



Wartime Marketing (1942), Martha Baché
Smithsonian American Art Museum

Art Lesson

Objective

To analyze the painting *Wartime Marketing* (1942) and discover symbols related to World War II rationing

Background

Wartime Marketing (1942), by Martha Baché, was created one year into America's involvement in World War II. This image, a genre scene, offers a glimpse into a market where people are buying food. The artist, a long-time resident of Washington, D.C., donated the painting to the Smithsonian Institution in 1974.

Vocabulary

Genre Scene – a scene of everyday life, such as people shopping, people at parties, the insides of homes, or people out in their neighborhood. These can be actual scenes or scenes that the artist imagined.

Painting Analysis

Teachers: Use the following questions to help students deconstruct and analyze the *Wartime Marketing* painting.

Level 1

- Who painted this?
- What are the people in the painting doing?
- Are there items in the shopping carts that you recognize?

Level 2

- Are the people happy? Sad? Thoughtful?
- What year do you think it is? Why?
- How does this grocery store differ from your grocery store?

Level 3

- How is class/status represented in this painting?
- What are the relationships between the people pictured?
- Why did the artist paint this image? What was his/her purpose?
- What is the mood of the painting? What clues tell you this?
- What clues in the painting tell you about the era represented?

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Activities

Teachers: The following are examples of activities that can be done to encourage student self-discovery when uncovering answers to the questions above.

Activity #1 – “I see a _____. What do you see?” A Game of Memory

Have each student say, “I see a (fill in the blank). What do you see?” As they ask the question, they should turn to someone else in the room. Each student should repeat the previous answers and then add his or her own observation. It can be a bonus if they get the items in the same order as they were said.

Example: Student 1- “I see a grocery bag, what do you see?” Student 2- “I see a grocery bag and carrots, what do you see?” Student 3 -“I see a grocery bag, carrots, and a green coat, what do you see?”

Activity #2 – Puzzle It Out

Print color reproductions of the image. Cut each into a puzzle. Give these puzzle sets to small groups of students. Have the students look at the puzzle pieces one by one and make short notes about each piece. What details have they discovered in their inspection? After they have analyzed each piece, put the puzzle together. What do the students see in the larger image that was not apparent in the smaller pieces?

Activity #3 – What Are They Thinking? A Writing Prompt

Divide the class into small groups, and have each group create thought/speech bubbles for each of the characters in the painting. To facilitate this activity, supply pre-made cutouts or have the students cut out speech/thought bubbles. The students can then write directly onto the bubbles and tape them to the image. Alternatively, they can use the speech/bubbles as a writing prompt to describe the scene.

Activity #4 – The Lens or the Brush: Which Is Mightier? Comparison Activity

Have students look at the painting *Wartime Marketing* and the photograph *Giant Food Store*, 1942 (next page). Have students use various methods of observation to look for similarities and differences between the images. Open a discussion about the limitations and benefits of one medium versus the other.



Giant Food Store, 1942
Library of Congress