

Revised Sept. 2001

FAMOUS ARTIST SERIES: GRANT WOOD 1892-1942

"American Gothic", 1930

Oil on Beaver board, 29 ¼" x 24 ½"

Art Institute of Chicago

Supplies Needed:

- * Framed print of "American Gothic"
- * Laminated visual aids #1 - #10 from supply box
- * Copies of American Gothic with blank faces for each student
- * Colored construction paper for matting from teachers' workroom
- * Students will need colored pencils and crayons
- * Copies of portrait drawing from supply box
- * For extended project:
 - Woman's smock, men's jacket and glasses are in supply box
 - Pitchfork or broom (bring from home)
 - Digital Camera
- * **Artist In Overalls: The Life of Grant Wood**, Duggleby available for reference in supply box

Reference Books

- * Grant Wood, Jennings J759.13 WOO
- * Grant Wood, Dennis Q759.13
- * Grant Wood The Regionalist Vision, Corn 759.13
- * Grant Wood, Venezia B WOO

AHEAD OF TIME NOTE: Check for enough copies of portrait for project, if you need more, copy on legal size white paper on copy machine in teacher's workroom. Also, make copies of the master note "Famous Artist Series" for each student.

Present laminate #1, Grant Wood :

Grant Wood grew up in Iowa, the heartland of America farming territory. He was born in the small town of Anamos with a population of only 2000 people. Wood lived there until age 10 when his father died. His mother then moved his family from the farm he loved so much to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Grant Wood is known best for painting the simple scenes of the land and people he knew best. His style of art became known as REGIONALISM.

Show students laminates #2 – 5, Wood's paintings: "Stone City, Iowa", "Spring in Town", "Overmantel Decoration", "Appraisal", and "Arbor Day". Discuss what type of everyday activities and customs they see of the midwestern farming community in his paintings. Ask if they see his

smooth, blended brush strokes. Is there a lot of detail? He painted scenes of their harsh life with a serene quality.

Like many other artists of his time, Grant Wood wanted to experience the "romantic" life of a painter and live in Paris. He painted street scenes and popular monuments while living in Paris. But he was unhappy with the "Impressionist" style of thicker, quick brush strokes. He concluded his best ideas "came while milking a cow!" He returned to Iowa and said an artist should "paint what you know", and "paint the subjects that are familiar and that one has honest feelings about and can interpret beyond the apparent surfaces."

Show laminate #6, "Avenue of Chestnuts", and ask students if they can see the influence the Impressionists had on him. Do they look different from the other paintings shown? Do you see a lot of detail in these?

Grant Wood eventually combined his own style with German art of the 15th and 16th century. While he was on a trip in Germany he fell in love with their rich patterns, fine details and beautiful glazed finishes. He also liked the way they painted a very distinct, detailed background.

Show laminate #7 of "Portrait of a Man in Red Hat." It was created by Hans Memling, a German artist. Note the detail.

In 1930 Wood painted his most famous painting, "American Gothic". It had strong German influence and showed great detail. It won a Bronze medal at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum purchased it for \$300. The model in the picture is his sister posed as the farmer's unmarried daughter. The stern "father" is actually the local dentist and a friend of Wood's. ***Show laminate #8 of actual models for painting. .***

Pass out laminated post cards of "American Gothic" and framed painting and note the farmhouse in background.

Wood loved the window in this local farmhouse that is still standing in Iowa. The window is Gothic style architecture popular in the U.S. in the late 1800's.

Point out some of the other details - brooch, design on dress. The faces in the portrait seem to match the long, narrow vertical lines of the Gothic window. Do they look stern, happy or sad? He also repeats the lines of the pitchfork tines in the seams of the farmer's overalls.

Wood was trying to show the protective, paternal qualities of the father he briefly knew. It also shows the hardworking independence of the small town farmer. Note the pitchfork - it symbolized the occupation Wood was portraying. Note the detail of the houseplant on the front porch. Plants were hard to keep alive in the

harsh Midwest winters and were considered the mark of an accomplished homemaker.

Do you see anything out of place? . Note the woman's single unruly strand of hair- it almost pokes fun at her tidiness.

Do you think Wood was making fun of farmers or honoring them? Allow students to comment.

Everyone seemed to have an opinion about it. One lady wrote a letter to the "Des Moines Register" suggesting the painting be hung in a cheese factory because "that woman's face would positively sour milk".

Wood's paintings were popular and sold easily to a prestigious group of collectors. Two of those collectors are from the Chicago area, Marshall Field, III and a commercial patron, Abbott Laboratories.

Grant Wood died on February 2, 1942 of liver cancer and was buried next to his mother in Iowa.

PROJECT

Hand out the legal sized project copies of "American Gothic" to each student. They will draw in their own detailed background and create their own faces in portrait. When done, they should color the picture. Show them laminates # 9 and #10 of Wood's different backgrounds on his self-portrait, portrait of his mother. If they have trouble with faces in portraits, point out how to divide the face area into quadrants (see sample) so students can place eyes, noses and mouths easier. As they finish, mat their work on colored paper. A completed sample of the art project is in the supply box, show the students prior to discussing the project.

PLEASE LEAVE AT LEAST 5 MINUTES AT END OF THE ART PRESENTATION FOR STUDENTS TO PRESENT THEIR WORK TO THE CLASS.

Extension of Project - optional

Use clothes similar to models in portrait that are in the box and bring a pitchfork or broom from home. Let students dress up and take turns posing in front of the mounted portrait so you can see the background of the farmhouse. Take pictures with digital camera. You may make collage of pictures and mount on poster board or mount photograph next to their portrait drawing. (this will have to be done after class.) Display outside classroom with their completed portraits.

FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES

GRANT WOOD

Today in class a volunteer parent presented the works of American painter Grant Wood to your child's class. They learned about Grant Wood's background, style of art and viewed selections of his work, as well as completed an art project in the style of his work. Ask your child about Grant Wood's work – what is he most famous for? Ask them if they recall what "Regionalism" means.

The Art Institute of Chicago owns "American Gothic", 1930. In addition, Cook Library owns an enjoyable children's book entitled Old MacDonald Had an Apartment House by Barrett which has nothing to do with the painting American Gothic, but does use a spoof of it in its illustrations. In addition, the book Artist in Overalls: the Life of Grant Wood by J. Duggleby does discuss Wood's art and is geared for children.

Sincerely yours,

Art Volunteer