

Family Activity: Working Together

Provided by the Art Institute of Chicago Department of Museum Education

Introduction

Genre scenes often depict groups of people at work. These two paintings show people working together to make or harvest goods. In John Singer Sargent's *Venetian Glass Workers*, men and women make glass beads. The woman at right uses a cutting tool to slice glass tubes into short, even pieces. The pieces are later mixed in a metal drum with rough materials, such as sand, and heated until they become smooth, round beads.

In *The Herring Net*, Winslow Homer painted two fishermen struggling to pull a net of herring into their small boat as they are tossed among the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. In 1884, Homer moved to Prout's Neck on the coast of Maine and reportedly witnessed the harvesting of a large school of herring, sketching the fishermen from a boat he had hired as it pitched in the waves.

Discussion Questions

- Compare the actions of the workers in the two paintings. How do they differ?
- What kind of clothing is required for each job? What sort of equipment is necessary?
- Can you see the workers' faces? What do you imagine they are thinking as they work?
- Compare the lighting in the two paintings? What type of mood did each artist create?
- What other groups of workers have you observed?

Activity

Draw a picture of workers.

Materials Needed:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Colored pencils
- Markers
- Crayons

Steps:

1. Choose a worker or group of workers you would like to draw. If possible, watch these workers doing their jobs and sketch them in action. You could also imagine your workers and practice drawing them doing their jobs.
2. As you draw, ask yourself the following questions: What are the workers making or doing? Are they working alone or together? Are they busy, resting, eating, or talking? What are their expressions? What are the colors of their uniforms or clothes? What does their work environment look like? Is their work easy? Is it dangerous? How can you show this?
3. Make a final drawing in pencil, filling a page with the scene.
4. Add color to your image.

Glossary**genre** (*n*)

indoor and outdoor scenes of anonymous figures engaged in the activities of everyday life; a category of painting, such as the genre of landscape painting