

Fun facts about Norman Rockwell (found at <http://www.brucevanpatter.com/rockwell.html>)

These are just some of the interesting things I've learned about his long and active career:

Runs in the family. Norman's grandfather was an English artist, Thomas Hill, who specialized in very detailed animal drawings. Norman's father liked to copy illustrations from magazines, and would pull up a chair for Norman to do it with him.

Silver lining. As a boy, Norman was very **thin** and **awkward**. His **pigeon-toed** feet caused him to wear **corrective shoes** at the age of ten, and glasses at twelve -- giving him the nickname "**Moony**". Poor at sports, he found he could entertain his friends through his art.

Early work. When he was just five years old, other boys played with **store-bought ships** to have naval battles. Since he couldn't afford them, Norman cut some of his own out of **cardboard** and **painted** them. They became so popular, other boys asked him to make some for them!

What a start! He had his first paying assignment by the time he was sixteen. By the age of nineteen he was the art director for **Boys' Life** magazine. His first cover of **Saturday Evening Post** appeared in 1916, when he was just twenty-two. He got the job with the help of his roommate who was already doing cartoons for the magazine.

Eating his way in. When he was turned down for the Navy because he was **too skinny**, he stuffed himself with **bananas**, **warm water** and **doughnuts** and went back. He was accepted, but when they found out who he was, they allowed him to continue to paint for his regular clients while doing his service in the Navy.

A new tool. In his earlier work, Rockwell worked from live models. When he began to use a **camera** to snap pictures of the models, he began to work in **wilder**, more **exaggerated poses** -- ones that would have been hard for a live model to hold for hours.



Tom and Huck. Before he illustrated Mark Twain's classic books, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, Rockwell went to Twain's boyhood town of Hannibal, Missouri. Rockwell walked the **streets** and **country lanes**. He even was able to interview townspeople who lived during Mark Twain's lifetime. Such research helped to make his illustrations capture the sense of **mythical boyhood** in the books. What a perfect combination: Twain and Rockwell.

Out of the flames. Disaster struck in 1943: his studio was destroyed by a fire. He lost not only the paintings he had made, but all his props. But he didn't let this stop his creative growth. In some ways, it kept him from relying on his past successes. It was about this time that he turned from the more **historical illustrations** and started to paint **everyday life** scenes.

To create my found poem on the next page, I first highlighted interesting words and phrases from the research. I looked for small bits of language that spoke to Rockwell's uniqueness. I have also highlighted the words I ended up using on the poem on the next page, but typically a poet doesn't do this on his/her found poem's final draft.



Norman

(a found poem inspired by the two paintings on this page)

Between city **streets** where knees are scraped
And the **country lanes** where **mythical boyhoods**
no longer really happen,
You dazzled us with the **everyday life**
You captured on canvas and **cardboard**.

Boys argue and point,
Thin and **awkward** and **pigeon-toed**.
Four versions of you, I'm sure,
Playing the sports you never did.
And yet, you did...with paint and shadow
And textures. Your mind's camera
Turned **skinny** legs into art.

Skinny white legs bandaged and **exaggerated**.
Skinny black legs heading to school
During a narrow-minded era
When brains were **skinny** too.
That tomato is your statement's exclamation
mark.

Your canvas was an America that
can't be **store-bought**.
Your images were your poetry.
Between silly and serious,
You understood the concept of **skinny**.

