

“Grandma” Moses: Painting from Memory

Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses was a self-taught artist who began painting in her 70s. She commonly painted landscapes from memory, and often included her favorite trees, buildings and human forms. Today we will create a landscape from memory after learning about Moses’ unique painting style.

Goals

- Create a landscape painting from memory using a limited palette.

Anna Mary Robertson (“Grandma”) Moses (American, 1860–1961)
The Mailman Has Gone, 1949
 Oil on Masonite, 16 3/8 x 21 in.
 Collection of Shelburne Museum, museum purchase, acquired from Otto Kallir, 1961-210.4
 Copyright © Grandma Moses Properties Co., New York

Vocabulary

Background—The area of a painting that is behind most of the objects in the composition

Collage—the act of cutting and pasting shapes onto a surface to create a composition

Foreground—The area of the painting that appears closest to the viewer

Horizon Line—an imaginary line in the painting that divides the sky and ground

Middle Ground—the area of the painting that is farther away from the foreground and closer to the background

Standards

VA:Cr1.1.5a Combine ideas to generate an innovative idea for art-making.

VA:Cr2.1.4a Explore and invent art-making techniques and approaches.



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Background/ History

“Grandma” Moses (American, 1860–1961)

Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses was an American artist who spent decades living a rural, agricultural life that she would later feature in her paintings. Moses began actively painting in her 70s, and continued for the rest of her life. Previously she did not have as much time for painting as raising children and taking care of a farm were full-time jobs. While Moses did not begin her art career until later in life, as a child she was introduced to the world of art through her father, who was primarily a farmer and occasionally painted. Moses became a household name by the mid-1950s when her paintings, rich in visual narratives that explored the everyday, were reproduced on popular holiday cards and domestic products from fabric to tableware.

As an artist, Moses was also known for her use of tracers. She would clip out interesting images of objects, buildings, or people from magazines or newspapers and save them in a chest. Moses often took her clippings and traced them using carbon paper. Carbon paper allows an artist to capture the exact shape of something, then transfer it to a new surface without ruining the original tracer. When looking closely at Moses’ works of art, viewers may notice that the same forms are used in variety of her paintings.

She used these tracers and vivid colors to paint scenes recalling memories from her life or family stories. She also relied on her imagination to tell these stories from her past, so while her paintings are always lively, they may not always be entirely accurate or employ precise composition. Moses was a pioneer of her time, painting with a unique style and finding inspiration in the world around her.



Unidentified maker

Grandma Moses working on a painting, 1945–50

Gelatin silver print, 10 x 8 in.

Collection of Bennington Museum, Bennington, Vermont,
gift of Will Moses, 2006.39

More Resources

Grandma Moses, Smithsonian American Art Museum, <https://bit.ly/SAAMgma-SM>

Grandma Moses, <https://bit.ly/BioGma-SM>

Acrylic Landscape Painting Techniques, The Willkemp Art School, <https://bit.ly/Willkemp-SM>

ANNA MARY ROBERTSON (“GRANDMA”) MOSES PROPERTIES, GALERIE ST. ETIENNE, [HTTPS://BIT.LY/GSE-SM](https://bit.ly/GSE-SM)

Grandma Moses, Bennington Museum, <https://bit.ly/Bennington-SM>

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ACTIVITY

For this activity you will be asked to think of your favorite place or an important memory and recreate it in paint!

Painting Landscapes - Things to Keep in Mind

Use of color—Color is very important in landscape painting. Cooler colors (blue and green) tend to recede into the background and help create depth, while warmer colors (red, yellow, and orange) move forward, closer to the viewer.

Layering your work—Creating a landscape painting that has dimension and depth takes practice. It is important to remember that when we stand and look out over a landscape we see many things layered over each other.

Materials

- Paper
- Pencil
- Eraser
- Scissors
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Paint
- Brushes
- Water
- Canvas (if you do not have canvas you can use paper)
- Optional: Glitter

Before you begin painting here are some questions to help you think about your favorite place or event.

- How old were you when you experienced it?
- What colors do you see?
- What kinds of buildings do you see, if any?
- Who was there? How many?
- Were there animals? What kinds of animals?

Now that you have answered these questions, use your responses to help create your landscape. Remember, try to use the colors you saw when you visualized your scene. Look through magazines and newspapers for images that you might use in your painting. Don't be afraid to add in glitter for extra sparkle! Moses sprinkled glitter over *Mailman Has Gone* to enhance the snowy effect.

Steps

1. Begin by 'washing' your canvas with a thin tint. Water down a blue or green paint to create a layer. This ensures you will not be leaving any white canvas behind. Let dry slightly.
2. Map out your scene. Lightly paint in your tree line, where you'll place a building, or mark in any other major shapes. Or use tracers, like Moses, to help create your scene by lightly penciling them in.
3. Begin by working in the background, and don't be afraid to cover up your marked areas. You will continue to build up layers with paint.
4. Move your way through the middle ground to the foreground. If you feel that your background layers are too wet, let your canvas dry for a few minutes in the sun.
5. Continue transferring your memory onto the canvas. If you are using tracers like Moses, now would be a good time to trace your shapes.
6. Adding details last will ensure that they pop off the paper or canvas. Waiting until after the painting dries ensures that colors stay vibrant and won't get muddled.

