ANDREW WYETH
IN RETROSPECT
EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE
OVERVIEW

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

“I know you were always right when you said the place where you were born is the place for an artist to paint.”
Andrew Wyeth in letter to parents, 1938

On the 100th anniversary of the artist’s birth, *Andrew Wyeth: In Retrospect* examines the American artist’s 75-year career and offers unexpected perspectives on his art and legacy. Co-organized by the Brandywine River Museum of Art and Seattle Art Museum, this special exhibition presents over 100 of the artist’s paintings and drawings. Wyeth painted his communities in rural Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania and the coast of Maine, highlighting a life close to nature and the people he knew. Although these works were realistic paintings, they told stories of Wyeth’s own imagination and history.

This exhibition follows the artist’s career, from his brilliant early realistic paintings of the Maine coast to the more somber drybrush watercolors and tempera paintings, for which Wyeth is best known. A popular painter in the mid-twentieth century for his magic realism, Wyeth became an outsider in an art world that came to celebrate abstract art and new ways of painting. Wyeth instead looked to the cinematic sensibilities of film to find artists who were storytellers, borrowing ideas from some of his favorite movie directors.

This guide explores the work of Andrew Wyeth and how one artist used the people and landscapes he knew his whole life to suggest stories, most often about his own emotions and past. Use the included images, looking questions, and activities to examine this work and the special exhibition.

Information in this guide is adapted from the exhibition catalogue *Andrew Wyeth: In Retrospect* by Patricia Junker, et al. (2017) and from the exhibition audio tour.

Painting in his father’s studio, around 1935 (detail). Courtesy of the Wyeth Family Archives.
On October 19, 1945, Wyeth’s father N.C. (Newell Convers) Wyeth, a famous illustrator who trained Andrew Wyeth as an artist, and N.C.’s young grandson were killed when their car was hit by a train. One day not long after this accident, Andrew Wyeth was walking past his neighbor’s farm near the spot of his father’s death. When he saw a local boy, Allan Lynch, running down a hill, Wyeth laughed and played with Lynch. Wyeth later recreated the moment as a somber painting of a shadow chasing a boy.

Using the realistic details of the boy’s expression and dress and the abstract brushstrokes of the grass on the hill, Wyeth combines techniques to create a mood. Rather than faithfully marking the moment when Wyeth played with Allan Lynch on this hill, the boy’s disoriented state suggests Wyeth’s feelings as he struggled to understand the tragedy of his father’s death. The painting borrows imagery from the closing scene in a silent movie that Andrew Wyeth had watched with his father and that became a lifelong obsession, a war movie called *The Big Parade* (1925). With dark colors and a carefully created composition, Wyeth is telling a story that he connected with his family’s tragedy and his relationship with his artist father.

**ABOUT THE WORK**

**WINTER 1946**


**LOOKING QUESTIONS**

**Younger Students**
- What is going on in this painting?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?
- What do you think the person is doing? What might he be thinking?
- What would it feel like to be running with this figure?
- What do you think happened right before this image? Right after?

**Additional Questions for Older Students**
- How would you describe this place?
- What story do you think this painting is trying to tell?
- How does the artist make the painting look realistic or abstract? What aspects of the painting look more realistic? What aspects look abstract?
- Describe the mood of this painting. What **art elements** does the artist use to achieve this mood?
APRIL WIND

This painting shows James Loper, a resident of Chadds Ford and an acquaintance of the artist who was often seen walking through the countryside around Wyeth’s home. In this work, Loper sits on a dead log facing away from the viewer and into the wind, with his collar pulled up close to his ears as his coattail blows out from the wind. He seems to cast no shadow, upsetting the sense of reality in the painting.

Especially in the 1950s and 1960s, Wyeth painted the black residents of Chadds Ford and referred to them as his friends. However, a deeper look at these relationships outlines a more complicated dynamic as Wyeth’s position as a wealthy white man in the community gave him more privilege than many of his working class black neighbors that he used as subjects in his paintings. Portraits like April Wind, show the diversity of the Chadds Ford community while also asking questions about the history of race in the area and how that history influences the relationship between subject and artist.

Looking Questions

Younger Students
• What is going on in this painting?
• What do you see that makes you say that?
• What more can we find?
• Have you ever had your portrait taken?
  How did it feel?
• Look closely at what he is wearing, what does that tell you about him and the setting?
• What do you imagine he is thinking?

Additional Questions for Older Students
• What is a portrait?
• What can a portrait tell you about a person?
  What can it tell you about the relationship between the artist and the subject?
  The subject and the viewer?
• How would this painting change if the man wore a fancy suit? If he was looking right at you? If he was the same race and class as the artist?
ALVARO AND CHRISTINA

Alvaro and Christina Olson were brother and sister and lived together in a weather-beaten house in coastal Maine. Andrew Wyeth was introduced to Christina in 1939 and painted her often. Christina had a condition that weakened her muscles, and by her early thirties she was no longer able to use her legs. Because of this disability, Christina had difficulty leaving the house, and her brother Alvaro took care of her. Andrew Wyeth spent his summers in Maine and visited the Olson’s for nearly three decades.

This painting shows a view inside the Olson house with a basket Alvaro used to harvest vegetables and a scrap of one of Christina’s dresses hanging from a nail. Using a drybrush watercolor technique, Wyeth created this painting after visiting the house in 1968, several months after Alvaro and Christina had died. Wyeth saw these two doors as the Alvaro and Christina he remembered—the shadowy Alvaro, who only posed for Wyeth once and remained always in the background as Wyeth painted in the Olson house; and, by contrast, the bright, interesting Christina. The painting appears to be a simple scene from everyday life but in reality serves as a tribute to Wyeth’s two friends.

About the Work

Looking Questions

Younger Students
• What is going on in this painting?
• What do you see that makes you say that?
• What more can we find?
• Imagine you step into this painting—how do you feel? What do you hear? Smell?

Additional Questions for Older Students
• What objects stand out to you? What might they symbolize?
• What choices does Wyeth make to create a specific mood?
SNOW HILL

Painted after Wyeth turned 70 years old, this work shows many of the artist’s favorite models from his community dancing around a Yuletide pole in winter. From left to right, we see his neighbor Karl Kuerner wearing his World War I helmet, with his wife, Anna; Bill Loper, father of James Loper; holding Loper’s hook hand is Wyeth’s famous model Helga Testorf; the boy Allan Lynch from the painting Winter 1946; and finally, barely visible, is Adam Johnson, one of the last black residents of the community near Wyeth’s home. At the time of this painting, only Anna Kuerner and Helga Testorf were still alive.

Wyeth would live and paint for another 20 years, but this painting marks a shift in his focus and looks back on people important to his art. Rich with symbolism, Wyeth says goodbye to these characters he painted for so long. Afterwards he moved in a new direction though often he made paintings that seem to reference earlier works.

Younger Students
• What is going on in this painting?
• What do you see that makes you say that?
• What more can we find?
• What do you think these people are doing?
• By looking closely, what can you learn about the individual people in the painting?

Additional Questions for Older Students
• The people in this painting are all former models for the artist. Why might he want to put them all in one painting? What do you think the artist is trying to say?
• On the back left side of the Yuletide pole there is one white ribbon that doesn’t appear to be held by anyone. Who do you think that ribbon is for?
• Think about the artist’s choices. Name one choice the artist made that could be different about this painting, like having it be a sunny day rather than a snowy day—how would this change the story the artist is telling?
ART ACTIVITY

DESCRIPTION

Andrew Wyeth painted the land and people from where he lived to express his own emotions or tell specific stories about his life. The art activity below will have students look closely at an everyday object to tell a personal story using symbolism.

MATERIALS

- Pencils
- 8.5 x 11” white paper
- Paint, water soluble oil pastels, markers, or colored pencils

ACTIVITY EXTENSIONS

Lingering Letters
In *Snow Hill*, Andrew Wyeth has painted a picture that highlights people who have been important to his art. Think about someone who is important in your life—a friend, a teacher, a family member. What makes them so important to you? Write them a letter, letting them know what they mean to you.

Setting And Skit
Andrew Wyeth’s paintings told stories from moments in his own life, movies, and his imagination. Using the questions in this guide, explore the setting and mood in Wyeth’s paintings and the story the artist might have been telling. Then, in small groups, create a one minute skit (story with dialogue) for one of the paintings in this guide and present to the class.

Seeing Others (For Older Students)
Unfortunately, little is known about James Loper, the sitter in Wyeth’s painting *April Wind*, and it’s difficult to learn much about him from the painting. Imagine you had your portrait painted by an artist. What would you want the artist to know about you? How would you pose? What would you wear? Either discuss in small groups, or sketch or paint your own portrait thinking about these choices.

STEPS

One
In *Alvaro and Christina*, Wyeth drew and painted everyday objects to represent people close to him. Look closely at this work using the looking questions provided.

Two
Have students make a list of the everyday objects they see around them. How might an object tell a story about something important to them? Ask students to pick an object and sketch it using pencil and paper, thinking about representing a person, telling a story, or setting a mood. Prompt them to consider if this object will be close up or far away? Realistic or abstract? Full of detail or more of a sketch? How do these decisions impact what they are trying to say with their work? They can also add color to their sketch with paint, water soluble oil pastels, markers, or colored pencils.

Three
Have students trade work with a partner. What do they think is going on in their partner’s picture? Ask each student to write a story based on the mood of the work or the story they think their partner’s object is telling. Make sure students include the details of what they see in the work in their writing.
Abstract/Abstraction
Not representing an object. Can have varying interpretations and does not necessarily reflect reality. Often represents non-visible things like sensations or emotions.

Elements of Art

**Color**
A hue generated through the reflection of light on a surface. Primary colors are defined as red, yellow, and blue and cannot be made by mixing other colors; secondary colors are defined as green, orange, and purple and are a result of mixing a combination of two primary colors.

**Line**
Line is defined as a mark between two points. Lines can be horizontal, jagged, vertical or diagonal, straight or curved, thick or thin.

**Shape**
A closed line that can be geometric (made of distinct lines) or organic (free-form or curved, like objects found in nature).

**Form**
Created by the combination of shapes that give the appearance of volume and mass, along with showing height, width, and depth in space.

**Value**
How light or dark an object is, separate from the color, depicted with shading to show light, shadow, as well as volume and form.

**Space**
The area between and around objects. The space around objects is often called negative space; negative space has shape. The objects are often referred to as the positive space.

**Texture**
A surface that stimulates or simulates feelings of roughness, smoothness and a variety of other sensations, depending on the object’s physical characteristics.

**Drybrush**
Wyeth’s specialty, this opaque watercolor technique involves removing the majority or water and paint from the brush to leave the brush dry and with a very little amount of paint on it.

**Magic Realism**
In art, realistic seeming subjects though the work represents or suggests dreams or fantasy.

**Portrait**
An artistic representation of a person.

**Realism**
In visual art, a style that attempts to realistically and faithfully capture contemporary life.

**Symbol/Symbolism**
In art, an object that is used in the work of art to represent a feeling or idea.

**Tempera**
A fast drying type of paint in which pigments are mixed with a binder, like glue or egg.

**Watercolor**
Type of paint made with a water-soluble binder instead of an oil based one. Typically it produces a transparent color, but Wyeth’s specialty was a dry, almost opaque watercolor technique aptly called “drybrush.”

**Yuletide pole**
In European traditions, a tall pole made of wood used as part of winter celebrations, similar to a maypole used in spring.
WASHINGTON STATE EDUCATION STANDARDS

THE ARTS

Arts 1
The student understands and applies arts knowledge and skills.

Arts 2
The student demonstrates thinking skills using artistic processes.

COMMON CORE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

Anchor Standards for Writing Production and Distribution of Writing
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Anchor Standards for Writing Production and Distribution of Writing
1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas, and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

CREATING

Anchor Standard 1
Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2
Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

RESPONDING

Anchor Standard 7
Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8
Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

CONNECTING

Anchor Standard 10
Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

All SAM Resource Guides and materials are copyright protected and can be used for educational purposes only.

All SAM Resource Guides and materials are copyright protected and can be used for educational purposes only.
Snow Hill, 1989, Andrew Wyeth, American, 1917–2009, tempera on hardboard panel, 48 x 72 in., The Andrew and Betsy Wyeth Collection, © 2017 Andrew Wyeth / Artists Rights Society (ARS)

All SAM Resource Guides and materials are copyright protected and can be used for educational purposes only.