

Wheat

Wheat, Thomas Hart Benton, 1967

Thomas Hart Benton (April 15, 1889 – January 19, 1975) was an American painter and muralist. His paintings showed everyday scenes of life, mostly in the American Midwest. He first became known to the mainstream art world in 1932, when he was chosen to produce murals of Indiana life for the 1933 Century of Progress Exhibition in Chicago. His murals were controversial because he painted everyday people and refused to sugarcoat the state's history. He is best known for his mural work. His most famous murals are located in New York City, the state capitol building in Missouri and the Harry S. Truman Library.

Early in his career Benton was a draftsman for the US Navy. The work of draftsman demanded objectivity, and this experience influenced his later work. It led him away from European influences and toward realism. Benton taught for many years at the Kansas City Art Institute. His most famous student was Jackson Pollock.

Benton's style was bold color with strong lines. The characters in his paintings have an almost caricature-like appearance. His paintings are realistic but never sentimental or romanticized.

1. Compare the painting above with these other paintings of wheat: Berthe Morisot's "In the Wheat Fields at Gennevilliers", Vincent Van Gogh's "Sheaves of Wheat in a Field," and Richard Reiman's "Threshing the Wheat."
2. What is the center of interest in this painting compared with the other paintings?
3. What is different about the way wheat is depicted in this painting, compared with the others.
4. Describe Benton's use of space.
5. What is the dominant color? What other colors does he use? What is the effect of his use of color?
6. What is in the foreground? What is in the background?
7. Find the horizontal lines. Find the vertical lines.
8. The first two rows of wheat are cut, with tiny shoots of wheat coming up. What might be these shoots symbolize?
9. What is the effect of the broken stalk of wheat up against all the other wheat?
10. What do the stalks of wheat remind you of? (Some have compared them with an army marching off into infinity.)
11. Write a detailed description of the painting.

P.A.S.S. for these activities

Grade 1: Visual Arts - 1.2,3; 2.1,3. Writing - 2.5

Grade 2: Visual Arts - 1.2,3; 2.1,3. Writing - 2.2c

Grade 3: Visual Arts - 1.2,3; 2.1,3. Writing - 2.3b

Grade 4: Visual Arts - 2.1,2. Writing - 2.1b

Grade 5: Visual Arts - 2.1,2. Writing - 2.1

Grade 6: Visual Arts - 1.1,2,3,4. Writing - 1.4

Grade 7: Visual Arts - 1.1,2,3,4. Writing - 1.4

Grade 8: Visual Arts - 1.1,2,3,4. Writing - 1.4

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