



# Norman Rockwell

## FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

### CLASSROOM CONNECTION

» Normal Rockwell created hundreds of paintings during the course of his career, each with a message for viewers. Rosie the Riveter carries a strong message that reveals the artist's opinion of the American war effort in the 1940s. Using evidence that you find in this work of art, develop a persuasive argument for what Rockwell wanted viewers to understand, and to do, after they saw Rosie in a poster, magazine cover, or painting.

Following the US entry into WWII in 1941, millions of American women answered the government's call to enter the work force.

*Rosie the Riveter* stands as a powerful reminder of the critical contributions that American women made to victory during the war. The model for Rockwell's Rosie was 19-year-old Mary Doyle, a telephone operator from Vermont. She sat for him twice, and it was her second sitting that was used for this work. The painting was featured on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* on May 29, 1943. The original work of art was given to the US Department of the Treasury. It was made into posters and also traveled in support of the Second War Loan Drive, a campaign to sell bonds to help finance the war effort.



Seated before a waving American flag and dressed in red, white, and blue, Rosie proudly displays a series of patriotic badges across the bib of her overalls. The iconic Red Cross represents Rosie's donation of blood; the blue star button shows her support for a serviceman fighting overseas, the 'V' for Victory button, displayed prominently in the center of the row, indicates that the wearer lent her financial support to the war effort by purchasing war bonds; the two bronze buttons reward faithful service; and the Presidential 'E' for excellence praises Rosie's proficiency in her work as a riveter for a factory that built products to support the war effort overseas.

A tattered copy of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* lies at the bottom of the painting, where Rosie's foot rests firmly in a metaphorical display of American superiority over Nazi ideals. Closer examination reveals the art historical inspiration for Norman Rockwell's statuesque figure: Michelangelo's depiction of the prophet Isaiah on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In the Bible, Isaiah was called by God to convert the wicked from their sinful ways, and to trample evildoers underfoot. So too, Rosie tramples on *Mein Kampf*, the literary manifesto of the Nazi party.



## Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

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Norman Rockwell, *Rosie the Riveter*, 1943,  
oil on canvas, 52 x 40 in.

Fischer, D. (2005). *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rockwell, N. (2007). *Rosie the Riveter*: Norman Rockwell. New York: Hammer Galleries.