



Minerva Teichert, *Immigrants to New York City (Jewish Refugees)* (1938)

ARTIST BIO

Born in Utah and raised on a ranch in Idaho, Minerva Teichert was a 20th-century American artist best known for her paintings of the American West and her depictions of the Latter-day Saint experience.

At the age of four, Minerva was given a set of paints and promptly set out on her favorite horse to paint the wild frontier. She would later recall her time spent on the homestead as her “most important training as a painter.” When she was fourteen, Minerva worked in San Francisco as a nanny. While there, she visited an art museum for the first time and began taking art lessons. Inspired, she saved money to attend the Art Institute of Chicago and later the Art Students League in New York City. Teichert quickly rose to the top of her class under her mentor, artist Robert Henri, who taught her to “Love reality but abhor photographic representation.” After three years in New York, she completed her courses and was offered a scholarship to attend the extremely prestigious Royal Academy of Arts in London. However, she turned down the offer and returned to Idaho to marry Herman Teichert.

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Without any mentors, galleries, or even fellow artists with whom to collaborate, Teichert was largely alone as a painter. Despite her isolation from the art world, she continued to paint between chores and children. Her large canvases took up an entire wall of their small home. In the confined space, she used binoculars turned backwards to see what her paintings would look like from a distance. Teichert’s children remember her impressive multitasking as she cooked at the stove and then walked around the corner to add some brushstrokes on a painting. She would also set the clocks forward and place her children to bed early to give herself uninterrupted time to paint.

ARTWORK

This painting depicts a group of Jewish immigrants arriving in New York City by boat in 1938. Men, women, and children are surrounded by their meager possessions and reflect a range of emotional responses to their current situation. These refugees, having fled the terrible persecutions spreading across Europe, now prepare to begin their new lives in a foreign land. Some figures look with awe and wonder at the urban skyline rising above the busy city below, while others huddle nervously, unable to look at what lies ahead, and at least one figure turns to face the Statue of Liberty, who greets these weary travelers.

Teichert, living and working in Wyoming at the time, was far from the immigration ports of New York City. However, she had an unexpected personal connection to the plight of the Jewish refugees. Her son was working in Germany as a religious missionary at the time and

wrote letters home describing the predicament of Jews scrambling to find refuge. His sympathetic letters spurred Teichert to create this politically-charged painting to raise support for the refugees.

INTRODUCTION

Immigrants to New York City (Jewish Refugees) serves as a reminder for all Americans that just as immigrants may become American citizens, America itself is constantly becoming a new nation, refreshed by the culture and talents of people from other nations.

GOALS

Students will be able to:

- 1 Use visual evidence to generate conclusions regarding the time period to understand the narrative being portrayed
- 2 Identify how Minerva Teichert’s artistic choices (line, color, composition, body language, and lighting) convey ideas and emotions
- 3 Understand Teichert’s use of perspective and generate a drawing using one-point perspective
- 3 Compose a fictional field report from the perspective of a Jewish immigrant coming to America

LOOK AND DISCUSS

Look closely at the painting. What is happening?

How would you describe the mood? What makes you say that?

Select one figure in the scene and focus on their body language and facial expression. What do you think they are feeling?

Based on what you see in this painting, how do you think Minerva Teichert felt about Jewish immigrants? How can you tell?

What time of day is it? Support your answer.

What role does the Statue of Liberty play in this scene?

Where does Teichert place the viewer and why?

If you had to flee your home, how would you feel? What would you miss the most and why?

CONTINUE THE STORY

In 1938, the same year Teichert painted this work, Adolf Hitler had been in power for five years as the Chancellor of Germany. Hitler persecuted Jews and other minorities across Europe as he invaded many European countries. Tens of thousands sought refuge in the United States. Many left their homes quickly, taking only what they could carry to embark on a journey halfway around the world.

In the painting, the Statue of Liberty welcomes these weary travelers to America. Inscribed on the base of the statue the famous poem *The New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus. The most well-known portion of the poem reads: “Give me your tired, your poor/ You huddled masses yearning to breathe free/ The wretched refuse of your teeming shore/ Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me/ I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

In real life, the Statue of Liberty actually faces the New York City skyline. Why do you think Teichert changed the positions of the Statue of Liberty to face the viewer?

ACTIVITY #1: A LETTER HOME

Materials: Writing paper, pencil

Subject Areas: English Language Arts, U.S. History, Visual Arts

Duration: 30 minutes

Imagine you are one of the people in this painting, fleeing your home. Write a letter to your friends who are back home, describing your journey thus far and your thoughts as you arrive at the New York Harbor. Based on this painting, include any relevant information that may benefit your friend, such as how you prepared for the long journey, challenges you faced along the way, specific circumstances, emotions, and general experiences.

UTAH STATE VISUAL ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS

Lesson plans may easily be adapted for each grade level. Please use the plans as a guide and source for ideas, but feel free to adjust the activity based on the needs of your class.

Strand: Respond (V.R)

Students will understand, evaluate, and articulate how works of art convey meaning for the observer as well as the creator.

Strand: Connect (V.CO)

Students will relate artistic skills, ideas, and work with personal meaning and external context.

ACTIVITY #2: ONE POINT PERSPECTIVE

Materials: Paper, pencil, ruler

Subject Areas: Visual Arts

Duration: 30 minutes

Minerva Teichert uses perspective to depict a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. By using a vanishing point, a horizon line, and a series of straight lines, you too can create a realistic rendering of your environment.

UTAH STATE VISUAL ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS

Lesson plans may easily be adapted for each grade level. Please use the plans as a guide and source for ideas, but feel free to adjust the activity based on the needs of your class.

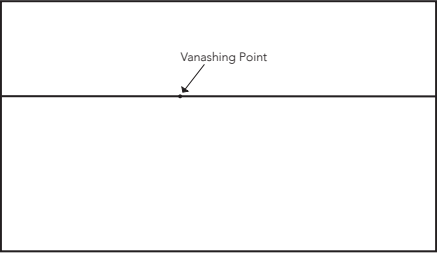
Strand: Create (V.CR)

Students will generate artistic work by conceptualizing, organizing, and completing their artistic ideas. They will refine original work through persistence, reflection, and evaluation.

Strand: Connect (V.CO)

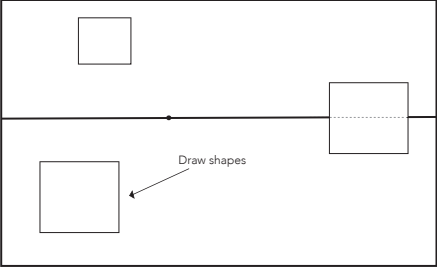
Students will relate artistic skills, ideas, and work with personal meaning and external context.

- 1 Starting with a sheet of paper, a pencil and a ruler, draw a line horizontally across the middle of the page. This is your horizon line.

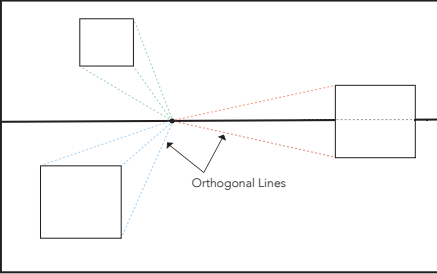


- 2 Then place a dot anywhere on this line. This is your vanishing point.

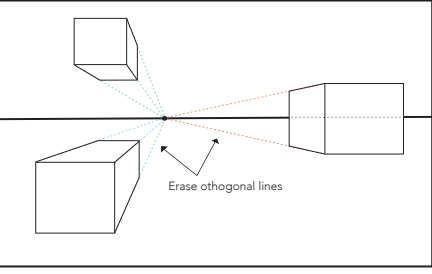
- 3 Either above, directly on, or below the line, draw a square. Locating objects above or below the line will determine how the viewer perceives them - below the line, you're looking down on the object, above the line, you're looking up at it, on the line you're looking straight at the object.



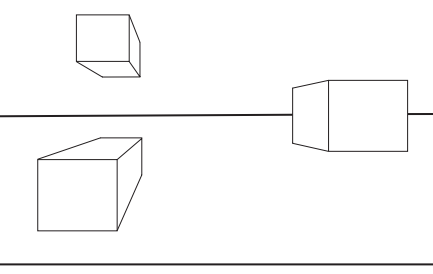
- 4 Take your ruler and draw lines from the vanishing point to all of the corners of the square. These are called orthogonal lines (indicated by red, blue, and green in the diagram).



- 5 To turn your square into a cube, draw horizontal lines and vertical lines (indicated here in bold) with a ruler, connecting them with the orthogonal lines. Now erase the orthogonal lines that are not part of the cube.



- 6 You have completed the first step in your mastery of one-point perspective. Notice how the shape gets smaller as it gets closer to the vanishing point!



ASSESSMENT

Assessment of students during this lesson may include participation in group discussion and written interpretive answers. The creative activity “One-Point Perspective” can be included to evaluate student craftsmanship, neatness, and ability to accurately render one-point perspective. Quality and participation of the creative writing activity “A Letter Home” can be used to assess student writing level, ability to create thought-provoking ideas in response to *Immigrants to New York City (Jewish Refugees)*, as well as grammar and spelling.