





# 1 Painting Life

American artist Winslow Homer (1836–1910) mastered both oil and watercolor painting during his career, portraying nineteenth-century America in a fresh way.

At age eighteen, Homer worked as an apprentice at a printing company in his hometown of Boston. He soon made a name for himself by drawing illustrations for novels, sheet music, magazines, and thirteen children's books.

He then moved to New York City, where he began painting and working as a freelance illustrator with the popular magazine *Harper's Weekly*. Homer received an assignment to report on the inauguration of President Abraham Lincoln, and he later covered the Civil War. His pictures of the Union troops received international acclaim.

In the late 1860s and 1870s, Homer turned his attention to rural life and scenes in coastal America, especially outdoor scenes of people at work and play: children exploring, farm girls attending to their duties, sportsmen hunting and fishing. After the destruction of the Civil War, these warm and appealing images perfectly suited the country's mood and hopes for a simpler, more innocent time.

top: Thomas Faris and Thomas A. Gray, *Winslow Homer*, 1863, albumen silver print, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington. Photo credit: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution / Art Resource, NY

middle: Winslow Homer, *On the Stile*, c. 1878, watercolor, gouache, and graphite on wove paper, National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

bottom: Winslow Homer, *On the Trail*, c. 1892, watercolor over graphite, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Ruth K. Henschel in memory of her husband, Charles R. Henschel

# 2 Breezing Up

Sailing home after a day at sea, a fisherman and three boys return with their catch. The late afternoon sun casts a shadow on the sail, and rays of sunshine light the boys' shoulders and arms. In the distance gray clouds gather across the blue sky. A brisk breeze fills the sail and pushes the little boat along choppy waves. Everyone leans to one side to balance the boat as its sail catches the wind, and cool sea spray splashes on them as their boat cuts through the water. The boy holding the tiller looks off to the horizon.





top: Winslow Homer, *Breezing Up (A Fair Wind)*, 1873–1876, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Gift of the W. L. and May T. Mellon Foundation

bottom: Winslow Homer, *The Sick Chicken*, 1874, watercolor, gouache, and graphite on wove paper, Goodrich 2005, Vol. II, no. 514, National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

### 3 Masterful Watercolorist

Homer created his first series of watercolor paintings in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1873. By the time he painted his last watercolor in 1905, he had earned an international reputation as a watercolorist.

Homer traveled widely—to the Adirondacks, Virginia, Canada, Bermuda, Florida, the Caribbean, and throughout New England. During these working trips, he preferred to paint with watercolors because they were easy to carry, and he could work outdoors and observe nature directly. He used watercolors to record the activities and environment that were specific to each place. With quick brushstrokes, he captured crashing waves, moving animals, and the visual effects of changing light. To suggest sunlight, Homer left areas of the white paper untouched. Using this technique, the whiteness of the paper—and not the paint—creates glints of brilliant light.



try this

## Watercolor Sketch

**You will need:**

A set of watercolor paints

Watercolor brush

A pad of watercolor paper

Sponge

Cup of water

Homer liked to paint with watercolors because the medium allowed him to experiment freely. Since watercolors are easy to carry, he could go out into nature and make sketches on the spot. Watercolors can be used in various ways. Here's one technique to try when painting water and sky in landscapes.

### Experiment with wet paper effects

- Wet a piece of paper with a sponge before you begin painting.
- Brush short, light strokes of color onto the wet paper, and watch the paint spread.
- Layer on other colors; let them run into each other.
- Use this technique to create a landscape—orange, yellow, and pink for a sunset sky; deep blue, green, and purple for an ocean; brown, red, and orange for a mountain range.
- Let the paint and paper dry before you add details, such as people, animals, trees, and buildings.

**“You will see, in the future I will live by my watercolors.” Winslow Homer**



top: Winslow Homer, *Salt Kettle, Bermuda*, 1899, watercolor over graphite, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Ruth K. Henschel in memory of her husband, Charles R. Henschel

bottom: Winslow Homer, *Red Shirt, Homosassa, Florida*, 1904, watercolor over graphite, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Ruth K. Henschel in memory of her husband, Charles R. Henschel