Lorimer's goals, he was able to deftly join the past and the present in his own innovative ways. Drawing upon his knowledge of art history and his keen sense of everyday life, Rockwell frequently used humor, sentiment, and earnestness not only to smooth over the pitfalls inherent in this strategy that wed the old and the new, but also to enhance its power and impact. Further, Rockwell's ordinary, familiar images had a particularly strong resonance precisely because of the prosaic manner in which they were regularly delivered to American homes. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that a Rockwell cover image was designed and used to sell three things to a newly defined public: the magazine itself; the goods advertised inside the magazine; and, perhaps most importantly, a vision of who we are and how we should be Americans.

Notes

Special thanks to Elizabeth Thomas, Linda Merrill, H. Nichols B. Clark, and Jan Cohn for their thoughtful readings of various drafts of this essay.

1. Quote from Norman Rockwell Museum guide Ellen Baise in “Exhibition In the Making, 1999–2000—A Cultural Exploration of *The Saturday Evening Post*,” *The Portfolio*, The Norman Rockwell Museum newsletter, summer 1998, p. 13.
2. For example, in 1897 the *Post*'s intended readership was middle-class businessmen, and what advertisements there were presumably targeted this group. However, as the century turned, it became clear that while these men were the principal money-earners, their wives were the primary purchasers of goods and services for the household, including the majority of goods and services advertised in the magazine. To bring this huge group of consumers to its pages, the *Post* announced on June 20, 1908, that it was welcoming women to its fold of readers. Articles, fiction, and editorials slowly began to reach out to women. In response to this new initiative, advertising revenue, along with circulation, increased dramatically. See Jan Cohn, *Creating America: George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), pp. 9, 60–99; C. E. Brookeman, “Norman Rockwell and The Saturday Evening Post: Advertising, Iconography and Mass Production, 1897–1929,” in Marcia Pointon, ed., *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America* (Manchester, England, and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 155.
3. By contrast, the traditional and highbrow magazines such as *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly* never reached these circulation numbers. For example, in the twenties, *Harper's* reached a peak of 75,000 readers, while *Atlantic Monthly* was closer to 100,000 readers. See Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), pp. 406–412.
4. Cohn, *Creating America*, pp. 5, 300.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Victor Boesen, “Look Ma! There Goes Our House,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 5, 1949, p. 20.
9. Phyllis Duganne, “The Cradle Robber,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 6, 1954, p. 20+.
10. Norman Rockwell, as told to Thomas Rockwell, *Norman Rockwell: My Adventures As an Illustrator* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), pp. 145–146.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 194–195.
13. Laurie Norton Moffatt, *Norman Rockwell: A Definitive Catalogue*, 2 vols. (Stockbridge, Mass.: The Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge, 1986), 1:72.
14. Karal Ann Marling, *Norman Rockwell* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1997), pp. 56, 58.
15. For example, the short story “Neighbors” by Clarence Budington Kelland revolves around the life of Warren Cross, a man of humble means, who rises through the ranks of Consolidated Lumber Company through hard work and determination, p. 3+. Another story by Fannie Kilbourne, “Chivalry is Not Dead,” describes the life of Claire, who through determination and hard work climbs up through the ranks of Miller Advertising Agency, leaving her modest beginnings behind her. Phillips, her coworker, is from an upper-class background. His laziness almost costs him his job until Claire teaches him the value of hard work and literally helps him keep his job, p. 14+. Editorials that focus on the value of hard work for anyone of any class include “Getting On in the World,” p. 136, and “On Driving a Milk Wagon,” p. 136+.
16. Also included in this issue was an advertisement for Hickok belts and buckles that prominently featured a bust of Lincoln next to representations of the products. It was not entirely clear how Lincoln related to the product advertised, but such copy as “character,” “rigid quality standard,” “careful workmanship,” and “finished correctness” suggests connections with Lincoln's stature and character.
17. John Wilmerding, *Important Information Inside: The Art of John F. Peto and the Idea of Still-life Painting in Nineteenth-Century American Art* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983), pp. 183–236.
18. While only a small number of *Post* readers would likely recognize this reference, it is nonetheless significant, as it shows Rockwell using art-historical details as well as details from everyday life to create visual narratives of compelling depth. Except for an occasional display in a drugstore or tavern, Peto's work did not become part of the popular visual culture until the 1930s with the revival of American folk art and craft, the resurrection of William Harnett's work by Edith Halpert, and the widely publicized

discovery of a number of works attributed to Harnett that were really Peto's. Harnett did a few late-nineteenth-century office-board still-lives very similar to Peto's. Unlike Peto, Harnett regularly displayed his work in drugstores, department stores, factories, and fairs. Since Harnett's work was more a part of popular visual culture than Peto's, it is possible that some of Rockwell's viewers would have made the connection between this and Harnett's paintings. See Doreen Bolger, Marc Simpson, and John Wilmerding, eds., *William M. Harnett*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992). See especially Elizabeth Johns's essay, "Harnett Enters Art History," pp. 101–112.

19. *The Saturday Evening Post*, cover, November 5, 1949. Marling, *Norman Rockwell*, p. 81.

20. Rockwell included a vague suggestion of a modernist-style edifice in the far left background of the picture as a foil for his weathered Victorian architecture.

21. Rockwell had working photographs taken of most of the elements in this picture. It is significant that in one of the photographs, the gable of the house is in very good condition with none of the holes and cracks that appear in the final picture. Rockwell deliberately added these signifiers of age to make a startling contrast between old and new; see Norman Rockwell Museum Archive, working photographs, Box 57.

22. *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 19, 1949. Letter from Susan G. McGuire of Deerfield, Illinois.

23. Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), pp. 252–253.

24. See one of the working photographs for this painting which includes the magazine *Movie Spotlights* with Jane Russell on the cover. Rockwell used photographs such as this in the process of creating *Girl at Mirror*. Norman Rockwell Museum Archive, working photographs, Box 72.

25. Thanks to Donald Peirce, Curator of Decorative Art, High Museum of Art, for helping me identify the style of chair and how it would have been interpreted by Rockwell's audience. The doll's age was verified by Deirdre Donohue, Librarian, Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in a fax transmission of December 15, 1998.

26. See also Marling's discussion of this painting in *Norman Rockwell*, pp. 44–45.

27. Old master artists such as Velázquez painted famous images of women looking into mirrors; see, for example, his *Rokeby Venus*. Rockwell had prints and books of Velázquez's work in his studio. David Brenneman, Francis B. Bunzl Family Curator of European Art, High Museum of Art, alerted me to the similarities between *Girl at Mirror* and a 1932 print entitled *Adolescence* of a nude girl looking into a mirror by British artist Gerald Brockhurst, whose work was widely known in the United States by the 1950s. I have not yet ascertained whether Rockwell knew of this work, but it would make for an interesting study. See *The Art of Gerald Brockhurst*, exhibition catalogue (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 1993), p. 128.

28. Deirdre Donohue said that the slip's cut and its lace trim "are of a generic style seen from the 1920s to the 1950s." Something like it could be found easily in the Sears and Roebuck catalogues. Fax transmission of December 15, 1998.