



Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, American, 1816-1868
George Washington Crossing the Delaware, 1851

Oil on Canvas; 12 2/5 x 21 1/4 feet

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Painting's Story:

George Washington was the commander of the Continental Army against Great Britain. He stands boldly near the prow of the crowded boat and navigates the treacherous Delaware River on Christmas night 1776. The Declaration of Independence had been signed. He led an army that had suffered many defeats and was dwindling in numbers and morale.

Soundly beaten in New York, Washington was pursued through New Jersey into Pennsylvania by British General William Howe, who fully expected to take Philadelphia. In his retreat across the Delaware River, Washington shrewdly seized all the available boats to ferry his men from New Jersey to Pennsylvania. A confident General Howe, certain the war was all but won, had already returned to New York in mid-December leaving his British and Hessian (hired German soldiers) troops in Trenton. The commanders left in charge plotted a river crossing as soon as the Delaware iced over. Washington acted immediately when his spies uncovered the plan. With the same boats used to flee the British, he and his men recrossed the river at Trenton, found the enemy, killed several officers, and captured more than nine hundred prisoners. The surprise attack not only checked the British advance but helped restore morale to the rebels. The victory confirmed Washington's leadership and the brilliance of his military strategy, both vital to reinvigorating the American cause. The December battle at Trenton was a turning point in the war.

The sheer size of Leutze's canvas, 25 X 21 feet pulls anyone standing before it into the scene. The viewer is nearly the same size as the painted figures and the action seems only a few feet away. Washington stands fast in the lead boat as his men struggle to maneuver the craft through the choppy ice-filled waters. Other boats follow, crowded with soldiers and jittery horses. We feel Washington's resolve and courage in facing the battle ahead as he leans forward into the blustering wind. As his men strain to pull the oars through the water, one deflects the ice while another at the back of the boat uses a paddle like a rudder to steer the course. Dawn glimmers below the troubled sky, and the American flag blown and knotted by the wind, rises to a peak behind the General. Leutze, a passionate abolitionist, included an African American as the third boatman from the front.

Discussion:

Ask the students to compare the size of the painting with something in the classroom. Explain the figures in the painting are almost life-size.

Ask the students to find these items- Washington's white horse (*in boat behind Washington's*) Branch floating in the water (*middle on the left*), a sword (*Washington's belt*), man with a bandaged head (*second man from the right in Washington's boat*)

Ask the students to describe the men's clothing. Explain that they wear a variety of hats and shirts representative of their regions.

Ask How Leutze emphasized Washington and the American flag. (*He surrounded their upper bodies with white light, almost like a spotlight or halo.*)

Most of the **colors** in this painting are muted blues, grays, and browns. What bright colors did Leutze include? (*red*)

In what part of the picture is the red located? (*only in Washington's boat*) Why do you think he use red only in Washington's boat? (*Red is a bright color and helps to lead our eye to Washington*)

Movement Who and what are moving in this scene? Who is standing still? (*only Washington and the distant land*)

How do you think they felt when they reached the opposite bank? (*They were tired, cold and wet.*)

Have the students describe the weather and water conditions. Why would anyone cross the Delaware River in this weather? (*Washington believed that the British were planning to attack his army as soon as the river froze. Washington knew the British would not expect an attack during this storm.*)

Ask the students to describe the flag. Even though it is knotted and wrinkled by the wind, ask them to find symbols that appear on today's flag.

Foreground, Background- How did the artist show that some things were closer or further away? How does making things smaller, or overlapping help to make the picture not look flat?

Bibliography

Picturing America: teachers resource book / [writers, Linda Merrill, Lisa Rogers, Kaye Passmore], Schmitz Press, MD, National Endowment for the Humanities, pp. 20-21

You may go to the following site if you would like to have a discussion about the various art principles used by Leutze.

http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/gw/el_gw_sub6.htm

Composition is the arrangement of different elements in a work of art. Let's look at a painting in which the artist used light, color, form, perspective, proportion, and motion to create the composition.

This painting describes the historic moment when General George Washington led the American revolutionary troops across the Delaware River in order to surprise the English and Hessian (Hired German soldiers) troops in the Battle of Trenton the day after Christmas in 1776. The artist Emanuel Leutze used a number of elements to express an emotional and patriotic message about this event.

Perspective is the way in which artists create an illusion of depth on a flat surface. For hundreds of years painters have tried to represent accurately a scene that exists in three dimensions on a two-dimensional canvas. One of the ways to create this illusion is to make the objects that are far away smaller than those that are closer to the viewer.

Where did Leutze use this technique in this painting?

Light- Just as stage designers use lighting to spotlight a performer, painters will often highlight important elements in paintings. The standing group in the center of the boat is surrounded by light. This effect keeps our attention focused on the main aspects of the historic event: that General George Washington would become the first president and that this event would culminate in the country's separation from England, symbolized by the American flag.

There is something unusual about the way Leutze uses light in this painting. **Can you tell from which direction the source of the light in the painting is coming?**

Color- Leutze has used mostly dark tones in this painting, probably because the crossing took place at dawn. One bright color, however, is repeated as a highlight in the painting.

What color did he use for the highlight?

Form- Leutze's figures look as if they exist in three dimensions, even though they are really as flat as the canvas. One way he gives his figures three-dimensional form is to reflect light off their bodies and paint shadows cast by them.

Here are two figures painted in both light and in shadow.



Our eyes know that when an object both reflects light and has a shadow it must also have volume. Just as sculptors carve stone to create volume, painters "model" their figures in light and shadow to give them a three-dimensional form. Without this effect, the figures would seem flat and two dimensional.

Proportion usually refers to the way different elements in a painting relate to each other in terms of size. If the figure of General Washington were twice as large as the other sailors, we would say that he was out of proportion to the scale of figures in the painting.

Look at the painting and see if you can find any objects in the foreground whose size seems too small in relationship with everything else.

Movement- What techniques did the artist use to convey the idea of movement?

One of the main purposes of focusing on the composition of a piece is to help students begin to read the information contained within the paintings they are viewing. Quite often artists structure the compositions of their paintings in ways that will bring the viewer's attention to the most important elements of the painting. Works of art are often encoded with a series of visual messages, some of which are readily accessible to all audiences, and some of which are only available to smaller, more knowledgeable audiences. This lesson should help students gain an awareness of one of the most important elements of a work of art—its composition—as an initial step towards accessing more of the information within a work of art.

- **Composition:** In a painting, generally refers to how the parts of the image relate to each other to create a whole. This includes the placement of objects on the picture plane, the relationship of these objects to each other, and how both of these components contribute to the expressive content of the image. It also includes how *line, color, motion, proportion*—everything that makes up the work of art—comes together to produce a coherent whole.
- **Focal point:** The part of the art work that draws the viewer's attention.
- **Line:** When your students think of "line" they will most likely imagine the outline of objects. That definition refers to **contour lines**. **Compositional lines** in the visual arts commonly refers to the actual or implied line which move a viewer's eye around the painting. These lines may be formed by the underlying structure of a figure or object, or by a figure's line of

sight. Compositional lines may reflect the shape of an article of clothing, a building, or a landscape feature, just to name a few sources. The line of an object or figure often conveys a sense of the movement or even the character of that figure.

- **Proportion:** Refers to the size relationship of parts of the painting's composition, or to the size of each object relative to the other objects within the same image.
- **Motion:** An artist implies motion in images through various techniques and devices- such as vigorous brushstrokes- to convey the sense that an object or figure is moving across or through the picture plane.
- **Perspective:** Refers to the way in which the artist creates a sense of depth within the space of a painting. Artistic means for creating perspective include *linear perspective* and *aerial perspective* or *atmospheric perspective*. In European and American painting, beginning in the Renaissance period, linear perspective became a common technique used by artists. Objects, buildings, people, and spaces drawn using linear perspective appear to exist in three-dimensional space- rather than simply along the flat plane of the painting's surface- by having the lines of the drawing converge towards a vanishing point. These converging lines can be seen in the walls of the buildings in the following painting:

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=635

- Emmanuel Leutze's [Washington Crossing the Delaware](#)

Students should note that Leutze's nineteenth century image also has a triangular composition. Triangular compositions are very common in the history of painting in Europe and America, and were particularly favored by painters during the Renaissance. Ask students to compare the two paintings. Do they notice anything similar about the triangle that is the overarching shape of both compositions? You can download the next set of diagrams which will help students to read the compositional shape of the two images. Students should note that in both of these paintings the triangles are oriented in the same direction. Ask students to contemplate:

- Why have both of these artists chosen to orient their triangular composition the same way?

Students may note that the triangle in each case resembles a pyramid-- that it rests on its broad foundation, coming to a point near the top of the canvas. Like a pyramid, this composition lends the impression of stability and balance, which is one of the reasons that artists employ this kind of composition. Pyramid-shaped compositions can be found in portraits, history paintings, and genre paintings, as well as in landscape and still life paintings.

http://edsitement.neh.gov/monthly_feature.asp?id=152

First a *German* artist painted it in response to German politics. Emmanuel Leutze, born in Germany in 1816, moved to America as a child, but returned to Germany to study art in 1840. With a strong belief in liberal democracy, he painted this American Revolution scene to inspire German reformers. When his first painting of Washington's crossing became popular in Europe, he shipped this second huge version to the United States in 1851. It became an instant success with more than fifty thousand people coming to see it. Today it is owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

But is it accurate? Is this really how it happened? Yes, and no. Leutze got the spirit of '76 right and that was his main purpose. He created an inspirational vision of brave and upright men from a variety of backgrounds standing up and fighting together against incredible odds for the common cause of liberty.

However, the details of the scene are more symbolic than accurate. Leutze exercised his artistic license to create a powerful composition.

<http://americanrevolution.org/delxone.html>

With the possible exceptions of DaVincis' Mona Lisa and Last Supper, this is perhaps the most universally recognized image in the entire history of art.

It is also an image that historians love to hate.

Painted in Dusseldorf, Germany around 1851, the artist had lived in America as a boy, and after going back to Germany, had returned to America many times (years later he would emigrate here). While here, he visited the Smithsonian and examined Washingtons uniform and sword, and carefully studied paintings and sculpture of the Great General which were done in Washingtons lifetime. Yet, despite this intensive research into historical accuracies, Leutze then let his artistic license run wild. Perhaps that is why this painting is usually classified in the "Romantic" school of art.

The actual crossing was done in the dead of night, during a driving snowstorm, and was completed by three a. m. Leutze indulged in symbolism showing Washington leading his men out of a stormy darkness into a new dawn of freedom. Indeed, although you can't make it out in our electronic image, in the original, in the sky directly above the foremost oarsman, Leutze painted in the morning star, invoking the legend of the wise ones following the star at Christmas.

Two future Presidents of the United States crossed the river that fateful night, James Madison and James Monroe. Also along with the army were a future Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, John Marshall, and famous rivals Aarron Burr and Alexander Hamilton.

Besides Washington, only two of the figures in the boat have been identified. Look closely at the fellow holding the flag, and you'll see James Monroe. He was quartered in the house where Washington made the decision to cross, and served as a scout and trusted adviser to the General, but there's nothing in the historical records to indicate he crossed in the same boat. Note the so-called "Betsy Ross" flag, with the stars in a circle. This design first came into existence some six months after the crossing.

The other recognizable figure, pulling on an oar at Washingtons knee, is Prince Whipple, a black patriot who has become a minor legend of the Revolution. As an early biographer said of him: "Prince Whipple was born in Amabou, Africa, of comparatively wealthy parents. When about ten years of age, he was sent by them, in company with a cousin, to America to be educated. An elder brother had returned four years before, and his parents were anxious that their child should receive the same benefits. The captain who brought the two boys over proved a treacherous villain, and carried them to Baltimore, where he exposed them for sale, and they were both purchased by Portsmouth men, Prince falling to Gen. Whipple. He was emancipated during the

[Revolutionary] war, was much esteemed, and was once entrusted by the General with a large sum of money to carry from Salem to Portsmouth. He was attacked on the road, near Newburyport, by two ruffians; one was struck with a loaded whip, the other he shot...Prince was beloved by all who knew him. He was the "Caleb Quotom" of Portsmouth. where he died at the age of thirty-two leaving a widow and children."

But, while many black soldiers served in Glovers Marblehead Regiment, the unit that ferried the army across the river, Prince Whipple wasn't one of them. In fact, in December of 1776 he was in Baltimore.

Of course, few of the soldiers who crossed the river that horrible night to fight what was to be one of the few battles that can be said to have changed the course of the history of the entire world were as fortunate as Monroe or Madison. Major James Wilkinson, who was on his way to join Washington, found his route easy to follow: "There was a little snow on the ground, which was tinged here and there with blood from the feet of the men who wore broken shoes." Primary documents differ about Patriot casualties, but even the most pessimistic reflect that the only American dead after the battle were two soldiers who froze to death.

<http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/articles/ushistory/washingtondelaware.htm>

George Washington and the Crossing of the Delaware

It was a desperate act at a time when his country needed it most. George Washington's crossing of the Delaware River in the dead of the night on Christmas and his subsequent victories in New Jersey energized a tired and sad Colonial Army and gave the American people cause for celebration. It was a desperate gamble, and it worked.

Here's how:

The British forces had occupied Boston and New York, forcing American evacuations of those two important cities. Frankly, the British were coming dangerously close to eliminating resistance in the north. The Declaration of Independence didn't make them any happier, either.

As the year 1776 drew to a close, the American army looked for a way to restore its people's faith in the cause. Against what surely was hundreds of years of military advice, George Washington took a big chance.

It was Christmas, and the Hessians on the other side of the Delaware River, in New Jersey, were sure to be drunk and tired. (The Hessians, German soldiers fighting for Britain, were known for their drinking and their partying, especially on major holidays like Christmas.)

By waiting until nightfall, Washington was able to achieve maximum surprise. But he had to get across the river first.

It was cold that night, ice cold in fact. The boats carrying the American soldiers barely made it across because of ice in the river. But make it they did, their commanding officer proudly leading the way, all 2,000 of them. They made it to shore, regrouped, and marched toward Trenton, where the Hessians were camped.



Chaos followed, but it was chaos on one side only. The Colonial forces routed the Hessians, sending them running from cover. The whole affair lasted only 45 minutes, and Colonial soldiers took 900 Hessians prisoner. The tired, hungry Americans also found food, supplies, and especially ammunition.

Building on their success, the Americans marched onward, toward Princeton, where they defeated the British a few days later. These two victories drove the British out of New Jersey and gave the American army and the American people a tremendous sense of achievement. Victories had been hard to come by lately, and the victories in New Jersey, emphasizing the daring of George Washington as they did, gave the people new hope that their cause was right and new determination that they could win their independence at last.

The crossing of the Delaware and the victories at Trenton and Princeton were certainly not the end of the Revolutionary War. But they did give both army and populace a reason to keep fighting and a story to tell for later battles and later generations.

Project: Flag in Pastels

The Project

This project the students will draw out the flag just as they see it on the actual print. They may also use the sharpies to outline their work. When this is done they may began to fill in the red, white, and blue with the pastel chalk, or oil pastel, or both mediums. It is important that they use the paper towels to guard their work so it does not become smudged. These art pieces will be displayed, we want them looking sharp! 😊 Once the student has finished applying color to their art, they will write in a famous eulogy by George Washington, "First in war, first in peace, and in the hearts of his countrymen."

The Project Cont.

This will be written in the white area to the left of the flag. It may also be written along the side of the pole of the flag. When the project is completed spray each artwork with hairspray (is a fixative to help keep pastels from smudging). All artwork should be placed in a folder provided. It has teachers name and should be taken to the copy room, where the green bin is, next to the large file cabinet. 😊

Supplies

- White construction paper
- Chalk pastels, oil pastels
- Pencils
- Gum erasers
- Fine point black sharpies
- Paper towels (classroom dispenser ones fine, these will be placed on the white construction paper so the student does not smudge their artwork.)
- Hairspray

Steps and Process

1. Pass out the white construction paper. Have student put their name on front of paper, bottom right hand corner.

2. Have students take their pencils to draw out the flag.

Note: Watch the time and make sure they are not taking too long with any one portion of the process so that they may finish their project.

3. The students should take the paper towel and place on art. Place directly where they are holding their hand to color. The paper towel should be moved as they finish each portion of their artwork. They may fill in their drawing with red, white and blue and any other shading or colors that are present in the print. The gum erasers may be used to correct small mistakes. If any blending is done, a piece of rolled up paper towel can work.

4. You may use document camera in the class to display eulogy. When all the coloring is done have the students take their pencils first and

lightly write in the eulogy:

**"First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."
George Washington**

Steps and Process Cont.

5. The students may then take the fine point sharpie and trace the eulogy carefully.

6. Completed artwork should be sprayed with hairspray to prevent smudges.

7. Clean up and place artwork in folder. If art work is still wet from fixative allow to dry and then place in folder.

8. Take artwork to copy room. ☺