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Grant Wood 1891-1942

Grant Wood was born on a farm near the small town of Anamosa, in 1891. By painting simple scenes of the land and people he knew best, he helped create an important, all-American style of art. Grant Wood's paintings show the love he had for the people and customs of the Midwestern United States. Grant Wood particularly loved the farmland of Iowa. While growing up, he enjoyed feeling the soft, warm soil between his toes as he walked barefoot through the fields. In his painting *Young Corn* it seems like the round, friendly hills are protecting the farmer and his children while they work in their fields.



Grant Wood showed an interest in art at a very early age. He often drew pictures with burnt sticks his mother gave him from her stove. Even though Grant drew pictures every chance he got, everyone thought he'd grow up to be a farmer like his father. Grant seemed to enjoy his farm chores, and had his own goats, chickens, ducks and turkeys. When Grant was ten years old, a very sad thing happened to him. His father died, and his mother found that it was too difficult to keep the farm running. She decided to move her family to the nearby city of Cedar Rapids. It was a hard move for Grant. He missed his farm pets, and felt out of place at the new city school. Some kids even made fun of him. Because of his good sense of humor and his talent for drawing, things eventually got better for Grant. In high school he made friends and was always busy working on projects, like designing scenery for school plays and drawing pictures for the school paper and yearbook. After he graduated in 1910, Grant did a lot of different things. He took art classes, taught art, made jewelry, learned carpentry, decorated people's houses and cared for his mother and his sister Nan.

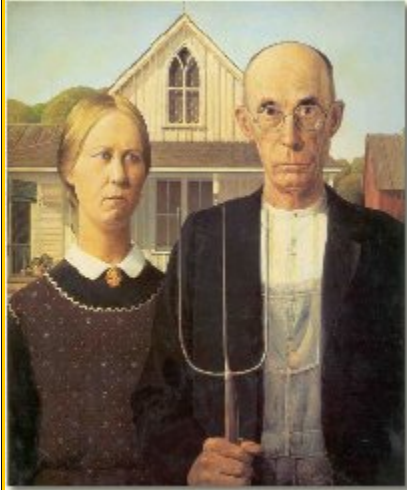


He loved gadgets and making things, and he worked slowly and carefully at all of his crafts. He was even able to use his artistic talent when he joined the army during World War 1. His job was to paint camouflage on tanks and cannons. During this time, American art students were often encouraged to study and paint in the style of the great 19th century French Impressionist artists. In 1920, Grant decided to travel to Europe to study artists like Pierre Bonnard, Alfred Sisley and Camille Pissarro. It was after his trip to Germany that Grant found a way to paint that was all his own. He decided to paint the subjects he knew and loved, using some of the simple ideas of the old European masters. Grant realized that scenes of the people and places he knew while growing up were as beautiful and important as anything he had seen in Europe.

In *Woman with Plants*, Grant painted his mother as a strong and loving frontier woman. He placed her in a farm landscape and paid special attention to the decorative stitching on her



placed her in a farm landscape and paid special attention to the decorative stitching on her dress, the cameo around her neck, the potted plant and other details that were important to her. People all over Iowa were proud of Grant's portrait of his mother. It was one of the first paintings about the Midwest that seemed like it was done by someone who really knew and understood the people there. Grant kept working in his new style and soon painted his most famous picture, *American Gothic*.



One day, while Grant was looking for something interesting to paint, he discovered a farmhouse with an unusual window. The arch-shaped window was based on a style of European architecture from the Middle Ages called Gothic architecture. Grant liked the contrast of a European window on an American farmhouse. After he made sketches of the house, Grant looked for just the right people to go with it. He thought his family dentist and his own sister, Nan, would be perfect for the farmer and his daughter. Grant entered *American Gothic* in a big show at the Art Institute of Chicago, and won the third place prize. People all over America loved the newspaper pictures they saw of it. Soon, Grant's paintings started to become very popular. One reason for this was that many people felt Grant's art was easier to understand than a lot of the new modern art being done. Another reason Grant's paintings became so popular was that they came along during a rough time in history known as the Great Depression.

The depression caused many people to lose their jobs and savings. It made people feel better to look at Grant Wood's painting of beautiful farmlands and proud, hard-working families who helped make America great. Grant also painted pictures of famous American legends. While growing up, he had loved the stories he heard about George Washington and Paul Revere. In *Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* Grant showed the story as he imagined it as a child. He painted broccoli-shaped trees and toy-like houses. The roads go off into the background and seem to glow in the dark. Grant gave his painting an almost fairytale look. Paul Revere's horse even looks more like a wooden rocking horse than a real horse!



Grant also started an art colony, and designed one of the largest stained glass windows ever made. Grant wood died in 1942. It had taken him many years to find a way to paint that he felt was special enough to call his own. After searching the art center of Europe, Grant had finally realized the best place to create art was right in his own backyard. When Grant Wood painted *American Gothic*, he was just having fun showing the people he had known all his life. Some people thought Grant was making fun of farmers, while others thought he was honoring them. One reason *American Gothic* has become so popular is that very often people see something in it that reminds them of themselves.