Grandma Moses
1860-1961
American Painter

Anna Mary Robertson Moses, better known as “Grandma Moses,” was born on a farm in upstate New York in 1860. Her art career did not begin until she was 67 years old when she began sewing embroidered pictures on cloth. Arthritis soon made embroidery difficult; at the age of 70, she began to paint. For the next thirty years, until her death at the age of 101, Grandma Moses produced more than 1,500 pictures that were painted in an honest, uncomplicated style. She is known as a “naïve,” or folk, artist because of her lack of formal artistic training.

Most of Grandma Moses’ paintings are landscapes, and all of her pictures tell a story. Her style was simple and unsophisticated, and she used solid bright colors that she modified using tints (making a color lighter by adding white) and shades (making a color darker by adding black). She also created depth in her paintings by stacking and diminishing elements to show perspective.

Grandma Moses’ naïve approach to art found acceptance in the sophisticated art circles of the early 20th century. At a time when the primitive art of other cultures and Abstract Expressionism were in vogue, her simple style and the almost abstract patterns had a broad appeal.

**Art Elements**

**Color**—The sensation resulting from reflection or absorption of light by a surface. Color has three properties: hue, which is the name of the color; value, which is the lightness or darkness of the color; and intensity, which refers to the purity of the hue. Grandma Moses adjusted the value of her hues by adding white to create a tint or adding black to create a shade. She created unity by repeating colors throughout her compositions, thereby leading the eye through certain parts of the painting.

**Space**—Refers to the feeling of depth in a painting. Space that appears three-dimensional in a two-dimensional painting is an illusion created by the artist. Grandma Moses used several simple types of perspective to give her paintings a sense of space: diminishing perspective, which shows objects decreasing in size the farther away they are from the viewer; stacked perspective, which places objects that are in the background vertically higher on the picture surface; and atmospheric perspective, where objects in the background appear bluer and hazier, simulating the effects the atmosphere has on objects seen at a distance. Overlapping is another technique Grandma Moses used to give her paintings depth.

**Vocabulary**

**Landscape**—A scene or view of land, such as mountains, fields and forests.

**Naïve**—Lacking worldly wisdom and sophistication; not learned or affected; primitive. A naïve artist is often self-taught, and his/her work is seemingly simple and childlike.

**Narrative**—A story or description of actual or fictional events. Grandma Moses’ paintings are filled with visual narrative about farm and town life as she experienced it.

**Art Principles**

**Repetition/Rhythm**—The repetition of elements (color, shape, line, value, space, texture) moves the viewer’s eye across a work of art and creates rhythm. Regular rhythm is the repetition of elements that are the same or nearly the same in regular sequence. Progressive rhythms are those in which the elements change size as they progress or move across space. Repetition of colors and shapes creates rhythms in Grandma Moses’ paintings, adding visual excitement and a sense of unity.
Unity—Visual unity is one of the most important aspects of well-designed art. Unity is the cohesive quality that makes an artwork feel complete and finished. Repetition and clustering of shapes and colors also create a strong sense of unity in an artwork. Grandma Moses achieved unity through both the repetition of colors and the clustering of elements. Most of her paintings were also unified by a common theme, such as a special event or holiday.
Anna Mary Robertson was born on September 7th, 1860, in Greenwich, N.Y., a small farm community in the rolling Taconic Mountains, near the Vermont border. She was the third of ten children, and growing up on a farm she developed an appreciation of both nature and hard work. Her father had an interest in art, and once while he was recuperating from pneumonia, he painted murals throughout their house. He passed this interest on to his children, treating them to paper for drawing. Anna Mary used berry juice to draw when she didn’t have chalk.

Anna Mary attended school only three months during the winter and three months during the summer; she was expected to help on the farm the other six months of the year. At school, the only art training she had was map drawing. At the age of 12, she “hired out” to an elderly couple that needed live-in help. They treated her like a daughter, and she took great pride in all the tasks she performed. She was able to continue some schooling, and at the age of 15, she wrote an eloquent essay on the importance of borrowing from nature to make your surroundings pleasant.

Anna Mary worked for several different people until the age of 27, when she married Thomas Moses on November 9, 1877. Thomas worked as a hired man, but he dreamed of owning his own place. Having heard of post-Civil War opportunities, the couple struck out for North Carolina, where a job on a horse farm awaited them. Anna Mary took enough money on the trip to get back home if necessary, but she later used the money to buy a cow. The couple made it as far as Virginia, where they fell in love with the Shenandoah Valley. They hired on as tenant farmers, but eventually bought their own farm. Here Anna Mary gave birth to ten children, and ran a successful butter-making business. Later she also made and sold potato chips (which were a novelty at the time). She felt marriage was a true partnership. She once said, “I couldn’t bear the thought of sitting down and Thomas handing out the money.”

In 1905, after 18 years in Virginia, Thomas and Anna Mary, along with five surviving children, returned to New York. Thomas had always been homesick for the North, so they purchased a farm in Eagle Bridge, N.Y., and packed their belongings into a railroad car to return to the valley where they had grown up. They spent the next 22 years on this farm, working the land and raising their family.

During these busy years there was little time for leisure activities. When Thomas died in 1927, their son Hugh and his wife, Dorothy, took over the farm. For the first time, Anna Mary, now 67 years old and known as “Grandma,” had time on her hands. She turned her attention to making bread and her famous jams and preserves. She also took up needlework (which she called her “fancywork”) with encouragement from her daughter, who had seen an embroidered picture and felt sure her mother could do a better job. Over the next seven years Grandma Moses produced more than 50 of these works, mostly landscapes, in embroidered worsted wool.

By 1935, Grandma Moses’ arthritis made it difficult to do needlework, and her sister suggested she seriously take up painting. Grandma had done a few paintings as decorations and gifts over the years. Now, she took canvas left over from the thresher and used old house paint to produce some paintings. She eventually began using oil paints and masonite (a pressed particle board with a hard smooth surface), instead of canvas, for most of her works. She was soon showing her artwork alongside her jams at local fairs. In 1938, she exhibited several of her paintings at the drug store in nearby Hoosick Falls, where the owner had started a Women’s Exchange. It was here that Louis Caldor, an engineer and avid art collector, first saw Grandma’s pictures. He bought every
Grandma Moses

painting in the shop. The next day he bought 10 more because he felt sure he could sell her work in New York City. Months later Caldor persuaded Otto Kallir, a gallery owner with a personal interest in primitive and naïve art, to hold a one-woman show of Grandma’s work. He titled it “What a Farm Wife Painted.” It opened in October 1940, and led to a Thanksgiving exhibition and gathering at Gimbel’s Department Store the following month, which Grandma Moses attended. There was a great deal of publicity prior to this event, and as a result, when Grandma arrived at the auditorium, there were 400 people to greet her. She charmed both the public and the press, and at age 80, her painting career began in earnest.

The public appeal of Grandma’s work was based on several things. Her simple naïve style and solid bright colors were visually attractive, while her wonderful sense of the narrative moved the viewer through the picture. It was her uncomplicated way of evoking memories of a time gone by, however, that gave her work its greatest appeal. It embodied everything that seemed good about America at a time of tribulation, following a prolonged economic depression and world war.

To the art world, Grandma Moses’ appeal was somewhat different. The way she used stacking and diminishing sizes of elements to convey depth in her paintings was visually pleasing in an almost abstract way. The simple layering of tinted mountains and trees to produce atmospheric perspective gave a fullness of color and depth to her otherwise simple bright color schemes. Her placement of sinewy, curving lines for roads, rivers, and tree branches completed her compositions in such a way that these separate elements seemed all interwoven somehow, even without the narrative that held them together.

Grandma Moses herself appealed to the newly emerging media world of radio, television, and magazines as a human-interest topic. In 1955, her work and no-nonsense ways were showcased when she was interviewed by Edward R. Murrow on his television program, “See It Now.” The camera crew captured her at work on a painting, and she even tried to cajole Murrow into trying his hand at painting, too. Her appearance on “See It Now” further enhanced her image and reputation.

Grandma Moses produced over 1500 paintings in the next twenty years, between age of 80 and 100. Her works were shown in galleries and museums both in America and Europe. They graced the White House, magazine covers, Christmas cards, and even became book illustrations. In addition to her numerous interviews, she published a biography, and was the subject of a documentary film and a televised play that starred Lillian Gish as Grandma. Contributing to the family income was very important to Grandma Moses. She once stated, “If I didn’t start painting, I would have raised chickens. I could still do it now...I never dreamed pictures would bring in so much....” She enjoyed creating her pictures, but it was as if the pleasure was just a bonus to helping the family.

Early in 1961, Grandma Moses’ advancing age caused her to fall several times. By July, her sons thought it best that she be cared for in a local nursing home. She hated the place, and her doctor would not allow her to paint. Gradually, her condition grew worse. She died on December 13, 1961. “She just wore out,” her doctor said. Her death made front-page news around the world, and The New Yorker magazine called her “one of those people that make the world seem safer.” Her paintings reflected her deep-rooted sense of well being, and even today they convey the pleasure she took from her world. It is indeed fortunate for the world of art that Grandma Moses chose painting over raising chickens.

Bibliography


Grandma Moses, by Margot Cleary, ©1991 by Brompton Books Ltd., Greenwich, Connecticut

Grandma Moses

Images
The Presentation

1. **Grandma Moses in Her Studio**
   1952, photograph

Taken when she was 92 years old, this photo shows Anna Mary Robertson Moses, known as “Grandma” Moses, working in her studio behind her kitchen. She often looked out her window for inspiration or to visualize a landscape scene. Her love for art proved that you are never too old or too young to do something you enjoy.

2. **Mt. Nebo Hill**
   c. 1930, worsted wool embroidery, 10” x 14”, Private collection

After her husband died, Grandma Moses’ son came to live with her and take care of the farm, so she had free time to spend on creative pastimes. Encouraged by her daughter, she tried her hand at embroidered landscapes. During a seven-year period in the 1930s she created over 50 embroidery scenes for her enjoyment and as gifts; some were copied from prints, and some were her own designs. This scene depicts the Moses farm (called “Mt. Nebo,” from the Biblical mountain where Moses disappeared) and the house where Grandma Moses lived for more than 40 years. The winding roads, fences, detailed trees, and farm buildings are subjects that are repeated again and again in Grandma’s work.

Grandma Moses’ use of color in this work was limited by the colors of thread available to her. She was able to solve the problems of blending colors and modeling forms by layering or interspersing different hues. Note how she did this to create the trunks of the large trees in the right foreground. Often, though, shapes were simply areas of flat color, as seen in the brown farm buildings on the left side of the piece. The blue sky and white clouds in the background are also large areas of flat color, but Grandma Moses was still able to create the illusion of a realistic-looking sky.

Color also helps to create unity in this work. The brown and green threads repeat throughout the composition. The horizontal direction of her stitches, through the foreground grass and the background sky, result in a unified surface treatment.

Grandma Moses’ technique for creating the look of 3-dimensional space was to stack elements in the scene. The tall trees in the right foreground were intended to appear closest to the viewer, so she placed them low in the scene, overlapping the white house behind them. The house, placed higher in the picture, in turn overlaps the brown hills behind it and is part of the middle ground. On the left side of the embroidery, the same technique was employed: the roadway, leading to the house and farm buildings, was placed at the bottom of the picture, followed by small trees overlapping the farm buildings. These buildings overlap the green hill, with its forest of trees, which overlaps the cloudy sky.

Fun Fact: Grandma Moses’ arthritis made it increasingly difficult for her to work on her embroidered pictures, so she was convinced to take up painting. She was also concerned for the permanence of her embroidered works, as the medium was subject to decay and the ravages of moths.
Grandma Moses loved to paint the events of farm life from her memory, especially those that were more like yearly celebrations than seasonal work. Some examples included: apple harvest, corn husking, threshing, haying, and the scene depicted here—bringing in the maple sugar. These works were filled with many people, each adding their part to the visual story (narrative). This winter scene is typical of Grandma Moses’ work; a man and a boy gather kindling, men empty the tap buckets, a group ladles syrup into the tub, children play tag, etc.

Grandma Moses achieved the illusion of deep space in this painting by the stacking of elements, and here she also used diminishing perspective. Objects in the distance were placed higher on the picture’s surface, but they were also rendered smaller in scale to increase the illusion of being farther away from the viewer. The barren maple trees that repeat across the painting diminish in size and are placed higher on the surface of the picture as they extend into the distance.

The color red repeats through the clothing of the individuals and is also the color of the house in the center of the scene. This repetition helps to move the viewer’s eye through the painting. It also adds to the painting’s unity, as does the repetition of darkly clad individuals, all at tasks relating to gathering the maple sap. Dark hues repeat not only through the clothing of the people, but through the trees and through the dark forest area along the horizon. The white used for the sky and ground underfoot also unifies the cold snowy day scene. Notice the way Grandma Moses’ brushstrokes imitate the small stitches she used in “Mt. Nebo Hill.” When she could no longer make her embroidered pictures, she simply translated her stitchery technique to her painting.

Fun Fact: This work is thought to be the one that convinced the New York art dealer, Otto Kallir, of Grandma Moses’ talents, resulting in the one-woman show of her work in his New York gallery.
Grandma Moses

4. **The Checkered House**
   1943, oil on canvas, 36” x 45”, Private collection

Grandma Moses liked to use historical events as her themes. The house in this painting dates back to the Revolutionary War, when it was used as a headquarters and a hospital. Later it was a stagecoach stop during the Civil War. When working on a painting of a scene from the past, Grandma wanted to be accurate. She used an old history book for reference to help “dress” her people, tracing over a picture in the book to get the correct clothing for her painting. Notice the stagecoach at the center, the Union Army officers in the foreground, and the two nearly identical horses and buggies. Grandma often repeated forms or poses throughout her paintings.

To create a sense of deep **space** in this painting, not only did Grandma Moses employ overlapping, stacking and diminishing perspective, but she also used atmospheric perspective. The hazy, bluish quality of the mountains near the top of her canvas makes them appear distant.

**Color** repeats throughout the canvas, especially the brownish-red color used on the checkered house and for the farm buildings that flank it. The same color also appears on the saddle of the rider in the left foreground and on buildings in the distance, near the top of the canvas. This **repetition** helps to move the viewer’s eye around the painting. The checkered pattern on the house is also mimicked by the pattern of stacked crops in the field in the distance, helping to **unify** the painting.

Fun Fact: Once Grandma Moses’ paintings became popular and there was a demand for her work, customers would specifically request a particular scene. “The Checkered House” was one of those popular images that customers wanted for their own. Her first patron, Louis Caldor, warned her against copying other works of art, and she became leery of copying even her own work. Although several themes, including the checkered house, repeat throughout her body of work, she never repeated a single composition exactly.

5. **Grandma Moses’ Childhood Home**
   1946, oil on canvas, 36” x 48”, Private collection

Composed from memory, this painting depicts the farm where Grandma Moses lived and played until she was twelve years old, when she left home to earn her living as a “hired girl” on a neighboring farm. Grandma Moses captures the vast **space** around her childhood home by stacking elements on the picture surface. Distant hills and trees rise higher on the canvas as they recede into the distance. The winding road leading from the barn in the center of the scene curves around the left foreground of the painting and recedes into the distance higher on the canvas. Houses, trees, farm animals and farm workers in the distance also diminish in size to appear farther away from the viewer.
**Grandma Moses**

**Color** repeats in the painting and helps to move the viewer’s eye around the scene. The red of the girl’s dress (in the right foreground) repeats in the farm buildings. Touches of red can also be seen through the trees in the distance to lead us through the landscape. Light blue repeats in the pond in the center foreground, in the rolling hills in the background and in the sky. This **repetition** of color helps to unify the painting.

**Unity** is also created by Grandma Moses’ brushwork. All of the foliage in the painting, from the dark trees in the background, to the leaves on the shrubs and plants in the foreground, are painted with small dabs of paint. This consistent texture repeats throughout the scene, creating a similar overall surface treatment.

Fun Fact: Although masonite was Grandma Moses’ favorite surface on which to paint (“it will last longer,” she said), she also painted about 20 larger works on 36” x 48” stretched canvases provided to her by a friend. This is one of those works.

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6. **A Tramp on Christmas Day**
   1915, oil on canvas, 32” x 39-1/2”, MOMA, New York

Although Grandma Moses was chiefly a landscape painter, she liked to paint scenes of farm life and social activities, and certain of these demanded an indoor setting. She also received a number of requests for interior scenes, which she felt obliged to honor. An exterior scene allowed for more variety of scale, but indoor scenes presented problems for interpreting perspective. The primitive qualities reflected in these interior scenes made these paintings highly prized among collectors, as the lack of realistic perspective actually enhances the charm of the piece.

Grandma Moses painted the parallel lines of the floorboards, but they offer no suggestion of linear perspective. They do, however, draw us into the space and up to the door at the top of the canvas, where the gentlemen greet the tramp as he enters the room. There is no real sense of scale, as the door seems entirely too large, as do the men, compared to the woman to the left at the kitchen pump. Grandma Moses also seemed to have trouble with the depiction of the room’s furnishings. The work table to the left is laden with items being prepared for the holiday meal, but it seems to be missing a back leg.

**Color** repeats around the scene. The glowing fire of the stove is depicted in streaks of red, and the same red is used elsewhere as edging in the rag rugs on the floor and in the apples on the kitchen counter on the back wall. Values of dark green also repeat: the floor surface under the stove, the dress of the woman holding the turkey in the foreground, and the window shades seen through the doorway to the left. This **repetition** creates a rhythm that moves the viewer’s eye around the scene, and contributes to its **unity**.

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**Could you figure out the story of this painting if you didn’t know the title?**
Grandma Moses

7. SCANNING: Williamstown
   1946, oil on pressed board, 36” x 48”, Private collection

In this painting of Williamstown, a sleepy town at the northwest corner of Massachusetts, we see another example of Grandma Moses’ depiction of deep space. The houses and town buildings are stacked on the painting surface and diminish in size as they extend into the distance. In addition, she painted trees that overlapped houses throughout the composition. Where the land meets the sky, purple-blue hills create the illusion of atmospheric perspective and appear to recede indefinitely into the distance.

A tint is created when white is added to lighten a color, and it appears that Grandma Moses used tints of green to create the fields and the trees in this painting. The values of the green fields get lighter as they recede into the distance. Blues, used to create building features in the foreground, also seem to be less intense when used on the building roofs and mountains in the distance.

Grandma Moses used the repetition of red to create a rhythm and move the viewer’s eye around the painting. The same red color is used for the roof in the right foreground, the barn in the middle of the scene to the left, and in roofs, chimneys and farm buildings seen in the distance. This repetition of red also contributes to the painting’s unity, as does the clustering of shapes. Throughout the painting, trees and houses are clustered together in the foreground and repeated across the background and in the distance.

Fun Fact: It is suspected that this may have been a commissioned painting. Grandma Moses’ daughter lived in Bennington, Vermont (15 miles north of Williamstown), and although she stayed with her daughter for a time, Grandma Moses was not as familiar with this area as she was with her farm in New York. Curiously, the state of Vermont, and Bennington in particular, came to adopt Grandma Moses as their own (some New Yorkers would use the word “hijack”). The Bennington Museum contains the largest public collection of Grandma Moses’ paintings in the country, as well as many of her “yarn paintings” and the 18th-century tilt-top table that Grandma Moses painted with rustic scenes and used as her easel.
Grandma Moses

Scanning Questions

Williamstown
1946, oil on pressed board, 36” x 48”, Private collection

Art Elements: What you see.

Color
• What color repeats to move your eye around the painting? (Red.)
• Where did Grandma Moses used tints? (Through the green fields that seem lighter and brighter.)

Space
• How do we know that the light green fields are farther away from us than the darker green ones? (They are placed higher on the picture surface.)
• Where did Grandma Moses create atmospheric perspective? (In the blue and hazy mountains near the top of the picture.)

Art Principles: How the elements are arranged.

Repetition/Rhythm
• What repeating elements can you find in this painting? (White houses and trees, green fields, blue mountains in the distance.)
• What repeating elements create an irregular rhythm? (All of the above, including the color red that is used throughout.)

Unity
• How do the houses, as Grandma Moses painted them, add to the unity of this painting? (They are all mostly white with grey roofs and black windows and are repeated in clusters throughout the painting.)
• How does the color green contribute to the unity? (Shades and tints of green are used throughout.)

Technical Properties: How it was made.
• Do you think it is easier to paint on stretched canvas or on a board?
• How many different tints of green do you think Grandma Moses had to mix to paint this scene?

Expressive Properties: How it makes you feel.
• What do you think Grandma Moses was trying to say with this painting?
• Does this little town look like some place where you would like to live or just visit?
8. **Christmas at Home**  
1946, oil on pressed wood, 18" x 23", Private collection

Grandma Moses never felt as comfortable painting an indoor scene as she did painting the outdoors she loved. Because of the limitations of space in an interior scene, these works became exercises in two-dimensional shape with a genuine charm all their own. They also usually depicted a special social occasion and are filled with the joy of story-telling (narrative painting). Every detail recalled a memory for Grandma Moses.

The illusion of **space** in this room is created by the stacking of figures and elements. Grandma Moses placed items higher on the picture surface when she wanted the viewer to see them as farther away. All the figures in the scene were rendered without regard to scale and give the viewer the feeling that they were just randomly pasted into the scene. In addition, the figures are created from flat areas of **color**, with no modeling, which also adds to their "cut-out" quality. Note the items on the table which would not be visible from that angle in real life—the whole table appears as if tipped or in a bird’s-eye view.

**Unity** in this painting is achieved by the clustering of figures and shapes, and by theme—all are involved in activities related to the holiday. Even Santa Claus makes an appearance in the scene. The **repetition** of figures around the room creates a regular rhythm that moves the viewer’s eye through the painting.

9. **The Spring in the Evening**  
1947, oil on pressed wood, 27" x 21", Private collection

Grandma Moses’ life as a farm wife was defined by traditional rural seasonal activities, and these were the scenes she painted. Scenes of spring, or “mud time” as it is affectionately known in upstate New York, do not figure prominently in Grandma Moses’ body of work. However, a few paintings focus on the traditional ritual of plowing the fields, a reminder that spring does eventually come. In this scene, a farmer plows his field with his work horses as the sky takes on the hues of evening. This painting contains all the elements of Grandma Moses’ distinctive style. The country road circles a farm house and leads up the picture surface to other farm buildings. Additional buildings of diminished size, placed higher on the picture surface (stacked perspective), combine with blue and hazy mountains at the horizon line (atmospheric perspective) to convey a sense of deep **space**. In addition, there are trees that overlap the buildings in the foreground and middle ground.

Shades and tints of green **color** are seen throughout this painting, from the grassy areas in the foreground, through the fields in the middle ground and to the green forest near the horizon. Grandma was often observed looking out the window to analyze “the various shades of green and the bark colors.” She said, “Often I get at a loss to know just which shade of green...There are a hundred trees that have each three or four shades of green in them. I look at a tree and I see the limbs, and then the next part of a tree is a dark, dark, black-green, then I have got to make a little lighter green, and so on. And then on the outside, it’ll either be a yellow green or whitish green, that’s the way trees are shaded.”
Grandma Moses unified this painting not only through its theme, but also by the repetition of color throughout the work. Not only do the various values of green repeat, but the blue of the evening sky repeats in the reflecting stream that descends from the horizon, in the plants edging the path and through the buildings in the foreground.

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10. Apple Butter Making
1947, oil on pressed wood, 16-1/2 x 23-1/8”, Private collection

This painting depicts the “Dudley Place,” one of the Virginia farms that Grandma and her husband rented during the 1890s. Here, in another example of narrative art, we see all the activities that go into the making of apple butter. Each scene could be a painting in itself, like the ladies peeling the apples, the man tending the kettle over the fire, or the people at the cider press. Grandma Moses clearly depicted all the steps in the process of this seasonal task.

In this painting, Grandma Moses used stacked perspective to give the illusion of deep space. Individuals working at the tasks associated with apple butter making are clustered in groups across the painting surface, and those that are farther away from the viewer are placed higher on the picture surface. The sizes of the individuals in the background are also slightly diminished, adding to the illusion that they are farther away. You can also see atmospheric perspective used at the top left corner of the painting. Faint hazy-blue mountains can be seen in the distance, adding to the illusion of deep space.

The repetition of unevenly spaced trees from left to right across the painting creates an irregular rhythm to this work. All the human activity takes place beneath their branches. The color red also repeats around this work, from the bricks on the house, to the apples in baskets throughout the middle ground, and to the red flowers on the shrubs in the foreground. This repetition of color helps to move the viewer’s eye through the painting. Unity is also achieved through the repetition of colors and shapes in the scene, as well as through the theme of this painting.

Fun Fact: Can the students find the woman in the mauve dress walking on the path and carrying a bucket? It is said that when Grandma Moses wanted to include herself in a painting, she painted a figure dressed in mauve. (She is in the foreground.)
Grandma Moses

11. *Taking in Laundry*
   1951, oil on pressed wood, 17” x 21.75”, Private collection

Grandma Moses knew that farm life was never easy. Seasonal work, depicted in the paintings “Bringing in the Maple Sugar” and “Apple Butter Making,” was predictable and expected, but everyday life could be interrupted by events that undid all the day’s hard work. In this scene, a windy downpour threatens to soak the laundry that has been washed and hung out to dry.

Tints and shades of the color green dominate this scene. The ground is a patchwork of fields and trees painted in various greens that fade to lighter and hazier tints towards the top of the canvas, creating atmospheric perspective. The illusion of deep space is further reinforced by the diminished size of the trees at the top of the painting.

Grandma Moses has repeated the effects of the windy rainstorm in this painting: all of the trees bend to the right under the effect of the wind; the laundry is blowing up towards the right following the direction of the wind; and slanted brushstrokes of blue and violet at the top of the painting create the effects of the wind through the rain itself. The repetition of the wind’s effects upon the entire scene contributes to the unity of the painting.

12. *Home for Thanksgiving*
   1952, oil on pressed wood, 18” x 24”, Private collection

The large number of paintings that Grandma Moses produced relating to traditional holidays, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas, reflected the importance of these holidays in the rural communities where she spent her life. These were also the favorite scenes of her ever-growing number of clients, and Grandma Moses painted a number of works related to the pre-Thanksgiving ritual pursuit of the elusive turkey. In this scene, a group of turkeys strut across the lower right foreground, unaware of their fate, while two gentlemen appear to be sizing up their choice for the holiday meal. Several groups of Thanksgiving guests (and their luggage) arrive in front of the house and are welcomed by the figures standing near the door. The gray sky, the colors of the turning leaves, and the warmly dressed individuals all contribute to the feeling of a crisp fall day.

The farm land rises on the picture surface, bordered by trees of diminished size to create the illusion of deep space. Houses overlap trees, and trees overlap the fields behind them. Smaller, faintly painted houses and trees on the distant white hill also contribute to the sense of perspective. The white fence surrounding the horse pasture on the right side of the painting diminishes in size as it winds around towards the barn in the distance, and the fence posts repeat in a progressive rhythm.

The repetition of fall colors also lends unity to the painting. The same dark green color creates a wedge of grass in the foreground and repeats to create the dark hills in the background. Burnt orange repeats around the scene: on the feathers of the turkeys, through the leaves on the trees, and on several of the horses bringing guests for the holiday.
13. **So Long Till Next Year**

1960, oil on pressed wood, 16” x 24”, Private collection

Even though Grandma only liked to paint scenes and situations she knew from her own experiences, when Random House asked her to illustrate Clement Moore’s beloved poem, “The Night Before Christmas,” she said “yes.” The request came in early 1960 and, at 99 years old, Grandma Moses couldn’t walk around much anymore. She looked forward to lifting her spirits by painting the scenes from the holiday poem.

This painting expresses an almost dreamlike quality achieved entirely through the use of color. The intense blue of a deep, clear winter night is illuminated by a white moon that bathes the unrealistic feathery branches of the trees in a silvery light; dots of white stars are scattered across the sky. The blue night is interrupted by green hills that stretch across the middle of the painting. A few patches of red—Santa’s red coat, red chimneys and red buildings through the middle ground—offer stark contrast to the cool blues and greens and repeat to create an irregular rhythm through the scene.

The green hills through the middle ground are placed high on the picture surface, utilizing stacked perspective. The diminished size of the houses painted in this area add to the illusion of deep space. The repetition of white, snow-touched trees around the scene, along with the dominant blue color throughout the painting, unifies this scene.

Fun Fact: The book, “The Night Before Christmas,” with Grandma Moses’ illustrations, was not published until 1962, two years after her death. It became very popular and was read each year on the December 24th telecast of the children’s television program, “Captain Kangaroo.”

14. **Witches**

1960, oil on pressed board, 16” x 24”, Private collection

Grandma Moses once said, “On a farm the days are nearly all the same, nothing changes but the season,” and as she saw it, each season held something special. Halloween was a seasonal holiday that Grandma Moses painted many times. In this scene, the bright night sky reveals the many ghosts and goblins enjoying the occasion. Grandma Moses included all of the traditional Halloween symbols: pumpkins are stacked in wagons near the barn; bats fly across the roofs; the trick-or-treaters include a ghost figure; and there is even a black cat on the roof.

Grandma Moses’ color scheme in this painting is dominated by cool blue and green colors. Blue fills the night sky that is interrupted by a haloed moon, and the same blue color is used on the roofs and siding of the buildings in the foreground. A patchwork of green fields and trees falls through the center of the painting and rises to the line of dark trees and purple mountains in the background. A few small white houses and orange barns dot the background and their repetition creates an irregular rhythm.
Grandma Moses

The use of color also contributes to the **unity** of the painting. Blues and greens repeat, as do oranges used on the pumpkins, the barns in the distance, and on some of the clothing of the trick-or-treaters. There are even dabs of orange to suggest apples still on the trees in the orchard behind the house.

The horizon rises high on the picture surface, and Grandma Moses used stacked and diminishing perspective to show us the houses, barns, forests and hills in the distance. The dark purple mountains at the left of the horizon suggest atmospheric perspective and add to the illusion of deep **space**.

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15. **Balloon**

1957, oil on pressed board, 16” x 24”, Private collection

Grandma Moses saw her first hot air balloon in 1907. In her day, the appearance of a hot air balloon would have been as exciting and marvelous as the space shuttle missions are for us today. In this scene of a day on the farm there is much to be done (the farmer plows his field in the right foreground), but the work is interrupted by the appearance of a hot air balloon and the family gathers in the yard to view the spectacle.

This work repeats all of the characteristics that made Grandma Moses’ art so special: it is a narrative painting that tells a story of life in rural America; the landscape is a patchwork of farmland and hills painted in tints of greens and blues that repeat to **unify** the painting; the illusion of deep **space** is created using stacked and diminishing perspective as the background rises on the painting surface; trees overlap houses, and houses overlap fields; and atmospheric perspective is used to make blue and hazy hills meet the sky at the horizon. Grandma Moses also irregularly **repeats** warm red **color** around the painting. She uses it sparingly—in the clothing of the individuals, on the chimneys of the houses, and even for the color of a horse at the left edge of the painting—but it serves to interrupt the cool color palette and create an irregular rhythm that moves the viewer’s eye around this scene. This painting, as do all of Grandma Moses’ works, symbolizes a simpler time in our American life and remind us of all that is good about our nation.