

# Dark Harbor Fishermen

BY N.C. WYETH

VIEWPOINT THEATER

PMA CLASSROOM  
BEST FOR  
Middle School



Newell Convers Wyeth  
United States, (1882–1945)  
*Dark Harbor Fishermen*,  
1943, tempera on hardboard  
(Renaissance Panel), 35 x 38  
inches. Bequest of Elizabeth  
B. Noyce, 1996.38.63

## THEMES

- Creative play
- Culture and tradition
- Sensory exploration
- Sound and movement
- Collaboration
- Identity

## CONTENT AREAS AND STANDARDS MET

### A1. Artist's Purpose

Students explain and compare different purposes of artists and their artwork in the context of time and place

### A2. Elements of Art and Principles of Design

Students compare features of composition both within an artwork and among artworks.

### E5. Interpersonal Skills

Students demonstrate positive interpersonal skills and analyze how interpersonal skills affect participation in the arts:

Getting along with others; Working as a team/ensemble; Following established rules/etiquette for observing/listening to art

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES

### Self-Management

Impulse control in the museum

### Social Awareness

Respectful listening and participation

### Relationship Skills

Teamwork, social engagement, communication

### Responsible Decision-Making

Evaluating and reflecting

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How does the artist's decision on viewpoint and composition impact the mood of an artwork?

Who or what powers industry?

## OBJECTIVES

- Students will engage in discussion, painting simulation, and viewpoint analysis to learn about viewpoint, perspective, and composition.
- Students will work collaboratively to physically recreate the painting by simulating the elements of the work (i.e. getting in the same positions as the fishermen, birds, fish, and boats), then take turns taking photos of the "model" from various angles to discover how different the painting would be from different perspectives.
- Students will discuss and analyze the impact of viewpoint and the choices the artist, N.C. Wyeth, made.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Smart phone or digital camera
- Writing utensil
- Blank piece of paper

## INSTRUCTIONS

Students will sit together in a semicircle in front of Dark Harbor Fisherman.

### Look

Take some time to look at the work of art. Notice that every color of the piece was made with a different print.

### Respond

Think about and respond to these questions:

- What do you think is happening in this scene?
- What do you think the fish in the boat are being used for?
- What time of day might it be?
- Would you describe this scene as active or still?
- What kind of mood do you think this scene conveys?
- What might you smell if you were inside this scene?
- What might you hear?
- How do you think the artist plays with light and dark?
- Consider the composition, or how the painting is arranged. How is the scene cropped? What is out of view? How do you think the key figures relate to each other?
- How do you think we are experiencing the scene and where are we standing?

## LEARN

Newell Convers "N. C." Wyeth was one of the most famous American painters and illustrators of his time and was also the head of a famous art family. Three of his children were artists, including the realist painter Andrew Wyeth, and one of his grandchildren, Jamie Wyeth (Andrew's son), is also a painter – he was born the year after N. C. died and is still living and painting in Maine.

N. C. Wyeth was born in Needham, Massachusetts, in 1882. Wyeth went on to settle in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and summered in Port Clyde, Maine (having discovered the beauty of Maine on a sailing trip in 1910). He studied under the artist Howard Pyle, who encouraged him to move to the Western part of the United States to explore his subject matter. Wyeth is best known for his illustrations for a new edition of the book *Treasure Island*, which launched Wyeth's career. Wyeth blended "romance and realism" in those 14 illustrations. The illustrations capture a sense of drama and whimsy. Wyeth was very skilled at creating scenes filled with tension and that suggest action. These skills carried over into the many paintings he did, including *Dark Harbor Fishermen*. Where do you see elements of drama and action in *Dark Harbor Fishermen*?

Wyeth painted *Dark Harbor Fishermen* in 1943, just two years before his death. The vibrant egg tempera paint adds a brilliant sparkle to the herring bait fish in contrast to the dark water. The colors and vibrancy

of the paint add drama to an otherwise ordinary scene, almost as if Wyeth is shining a spotlight on the fishermen to pay tribute to their hard work. The men themselves are looking down and we do not see a lot of detail on their faces. They appear absorbed in their work. Though this is a scene of action (loading fishing bait, loud and swarming birds), it is quiet in tone, capturing how things might feel before the start of the day. What sounds do you imagine hearing when looking at this painting? What do you imagine you might feel if you were to step into this painting?

We are looking at this fishing scene from above, a birds-eye view. Viewpoint is the spot from which we, the audience, are looking at the scene. It is one of the first decisions an artist makes when planning a composition. Standard viewpoint is how a person views something as if they were standing in front of it. A low viewpoint is when one is viewing the scene from a much lower stance, crouched down for example, or looking up from the bottom of a hill. A high viewpoint is when one is looking down on a scene, like we are here. There is no right or wrong viewpoint, but the choice the artist makes has an enormous impact on the piece. The rules of perspective don't change depending on viewpoint, but the experience is affected. Why do you think N.C. Wyeth chose to paint this scene from a high viewpoint?

## ACT: VIEWPOINT THEATRE

*This activity should be done with multiple people and is best done in an in-person setting.*

To learn a little more about the idea of viewpoint, we will simulate the fishing scene in this painting by creating the mirror image of it – physically reenacting it with our bodies. We need four volunteers to be the fishermen. Look at the painting and arrange your body in the same position as the person you are mimicking. We also need three hungry seagulls. Look at the scene and arrange your body in a similar way as the seagulls. We also need fish in the barrel. You can lie down on the floor in front of the appropriate fisherman. And finally, the boats.

Now that we are all in position, let's take turns stepping out of the model to take photos from different viewpoints.

Choose a student to start, and hand the camera to that student. Ask that the student walk around until they find a spot to shoot the scene. It can be standard, low, or high viewpoint. Feel free to crouch down or stand on the bench, or even to take the photo from the perspective of the fish in the boat looking up at the scene.

### Reflect and Share

#### Viewpoint Theatre Reflection

Sit down again and take a look at the photos that were taken together as part of the Viewpoint Theatre activity. Look at the photos with all the students and ask that each student talk about their choices in viewpoint and how that affected the overall scene and composition.

The last step in interacting with art is to share your experience with others.

Share your writing or your experience with the PMA! [Learning@portlandmuseum.org](mailto:Learning@portlandmuseum.org)

Or share with others in your home or class.

## Perspective Writing

*This activity can be done individually or in a group setting.*

Get your writing utensil and blank piece of paper.

This scene is filled with different characters, both human and animal. Look closely at all the characters and choose one that you would like to explore more. Once you have your chosen character, notice what that character is doing.

Write down a few words that describe this character and what they are doing.

Think about what it would be like to be this character. Write a few sentences or a short story about what it would be like to be this character. What are your motivations? What are your fears? What are you thinking about? What is most important to you?

If you have time, choose another character and do the same activity.

Compare this character with the one you initially chose. How are these characters different? How are they similar?

If you are doing this activity in a group, share your perspectives with others and explore how there are multiple perspectives that exist in one scene!

## RESOURCES

Keyes B., "PMA exhibition to present stunning, complicated portrait of N.C. Wyeth," *Portland Press Herald*, September 29, 2019

Wikipedia, "N.C. Wyeth,"  
[Wikipedia.org/wiki/N.\\_C.\\_Wyeth](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/N._C._Wyeth)

Artscope online: current exhibits  
"A Stunning Homecoming: N.C. Wyeth's Masterful Portland Retrospective,"  
October 28th, 2019 // Current Exhibits,  
November/December 2019, November/  
December 2019, Visual Arts  
[ArtscopeMagazine.com/2019/10/a-stunning-homecoming-n-c-wyeths-masterful-portland-retrospective](https://www.artscopeMagazine.com/2019/10/a-stunning-homecoming-n-c-wyeths-masterful-portland-retrospective)

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