

Step 4: Interpretation

Interpretation involves bringing your close observation, analysis, and any additional information you have gathered about an art object together to try to understand what a work of art means. There can be multiple meanings of a work of art. The best informed ones are based on visual evidence and outside research.

Some interpretive questions to consider for this painting might be:

Why would Rockwell Kent choose to paint this scene?

Is this a realistic or abstract depiction of this scene?

How do you think this scene was received by people in 1941?

Who would want to buy this painting? Why?

Why do you think it is titled *December 8, 1941*?

What happened that day in U.S. History?

Step 5: Critical Assessment & Response

This final stage involves a judgment of the success of a work of art. Critical assessment involves questions of value and can include personal and subjective responses to art.

Do you think this painting is well done? Why or why not?

Do you like it?

Is this image still a relevant depiction of a family member going off to war? What is the same? What is different?

We hope this approach enhanced your exploration and enjoyment of this painting. If you like, you can try this method with other works of art. Simply ask yourself the following questions with each object:

What do I see?
(Close Observation)

What do I think?
(Analysis)

How can I learn more?
(Research)

What might it mean?
(Interpretation)

How do I feel about it?
(Critical Assessment and Response)

Rockwell Kent, 1882-1971
December Eighth 1941
Oil on canvas, 43.5 x 71.5"
X1978.1.17
Gift of Sally Kent Gorton

This painting has been known by two names. It was originally titled *The Open Road*. In reference to this title, Kent remarked, "the road that led out into a wider world has been open for many generations, and youth has taken it; and more youth now in these days will take it. And many, because of what will happen to them, will never return." (Kent 1942)

The piece was later renamed *December Eighth, 1941*, a direct reference to the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Regardless of which title one applies to this painting, the story of love and loss remains evident.

Plattsburgh State Art Museum

Look Think Learn



Interactive Guide
part of a series

Look Think Learn

As a college museum, Plattsburgh State Art Museum is committed to helping visitors develop visual literacy skills – the ability to construct meaning from all that we see. One way it does this is through a method called Learning to Look. This is a five-step approach to exploring works of art that is meant to empower visitors to observe carefully and think critically about any work of art they encounter. Simply follow the steps below.

Step 1: Close Observation

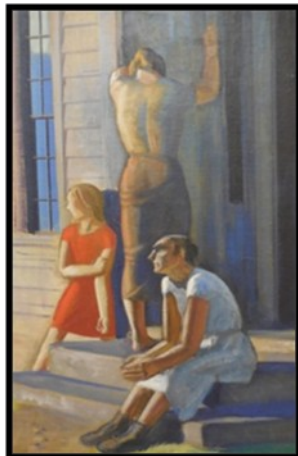
Look carefully at this painting by Rockwell Kent.



What do you notice about the figures?

Their poses?

Their expressions?



What do you notice about this girl's body language?



Do you see the tiny figure on the road?
What do you observe?



How would you describe Kent's painting style? His colors? Brushstrokes?

Step 2: Analysis

Now think about all this visual information.

Who do you think the people might be?

What do you think is happening in this scene? How do you know?

How are they responding to the tiny figure in the background?

When do you think they lived?

As you consider each of these questions, look to the painting for clues to support your ideas.

Step 3: Research

Now that you have had a chance to look carefully and begin forming your own ideas about this work of art, feel free to read the text printed on the back of this brochure. It provides some information that you cannot get from simply looking at the object.

When you have finished reading, consider the following questions:

Does the text reinforce what you observed on your own? How?

Did it mention anything you did not see or think about previously? What?

How would your experience of this painting have been different if you had read the informational text first?