

## Grade 7

## Stories in Art

*November*

John Quidor "Rip Van Winkle"

Diego M. Rivera "Detroit Industry" North wall (detail)

**Artwork Overview:**  
(See following pages)

**About the Artist:**  
(See following pages)

### Topics for Discussion:

1. What different ways are the people dressed in these two paintings?
2. Where these painted at different times in American history? How can you tell?
3. What do you think is the story about in each painting?
4. What are the people doing in each painting?
5. Which painting shows more or less action? Why?
6. Can you find which painting contains historical elements? What are they?

### Hands - on Art Activity: Draw a Picture that Tells a Story

#### Materials:

*drawing*  
White drawing paper or ~~cardboard~~  
Pencil and colored pencil

Teacher Preparation: Review the "Rip van Winkle" story. Ask students to imagine what their world would be like if they were to fall asleep after school and wake up 20 years later. How do they think their world would be different.

#### Directions:

1. Draw the story in pencil. Include some symbols or clues to tell about the time the story is about. (American flag, peace sign, religious symbols etc.)
2. Discuss the way the artists used the background to place the story in a certain setting. John Quidor places the story on a village street, while Rivera places his story in a flat, almost imaginary place which moves around the picture plane like a maze.
3. The students may imagine their school or town 20 years in the future.
4. Carefully think about the colors you will use.
5. Fill in the entire paper with color and drawings.
6. Because they will use color pencil they must put some pressure on the pencils to achieve dark color areas.
7. They may also use details because they are working with color pencil on small paper.
8. Student should write their name on the front when complete.

Variation: This project lends itself to a group activity: students could work in groups to develop large mural sized drawings. They could paint their mural using tempera paints. (if time and planning permits)



# Urban Environments

## Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry*, North Wall (Detail)



Diego M. Rivera (dee-ay-goh ree-vay-rah), Mexican, 1886-1957, *Detroit Industry*, North Wall (Detail), fresco, 1932-33, 258 x 213 cm (8-ft.5-in. x 6-ft.11-in.)  
© The Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Edsel B. Ford Fund and Gift of Edsel B. Ford.

### The Artist

Diego Rivera was a giant of a man who had a reputation for boisterous behavior, wild exaggeration, and antagonizing nearly everyone around him. He was also an artist of extraordinary talent and was called "Mexico's national treasure" by her president.

He was born in 1886 and even as a little boy, Diego astonished everyone with his artistic ability. Between 1913 and 1917, Rivera produced over 200 cubist paintings, but he abandoned the style to follow his heart: painting from life in a realistic manner. He was becoming increasingly sensitive to the plight of the poor and the struggling, unorganized workers around the world. He wanted his art to uplift them, to give them hope and direction and his themes became increasingly political.

His fame and notoriety spread, and he was invited to the United States, along with his third wife, Frida Kahlo, a brilliant and controversial artist in her own right. He painted murals in several cities, but his themes and subjects were constantly disputed, and public outrage followed him everywhere. Rivera and Frida returned to work in Mexico. Rivera died in his studio in 1957.

### The Art

Detroit, Michigan, is the automobile center of the world, and when the Detroit Institute of Art invited Diego Rivera to decorate the walls of one of its rooms with frescoes, he eagerly accepted. He was

excited by the prospect of seeing and depicting the state-of-the-art American machinery that had always fascinated him.

The north wall of the mural series shows the production of the Ford Motor Company's brand new V-8 engine which came out the same year the mural was begun. At the very top of the mural, Rivera has represented the raw materials used to make the automobile. Notice the subtle fossils etched into the dark band in the upper right. Why do you think the artist included this?

An enormous blast furnace in the center of the main fresco dwarfs the silhouetted worker as he works to reduce the iron ore, coke, and limestone to make iron. In the upper left and continuing across the mural are the various operations of making the mold for the engine block and, further right, the pouring of the steel for the block itself. On the lower half, going to the center, the activities of deburring, spindling, and honing are depicted. On the right in the lower section, there is foundry and drilling work going on, while directly in the center and largest, we see men working on the motor assembly production line.

Throughout the mural we see a cross-section of racial and ethnic types, yet their faces seem to be masks of grim, resigned determination. All the operations seem organized and show the results of teamwork. Would this be a good place to work? Explain your answer. Can you find any women in the mural?

### Guided Analysis

#### Cultural Context:

Diego Rivera lived and painted during turbulent times in world history. His own country's government changed hands ten times. During the Mexican Revolution, the ill-fed, illiterate workers and peasants rose up against the wealthy landowners. In 1914, World War I began. In Russia, one famous revolution was followed by a second, and Lenin, the revolutionary leader, promised his people a new order that would end the class system and poverty. Rivera began his murals in the United States while the country was in the deepest throes of the Great Depression.

#### Style:

There are three periods of art history evident in *Detroit Industry*: early native America (the large



## o Rivera, *Detroit Industry*, North Wall (Detail)

naissance  
basic

Rivera's style is characterized by a straightforward, heroic naturalism that uses both the ideas and techniques of modern art and the richness of primitive cultures.

### Media and Technique:

The art of fresco dates back thousands of years, but it gained prominence in the Italian Renaissance. Rivera revived the technique after studying it thoroughly in Spain and Italy. Rivera's assistants would first lay a limestone base on the wall. Then, while the plaster was still wet, Rivera painted on top of it with special watercolors whose pigments had been carefully ground. As the plaster dries in fresco painting, a chemical reaction takes place between the limestone and the carbon dioxide in the air, causing the watercolor to be covered with a thin layer of calcium. This creates an unusual glow and a tremendous durability. The paint actually becomes a permanent part of the wall, protected from time and weather.

Assistants would trace and transfer drawings to transparent paper, make perforations along the outlines, and then dust red ochre paint through the holes. This process, called pouncing, made a dotted line on the wall which Rivera then painted.

### Subject:

As a child, Rivera loved to investigate machines and how they worked. In Detroit, Rivera felt he could reach and liberate the American worker masses who labored, like machines themselves, in the automobile industry. He wanted the workers he represented to be the real "owners" of his mural through their appreciation and understanding of a piece that had been done essentially for them.

Diego Rivera helped change the meaning of art. He took it out of the galleries and museums and into public places.

### Judgment:

Is *Detroit Industry* a beautiful picture? What are some things or places you consider beautiful that others might not? What makes them beautiful in your mind? How do we learn what beauty is? Where is your favorite part of the mural? Why?

### Elements and Principles of Design:

The design emphasis of this mural might seem at first to be based on strong verticals and horizontals. Yet there is a powerful diagonal movement at work. A wave-like motion of bodies and machine parts moves throughout the piece. Start at the left and trace the wave that begins with a man's arm reaching into the mural. It connects with another man's arm and the motion moves up through the elbow of the next worker, then up and down across the entire assembly line. Find other "waves" in the machinery or other elements of the mural. The repetition of the wave leads the eye over each part of the mural and *unifies* the picture.

Perhaps the most subtle diagonal is the one created across the entire mural, including even the uppermost panel. Can you describe it? It is an *implied* line created by the contrast of the rich, glowing, warm oranges and browns against the iridescent icy blues, whites, and greens. Which things are painted in the warm tones and which are in cool tones?

*Living, biological objects are represented with warmer colors, while the cool, impersonal machinery tends to be shown in whites, blues, and greens.*

Find a worker who seems the farthest away. Which one seems closest? What artistic techniques help create this illusion? *Size, elevation in the scene, detail.* Where would you divide the mural into a foreground, middle ground, and background. How did you make the decision?

Find evidence of repetition in the mural. Where are colors repeated? Lines? Forms? Repetition also serves to unify the busy activity.

### Comparison:

How does *Detroit Industry* compare to Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*? Where can you find similarities in style? In emotion? How are they different?

**Activity:** Take a field trip to a plant or factory. Paint a mural that uses symbols that are important to you. Express your strong feelings about a subject or event in the mural. Perhaps there are school or community issues that you could portray.



# Rip Van Winkle

attributed to  
**John Quidor**

## Overview

**J**ohn Quidor was born in 1800 in Tappan, New York, a town in the Hudson River Valley. His father was a schoolteacher. When Quidor was eleven, his family moved to New York City. At the age of fourteen, he studied with the well-known portrait painter John Wesley Jarvis. To earn extra money, Quidor painted banners and signs for New York City's volunteer fire department.

In 1829 Quidor began exhibiting his paintings at the National Academy of Design in New York City. Since artists had a hard time earning a living in the 1830s, Quidor left New York City to try farming in Quincy and Columbus, Illinois. After about twelve years, he moved to upstate New York, where he painted full-time until his death in 1881.

Quidor lived when the United States was a young country. He and other American writers and artists began to look to their own land and its people for subjects to write about or paint. Quidor enjoyed reading books by James Fenimore Cooper (also a resident of upstate New York), and Washington Irving. The artist often chose romantic and fantastic scenes from their stories to paint, such as this and other events from Irving's 1820 tale "Rip Van Winkle."





## What's the Story?

Washington Irving's character, Rip Van Winkle, is a hunter and trapper of Dutch descent living in a small town in the Hudson River Valley of New York State in the 1760s. In order to escape the continuous nagging of his wife, Rip frequently walks through the Catskill Mountains with his faithful dog Wolf. On one such trip, Rip is lured into a secluded glen by a strange and very small man dressed "in the antique Dutch fashion." Rip decides to join the man's companions in their game of skittles or ninepins, a bowling game in which a wooden disk or ball is used to knock down nine pins. While they play, Rip drinks a mysterious potion that tastes somewhat like Dutch beer. At the end of the game, Rip falls asleep and does not awaken for twenty years. When he returns home, no one recognizes him, his wife and all of his friends are dead, and George Washington, rather than King George III, presides over the country. After confronting skeptical townspeople, Rip is recognized by his daughter Judith, who takes him into her home to live the rest of his life in comfort.

*Rip Van Winkle*, 1829  
attributed to John Quidor  
(American, 1800–1881)  
Oil on canvas  
George F. Harding  
Collection, 1982.765



First published in 1820 in Washington Irving's short-story collection *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, "Rip Van Winkle" has become a classic of early American literature. The young United States was eager to have its own legends and myths featuring the everyday lives of its citizens. This story is based on a German folktale about a young goat shepherd named Peter Klaus, who was lured into a dell where twelve knights played skittles and where Klaus drank and fell asleep for twenty years. The small, secluded wooded valleys of the Catskills were a natural setting for an American version of the story.

This painting of Rip Van Winkle highlights Rip's emotions upon his return to his post-Revolutionary War hometown. Fantasy, nostalgia, and political commentary play equal roles in this interpretation of Irving's story.





## Ghosts and Relics

At the end of Irving's story, the mystery of Rip's long nap is ascribed to the ghostly appearance of Henry Hudson, the first European to explore the Hudson River and its immediate region. A town member explains that Hudson keeps a ghostly vigil over the area by appearing every twenty years with his crew and that they are seen on such occasions playing ninepins (skittles). Since Hudson explored the Hudson River in 1609 and thereafter appeared every twenty years, Rip would have fallen asleep in 1769 and awakened in 1789, the year George Washington (for whom Irving was named) was elected president. The portrait of George Washington that swings over the tavern's door in the Quidor painting highlights the young republic's pride in its heroic leader.

Quidor also included details that reflected New York politics of the early nineteenth century. The Dutch colonial settlement of New Amsterdam, which would become New York City, was founded in 1626 and was ruled for thirty-eight years by the Dutch before it was turned over to England in 1664. When Washington Irving was born in New York City in 1783, its twenty thousand inhabitants were still largely Dutch and many still spoke the Dutch language and practiced Dutch customs. By the time Quidor was born in 1800, both the culture and architecture of New York City were experiencing rapid change, although change came more slowly to the Dutch communities that filled the Hudson River Valley, the setting for Irving's story and Quidor's painting.

The early years of Irving's and Quidor's lives in New York City saw the end of traditional Dutch culture, as the city's oldest inhabitants became part of a larger, more diverse urban society. Changes made to the city's Dutch houses were the most visible symbol of this transformation. Characterized by step-shaped roofs, many of these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century houses were still standing when the Revolutionary War began in 1775. However, by 1820 most had been destroyed and replaced with buildings constructed in English Georgian and Neoclassical architectural styles. It is no accident that the houses in "*Rip Van Winkle*," set shortly after the American Revolution, still have the step-shaped roofs of the earlier Dutch buildings.



The newspaper *New-York Mirror* and other periodicals started a campaign in the late 1820s to save remaining buildings, featuring engravings of the endangered architecture and nostalgic stories about “Knickerbocker” (Dutch) taste in order to build public support. Although the cause achieved great notoriety, the last Dutch house in New York City was destroyed in 1834. During the 1930s, the Dutch house became a cultural icon with a wide range of associations surrounding the destruction of New York’s early history. Hence, the Dutch houses included in this painting suggest a wider context in which to understand Rip Van Winkle as a figure battling against forces of change beyond his control.

## What’s in the Painting?

**T**his painting illustrates the most dramatic moment of Irving’s story, when Rip awakens from his sleep and returns to his village, on what was an election day of the new Republic.

*The appearance of Rip, with his long grizzled beard, his rusty fowling piece, his uncouth dress, and an army of women and children at his heels, soon attracted the attention of the tavern politicians. They crowded round him, eyeing him from head to foot with great curiosity. The orator bustled up to him, and, drawing him partly aside, inquired “On which side he voted?” Rip stared in vacant stupidity. Another short but busy little fellow pulled him by the arm, and, rising on tiptoe, inquired in his ear, “Whether he was Federal or Democrat?” Rip was equally at a loss to comprehend the question; when a knowing, self-important old gentleman, in a sharp cocked hat, made his way through the crowd, putting them to the right and left with his elbows as he passed, and planting himself before Van Winkle, with one arm akimbo, the other resting on his cane, his keen eyes and sharp hat penetrating, as it were, into his very soul, demanded in an austere tone, “what brought him to the election with a gun on his shoulder, and a mob at his heels, and whether he meant to breed a riot in the village?”—“Alas! gentlemen,” cried Rip, somewhat dismayed, “I am a poor quiet man, a native of the place, and a loyal subject of the King, God bless him!”*



*Here a general shout burst from the bystanders—"A tory! a tory! a spy! a refugee! hustle him! away with him!" It was with great difficulty that the self-important man in the cocked hat restored order; and, having assumed a tenfold austerity of brow, demanded again of the unknown culprit, what he came there for, and whom he was seeking? The poor man humbly assured them that he meant no harm, but merely came there in search of some of his neighbors, who used to keep about the tavern. . . .*

*Rip's heart died away at hearing of these sad changes in his home and friends, and finding himself thus alone in the world. Every answer puzzled him too, by treating of such enormous lapses of time, and of matters which he could not understand: war—congress—Stoney Point—he had no courage to ask after any more friends, but cried out in despair, "Does nobody here know Rip Van Winkle?"*

*"Oh, Rip Van Winkle!" exclaimed two or three, "Oh, to be sure! that's Rip Van Winkle yonder, leaning against the tree." Rip looked, and beheld a precise counterpart of himself, as he went up the mountain: apparently as lazy, and certainly as ragged. The poor fellow was now completely confounded. He doubted his own identity, and whether he was himself or another man. In the midst of his bewilderment, the man in the cocked hat demanded who he was, and what was his name?*

*"God knows," exclaimed he, at his wit's end; "I'm not myself—I'm somebody else—that's me yonder—no—that's somebody else got into my shoes—I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain, and they've changed my gun, and every thing's changed, and I'm changed, and I can't tell what's my name, or who I am!"*

As the above passage from Irving's story indicates, the crowd in the painting appears highly suspicious of Rip's outburst. An old woman leaning on a crutch, a pack of thin children, a young mother holding close her frightened child, and various other skeptical farmers and townspeople make up the crowd. In this scene, Rip seems trapped between the hostile people before him and the red-vested man who demands to know his identity.



## John Quidor (1800–1881)

**J**ohn Quidor was born in Tappan, New York, a town in the Hudson River Valley. He was the son of a schoolteacher, and the family moved to New York City when Quidor was eleven. When he was fourteen, Quidor was apprenticed to the portrait painter John Wesley Jarvis. It is possible that Quidor was also apprenticed at some time to a sign painter or other commercial artist, as he supplemented his income by painting banners and signboards for New York City's volunteer fire department. He also taught a number of aspiring artists. Four of Quidor's oil paintings were exhibited in 1829 at the National Academy of Design in New York City, an association that organized yearly exhibitions to showcase the talents of American artists and one that remains active today as a venue for historical exhibitions.

According to an anonymous reviewer of an 1829 show at the National Academy of Design, Quidor's painting, if exhibited in Europe, "would be bought at a handsome price, and the painter be thus encouraged and enabled to produce one still better. How it will be in America, one cannot say." The painting to which this quotation refers is thought to be the Art Institute's *Rip Van Winkle*.

Despite this promising reception, Quidor left the New York art world by 1837. He moved to Illinois and farmed for twelve years in Quincy and Columbus before returning to New York State. The artist painted for almost fifty years, creating landscapes, religious subjects, and portraits in addition to subjects drawn from literature. He based many of these paintings on the work of Washington Irving (1783–1859) and James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851). Their works — especially "Rip Van Winkle" and Cooper's *The Pioneers* — were among the most influential early writings on the geographical wonders of the Catskill Mountain area of upstate New York, which Quidor loved. Although Quidor's paintings were not intended to be book illustrations, it is thought that twenty-one of his twenty-eight surviving paintings are based on Irving's stories.



## Washington Irving (1783–1859)

**W**ashington Irving was the youngest child of a wealthy New York merchant who sided with the colonists in the Revolutionary War. The young Irving was trained as a lawyer before turning to journalism and literature. He had already achieved some fame as a writer when, in 1809, he published a comic history titled *Diedrich Knickerbocker's History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, which earned Irving international attention. "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" were two of the classic stories included in Irving's most successful book, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon of 1819*, which the author described as "found among the papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker." In reality, the book was written while Irving was living in England. In addition to popular fiction, Irving also produced essays, biographies, and historical works.

### Rip Van Winkle and the Arts

Throughout the nineteenth century, several versions of "Rip Van Winkle" were performed on the American stage. One of America's leading actors, Joseph Jefferson (1829–1905), wrote and acted in the most successful of these productions, and he devoted much of his stage career to the exploration of this character.



## Glossary

**Apprentice:** One who enters a legal agreement to work for another for a specific amount of time in return for instruction in a trade, art, or business. Learning to paint as an apprentice was a centuries-old custom in Europe and was also practiced in the young United States.

**“Knickerbocker”:** The colloquial term for things of Dutch culture, such as houses with step-shaped roofs.

**Skittles or ninepins:** A bowling game in which a wooden disk or ball is used to knock down nine pins.

**Federal:** The term refers to the Federalist Party (1789-1801), which advocated strong central government and support of the United States Constitution.

**Democrat:** The term refers to the Democratic Party, which had its origins among Thomas Jefferson’s Republicans, who were strongly against the monarchy.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*Rip Van Winkle* attributed to John Quidor

Read the passage from *Rip Van Winkle* (p. 90) on which this painting is based. Have students pick out the details from the passage represented in this painting.

- Rip with long grizzled beard and rusty fowling piece (musket)
- an army of women and children gathered at his heels
- an old gentleman in a sharp cocked hat
- Rip Van Winkle’s son leaning against a tree

Find Rip Van Winkle.

How can you tell he has been asleep for twenty years?

Imagine you fell asleep and woke up in twenty years.

How might things be different?