

## Masterpiece: "Victorian Interior", 1945 by Horace Pippin

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Keywords: Balance, Emphasis, Unity, Repetition, Rhythm

Grade: 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

Month: February

Activity: Symmetrical 1-point perspective drawing



**Balance:** A principle of design that shows whether or not there is a sense of stability within the artwork. Balance can be symmetrical (with a center point and equal amounts of design from that point) or it can be asymmetrical (without a center line). Balance can also be radial in nature where the design elements radiate from the central point.

**Emphasis:** A principle of design that calls attention to an important idea or theme. Emphasis can be created by bold details, unusual texture, bright colors, shocking subject, positioning on the paper, and size.

**Unity:** Another principle of design that calls for consistency. A piece of art achieves unity if the elements of design achieve a sense of purpose.

**Repetition** and **rhythm** are the repeating parts within a design, such as shapes, colors or lines

### Meet the Artist:

- Pippin was born in Pennsylvania in 1888. He stopped going to school at 14 to help provide money for his family. He worked as a stable boy and a hotel porter.
- During World War I, he wanted to fight for his country. He joined the first regiment of African-American soldiers to fight overseas. It was during this war that many of his inspirations for his later artwork were born.
- He was badly wounded in the shoulder. The doctors had to place a metal plate in his shoulder, but his right arm eventually shriveled up and was useless. For 11 years after he returned to America, he couldn't even draw.
- Eventually he learned a way to support his right arm with his left arm in order to make art once again.
- His paintings reflect his painful memories of the war. They also show how important peace was to him. He once said, "pictures just come to my mind and then I tell my heart to go ahead".
- Pippin became the first self taught African-American artist to gain any recognition for his artwork.

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- He was acclaimed for his primitive style.
- He died of a stroke in 1946.

### **About the Work:**

Horace Pippin's painting **Victorian Interior** is a portrait of the artist's living room. It is painted with childlike simplicity and has a perfect sense of balance.

The solid horizontals of the floor and table slant upward, and the doorway, window frames, and walls provide a firm vertical support for the figures.

Repeating images can form pleasing patterns and create a sense of rhythm and balance. For instance, in Pippin's painting, the two chairs are balanced on either side of the table, two paintings on the wall, and the bookcase and end table on either side of the painting.

### **Possible Questions the Work:**

- What kind of room is this? (Living room, Den, Family room)
- It is someone's living room, or parlor.
- What is it like to be in this room?
- Is it warm or cold?
- Is it neat or messy?
- Is it quiet or noisy?
- Is it crowded or empty?
- Is it modern or old fashioned?
- Who do you think lives in this room? (Responses will vary -- encourage students to look at all the details to answer the questions - the doilies, the flowers, the lamp, the knitting basket in the floor, the books -- have them imagine what kind of person would live in a room like this - remind them that there is NO SINGLE RIGHT ANSWER)

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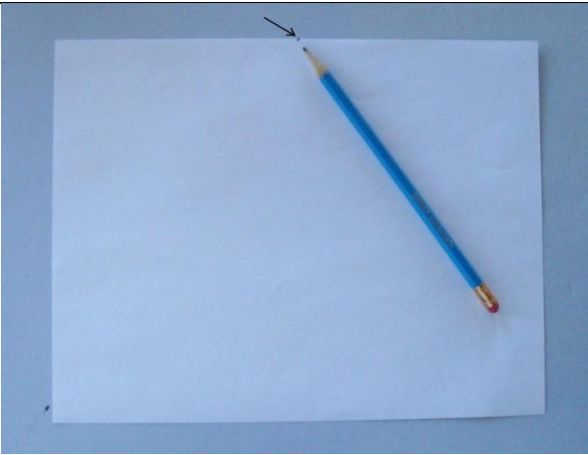
**Activity:** 1-point perspective drawing

**Materials Needed:** 9x12 white construction paper, 12x18 black construction paper, glue sticks, markers, crayons, and color pencils


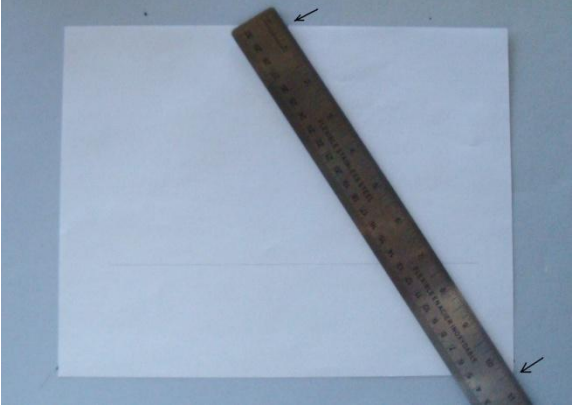
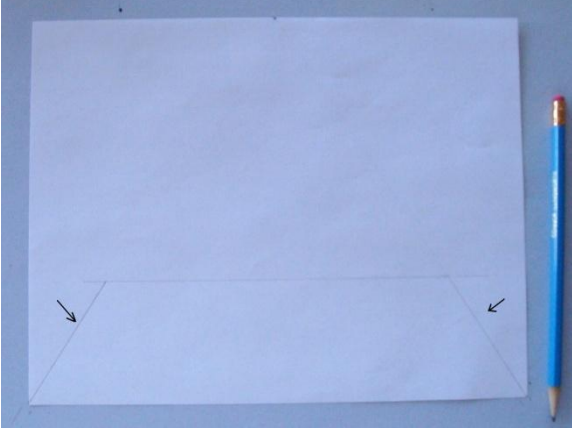
Students will be creating a one point perspective drawing that uses symmetry/balance as Pippin does. They can draw any room they wish, but should follow steps 1-6 to get the room walls and floor created. As the art guide, you may project this onto the screen and have them follow along. Or - you can draw on the board and have them follow along, whatever you prefer. Once they have completed those steps, show them 7-10, but noting it is for reference and they may draw whatever furniture and accessories in the room that they like.

**NOTE:** Step by step instructions below. Let students know that all vertical/horizontal lines should be parallel to sides of paper. Lines that give dimension (any diagonal lines) should be aligned with dot at top of page (see table top in example in step 7). Remind students to press lightly with pencil or they will have trouble erasing unwanted lines at the end.

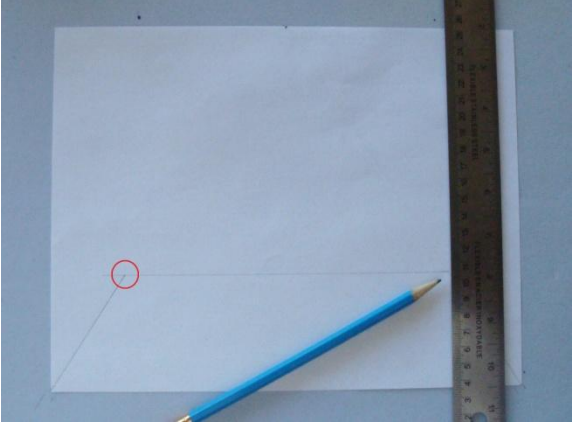
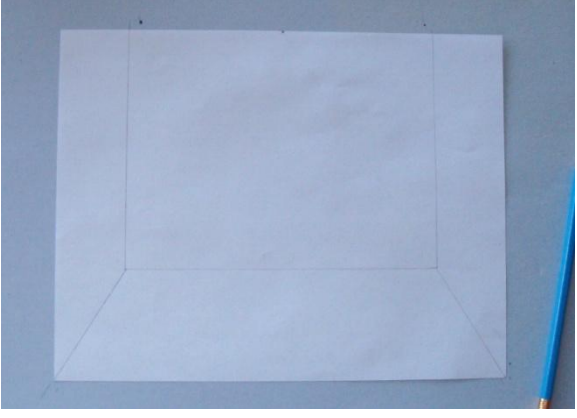
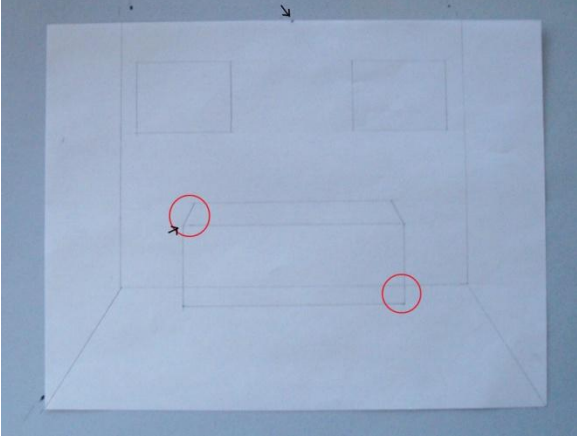
### Process

Step	Instructions	Illustration
1	Using a pencil put a dot at the top center of the page. This is our vanishing point.	

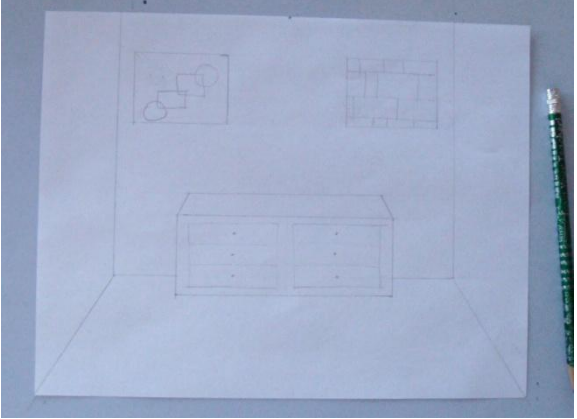
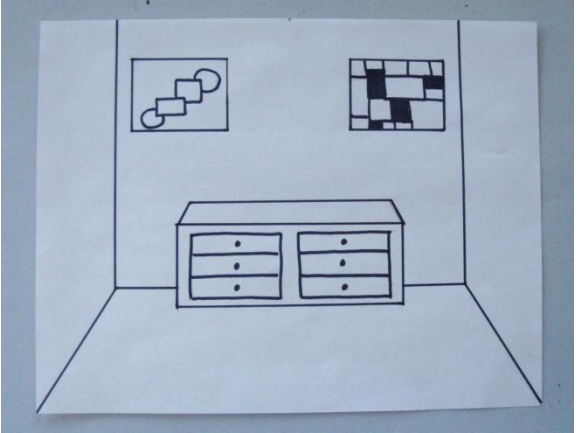

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Step	Instructions	Illustration
2	Using pencil, draw a horizontal line across the bottom 1/3 of the page.	
3	Align ruler with dot at top of page and bottom corner of paper. Using a pencil, draw a line from the horizontal line in step 2 to the bottom corner of the page, along the ruler edge.	
4	Repeat on other side. The floor has been defined.	

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Step	Instructions	Illustration
5	<p>Align ruler with floor corner (see red circle for placement) and top of page. Using pencil draw a line along the ruler from floor corner to top of page. Repeat on other side.</p>	
6	<p>The walls are now defined. Erase any overdrawn lines.</p>	
7	<p>The students are now free to draw a balanced, symmetrical room. It can be a sitting room bedroom, game room, etc. Show student examples from last year.</p> <p>This example has a dresser and two paintings. The dresser top has an angled line that give a 2D impression. Align ruler with the top corner of the dresser and the dot a top of page. Note that the dresser comes into the room past the point where the back wall and floor meet. The length is approximately the same distance and the depth of the table top.</p>	

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Step	Instructions	Illustration
8	<p>Finish drawing the details. As in Pippin's painting, their drawing should be balanced (symmetrical). This example would look great with two bean bags on the floor and a game system on the dresser. Once done the students should erase lines behind the dresser (see this dwg and compare with dwg above), and any others they don't need.</p>	
9	<p>Use permanent marker to outline drawing.</p>	
10	<p>Finish drawing using colored pencils, crayons, and markers. To draw this flooring (or a rug) align the ruler with the dot at top of page and the bottom of the page. As you move across the floor, the top of the ruler stays with the dot. Same method to draw side wall chair rails.</p>	
11	<p>Mount to black construction paper.</p>	

We have a perspective poster series if you would like to show the students examples of 1, 2, and 3-point perspective.

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Victorian Parlor



Interior

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### **BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS**

In 1927, the famous illustrator N.C. Wyeth and the art critic Christian Brinton noticed a painting in the window of a shoe repair shop in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Upon inquiring, they learned that it was the work of a self-taught Black artist named Horace Pippin. Mr. Brinton arranged for a showing of the artist's work at the local community center very soon thereafter. Pippin's art gained immediate popularity, and, in the very next year, four of his paintings were included in an exhibit called "Masters of Popular Painting" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The exhibit catalog for his one-man show at the Carlen Galleries in Philadelphia in 1940 contains high praise by the noted art critic Albert C. Barnes, who also prepared the notes for the catalog. Mr. Barnes wrote:

"It is probably not too much to say that he is the first important Negro painter to appear on the American scene, and that his work shares, with John Kane, the distinction of being the most individual and unadulterated painting authentically expressive of the American spirit that has been produced during our generation."

Pippin produced a remarkable body of work, despite the fact that wounds he had received during World War I had completely crippled his right arm, and that he did not even begin to paint until he was forty years old. In the last six years of his life alone he produced seventy-five works. Among the most famous of these are JOHN BROWN GOES TO HIS HANGING, DOMINO PLAYERS, and a series of painting entitled THE HOLY MOUNTAIN, reminiscent of Hicks' PEACEABLE KINGDOM. This last series was described by Pippin as a response to war. In it, the pastoral peace of the shepherd with animals, flowers and plants in the foreground is in sharp contrast to the dark and foreboding background. Most of his work came from his own experience, and expresses his reactions and feelings to these experiences. We do not know if VICTORIAN INTERIOR comes from a memory of his childhood home or not, but the importance and proportion of the table with flowers in relation to other objects in the room lead us to believe that it left a lasting impression upon Pippin. The careful attention to detail and the symmetrical composition also point in this direction. Other paintings, such as NIGHT CALL, THE BUFFALO HUNT, and THE HOLY MOUNTAIN, are more realistically proportioned and more asymmetrical in design, leading us to conclude that all elements in VICTORIAN INTERIOR are by conscious choice.

Horace Pippin had a most engaging personality and was highly valued as an ambassador of good will and healing where tensions were strained. Perhaps it was this love and careful observation of nature, plus his sensitivity to human feelings, along with the freshness and spontaneity of his art which accounted for the esteem in which he was held. Belatedly, in 1944, he was honored with the Purple Heart medal for wounds he had received in France twenty-seven years before. He died of a stroke two years later in 1946 leaving behind a legacy which testifies to the triumph of the human spirit over physical and racial barriers.

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### **IDEAS FOR LEARNING**

This is a very tidy painting, isn't it? Everything is very neat in this living room. The artist who painted it was born in 1888, and this is the way many people arranged their furniture in those days. Even if we did not know that the name of the painting is VICTORIAN INTERIOR, we would know what period of history it represented since there were Victorian fashions, Victorian architecture, Victorian novels, and more. This was during the reign of Queen Victoria of England, who lived from 1819-1901. She was very popular, even in our own country, and her sensible and very proper ways were reflected in the life of the times as well as in the way people thought about things. The sense of balance in this Victorian



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parlor, the furniture against the wall, the lace coverings on the furniture, and the styles of the lamp, are all signs that we are viewing a room from the Victorian Age.

What do you think about the flowers on the table? Do you think they, or the table, were really that much larger than the armchairs, or even the bookcase? Mr. Pippin must have had a reason for making flowers so big in proportion to other objects in the room. What do you think the reason might be? He placed them right in the middle of the room, too, so he meant to show how important they are. Almost as if he were saying, "Please, don't miss these flowers"! Perhaps this is the way he remembers the parlor in his childhood home and wants to share his feelings about it with all of us.

If you draw an imaginary line down through the middle of this painting you will see one side of it is almost a mirror image of the other. This is called symmetrical balance; it is frequently used in patterns and designs but not often in paintings, because it seems to break the picture plane into separate halves. In VICTORIAN INTERIOR, the artist knew what to do to keep that from happening. Can you find out how? There are two armchairs, two paintings, two footstools, a lamp stand and a lamp to balance the bookcase, but what about the sewing basket? Is there anything to balance this? No, there isn't. And this is a good thing because it puts more weight on the left side of the picture than on the right. If it were not there we would feel like moving the table with the vase of flowers to one side or the other. Can you find another example of symmetrical balance in the picture? What about the top of the book case? Are the books arranged symmetrically or asymmetrically?

Horace Pippin has included other elements of design in this painting: one of them we call *texture*, and the other we describe as *contrast*. The wonderful flowers, of course, have texture, as have the rug and lace coverings. Is the wall textured? No, this is smooth, and the picture is more interesting because of the contrast this creates. We see contrast also in the play of dark colors against light colors. Can you find another example of both texture and contrast we have not mentioned?

Flowers can make a great difference in the way we feel about a room; they were certainly important to Horace Pippin, weren't they? How can you tell that? Close your eyes and try to visualize your living room; think of every detail you can remember. Now draw a picture of it with your crayons, and be sure to use pressure so that the crayon will be waxy. Show what you like best about your living room by making that object more important than anything else in the room. Invent a new way to do this. You don't have to do what Mr. Pippin did to show us how much he liked the flowers. Will you include some texture? Some contrast? When you have completed the crayon drawing, choose a dark color tempera paint to brush over the entire picture. Where the crayon is very waxy the paint will run off to fill only the empty spaces. Just as Horace Pippin delights us with his paintings, you will discover that you can delight and please yourself and your friends with pictures of your own.